

STAR TREK: RENAISSANCE

"Mercy Bay"

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE -- NEAR THE BANKS DRIFT

We're in deep space. In the background we see a roiling, violent nebula, lit with flashes of color in every hue of the rainbow by the deadly plasma storms and gravitational anomalies contained within.

In the foreground, cruising majestically though the void is the USS Enterprise-G in all its glory.

We close in and our POV rotates around the ship, taking it all in. The ship is beautiful, the hull sleek and clean and white, without the tiniest pit of a micrometeorite. We hear the voice of Captain Neil Cross as we fly around the Enterprise:

CROSS (V.O.)

Captain's Personal Log, Stardate 79312.4. The Enterprise has been assigned the task of charting the boundaries of the Banks Drift.

As he speaks, we see a massive burst of radiation and plasma from the Drift far in the background. The camera cuts to a close-up of the dome on the underside of the saucer. Suddenly, the dome pops out, revealing a swiveling turret. The turret swivels to the side a little, and issues forth a probe. We follow the probe as it zooms into the Drift.

CROSS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Admiral Delfune was very careful about this assignment. The Drift is far enough from anyplace remotely strategic that there's no chance of the Enterprise getting involved in an incident, but the Drift itself is dangerous enough that Starfleet has lost a dozen ships in it over the years. Somehow, I doubt the Admiral would be too upset if we became number thirteen.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- READY ROOM

We continue to listen to CROSS narrate as we watch him at his desk, going through a pile of PADDs.

CROSS (V.O.)

I don't intend to give her the pleasure, and I don't believe the
(MORE)

CROSS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
crew will, either. We're all getting
used to being back aboard the
Enterprise again, but the crew knows
their jobs, and they know how to run
a good ship...

Cross finishes with one PADD, picks up another, and as he
does, we hear a COMM BEEP.

Cross sighs, puts down the new PADD.

CROSS (CONT'D)
Yes?

Talora's voice answers.

TALORA'S COMM VOICE
Captain, please report to the Bridge.

CROSS
What is it, Commander?

TALORA'S COMM VOICE
I think you should see for yourself,
Captain.

CROSS
Very well. On my way.

Cross gets up from his desk, heads for the door.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Cross strides onto the Enterprise Bridge. We see the Banks
Drift on the main viewscreen.

TALORA currently occupies the center seat; she rises as the
Captain approaches. DOJAR and QUINLAN sit at their usual
stations.

CROSS
What's the situation, Commander?

As Cross sits, Talora stands to his right.

TALORA
Mister Cale?

At Ops, LIEUTENANT CALE, the new Chief of Operations, enters
commands into his station. As he does, the image on the
viewscreen zooms in, giving us a close-up view of an
especially violent patch of the nebula.

CALE

Six minutes ago, we began to pick up
theta radiation emissions from within
the Drift, Captain.

The viewscreen zooms closer in towards the Drift, and then
through the outer edge of the nebula and inside it.

CALE (CONT'D)

We launched a probe, and it returned
these images to us.

The view continues to zoom in, and we can see that in the
distance, rapidly closing in, is an asteroid field within
the nebula. The view closes on one particularly large,
irregularly shaped asteroid.

CROSS

What am I looking at?

We zoom still closer, and now we can see a patch of white on
the surface of the asteroid.

Closer still... and just as we can begin to see some detail...
the image flickers into static for a moment, and then snaps
back...

CALE

One moment, Captain. The plasma
storms are causing some interference,
but I think we can cut through it...

And now we can see that smashed into the surface of the
asteroid is a starship.

It's a design we've seen before, long ago -- a Constitution-
class ship, a sister to Kirk's Enterprise after her refit.

But the ship on the screen has seen far better days; the
saucer appears mostly intact, but the rear of the secondary
hull is crumpled; the port-side pylon and nacelle are gone
entirely, as is the starboard nacelle; the pylon is still
there, however.

Everyone on the Bridge is silent as they contemplate the
sight...and it's on that note that we...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before; the entire Bridge crew is staring at the wreck of a Constitution-class starship.

It's Quinlan who finally breaks the silence.

QUINLAN

(excited)

I know that ship. It's the Investigator! She was lost in the Banks Drift 124 years ago.

All eyes on the Bridge turn towards her with surprise.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

What? I DID go to Starfleet Academy.
And I got an A in Starfleet history.
(everyone continues
to stare)
I'm serious!

Cale returns his attention to his station, tapping away. The image on the viewscreen zooms closer yet, and we can read the letters on the saucer: USS INVESTIGATOR, NCC-1779.

TALORA

My apologies, Lieutenant. But you will forgive us for doubting you.

QUINLAN

(under her breath,
but with a slight
smile)

I will?

CROSS

I didn't get an A in Starfleet history, Lieutenant. Tell me about the Investigator.

QUINLAN

They'd been sent on a general exploration mission. One of the "five year" missions, just like Kirk's Enterprise. They were mapping the Drift when they picked up signals from somewhere inside, and they went in to investigate.

(beat)

They never came out.

TALORA

Clearly.

QUINLAN

There was one final message, that's how Starfleet knew what happened, they sent a distress call, and the... uh, the Enterprise, Kirk's Enterprise, was the closest starship. But they couldn't get through the plasma storms, and... well, here we are now.

CROSS

Here we are.

(beat; turning to
face Dojar at Tactical)

Mr. Dojar. You've been scanning the Drift?

Dojar nods.

CROSS (CONT'D)

I'd like to get a closer look at that ship. Will our shields hold if we go in there?

DOJAR

I believe so, Captain. But we haven't really tested them since the repairs were completed.

CROSS

(tapping a button on
his chair)

Bridge to Engineering.

GREY'S COMM VOICE

Lieutenant Grey here.

CROSS

Mr. Grey, Lieutenant Dojar will be downloading some sensor readings to you.

GREY (V.O.)

I have them now.

CROSS

Will the refitted shields hold in the Drift?

GREY (V.O.)

They should. But our mission doesn't require us to...

CROSS

I'll be the judge of what our mission requires. Bridge out.

Cross stands, stares out at the viewscreen, seemingly entranced by the violent plasma storms.

TALORA

Captain?

CROSS

Mr. Dojar, shields at maximum. We're going in.

TALORA

Sir? Are you certain?

CROSS

You heard me. We're going in to check out the Investigator. Commander, you'll assemble an away team to board the wreck once we're in transporter range.

TALORA

Are you sure that's wise, Captain?

Cross clenches his fists, and we can see that he's mentally counting to ten.

CROSS

We'll discuss this in my Ready Room, Commander.

Cross turns and exits the Bridge, Talora following.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- MAIN ENGINEERING

Engineering is buzzing with activity. Grey stands at a console, entering commands, muttering to himself under his breath.

Boyle enters Engineering and heads straight for Grey. She stands over his shoulder, and he's too engrossed in his work to notice her. Finally...

BOYLE

I think you meant to bypass the EPS junction on Deck 20.

Grey whirls around, surprised.

Boyle points at a display screen, with a smile.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

Right there. Deck 20. Not Deck
200.

GREY

(angry)

Don't be ridiculous! There is no...

He sees his mistake.

GREY (CONT'D)

Of course.

BOYLE

What was it you told me Professor
Kaminski always said?

GREY

(reciting from memory)

Anger has no place in an Engineering
Room.

BOYLE

I can't argue. So what's the problem?

GREY

The Captain. I don't know what he
thinks he's doing, taking the ship
into the Drift. What does he intend
to prove, that a dead ship is really
a dead ship?

BOYLE

He is the Captain. It's his call.

GREY

(bitterly)

And he's made it. So we have to
make sure he doesn't kill the
Enterprise in the bargain.

(beat)

The aft shield grid is coming up 3.5
percent below optimum. See what you
can do about that.

And with that, Grey returns to work, not even looking to see
if Boyle follows his orders. She does, after a moment or
two.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- READY ROOM

Cross and Talora are in mid-argument.

TALORA

...already know what happened to them. It is irresponsible to risk the safety of the Enterprise simply to visit a graveyard.

CROSS

Commander, I've made my decision!
(beat, Cross takes a moment to calm himself)
Command-- Talora. I understand your concerns. But 400 men and women died on that ship, and if we can... I don't know. But I think we owe it to them to at least try.

TALORA

Try what?

CROSS

Try to do something good. Something better than what we've been doing. Running from crisis to crisis. Leaving situations worse than we found them. At least here we can't do any more damage, and maybe we can take something good out of it all.

TALORA

How?

CROSS

We'll find out when we board that ship.
(beat)
We're doing this, Commander. That's all there is to it. So who do you recommend to accompany me on the away team?

TALORA

You?

CROSS

Me. Don't argue, Commander. I know it's your job, but don't. I'm going.

Talora doesn't answer; she just stares at Cross, seeing the determination in his face. There's no way she's going to talk him out of this.

TALORA

I see.

CROSS

Good.

TALORA

Is there anything else, Captain?

CROSS

No.

TALORA

I thought not.

Talora turns and leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE -- NEAR THE BANKS DRIFT

The Enterprise is motionless, as we see the Drift in the background. If anything, it looks to be even more violent than earlier, with almost blinding flashes of plasma erupting inside.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The usual Bridge crew is on duty, with Cross in the center seat. As we enter the scene, Grey comes onto the Bridge.

CROSS

Lieutenant?

GREY

If you're really going to do this, I want to be sure you know the risks you're exposing the ship to.

CROSS

Go ahead, Lieutenant.

GREY

Aside from the plasma storms, we've detected at least ten gravimetric anomalies. In addition, there are massive electrostatic charges that will build up on the hull, turning us into a veritable lightning rod to the plasma discharges. I can't guarantee that the shields will fully protect us.

CROSS

I see. Anything else?

GREY

That's enough, I'd say.

CROSS

Your opinion is noted, Lieutenant.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)
 (beat; turns to Talora)
 Commander, call Mr. Carter to the
 Bridge. He's here to report on us,
 he may as well have a front row seat
 for this.

In the background, we hear Talora calling Lewis Carter over
 the ship's comm.

CROSS (CONT'D)
 Mr. Cale, are we ready?

CALE
 As ready as we're going to be,
 Captain.

CROSS
 Excellent.
 (to Quinlan)
 Set a course, into the Drift. Prepare
 to implement on my command.

A moment later, Lewis Carter enters the Bridge.

CARTER
 Captain Cross?

CROSS
 Mr. Carter. We're about to do
 something I hope you'll see as
 newsworthy. You're aware of the
 ship we've detected in the Drift?

CARTER
 Yes. It's an old Starfleet ship.
 The Investigator? Lost a hundred
 years ago?

CROSS
 Correct. We're going to go in and
 see exactly what happened to her.
 It should make a good story for you.
 (beat; to Quinlan)
 Lieutenant, one quarter impulse.
 Take us in.

EXT. SPACE -- NEAR THE BANKS DRIFT

The Enterprise begins to move, slowly at first and then
 picking up speed, heading straight for the colorful, violently
 roiling mass of the Drift, and on that we fade out, and...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE -- NEARING THE DRIFT

The Enterprise is approaching the Banks Drift. As it does, a massive eruption of plasma bursts out from the surface of the Drift, almost as though it's reaching out to grab the starship and drag it in.

CROSS (V.O.)

Captain's Log, supplemental. The Enterprise is about to enter the Banks Drift. We'll be the first starship in a century to attempt this... and this is the first time this ship is doing something other than fighting in...I don't even remember how long. I'll gladly take the plasma storms and gravitational anomalies over battle any day...

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The crew is tense as the Drift looms on the viewscreen.

CALE

Fifteen seconds to the Drift...

There's a jolt that shakes the Bridge.

CROSS

Steady... hold your course...
(turning to Dojar)
Lieutenant, keep those shields up...

DOJAR

Working on it, Captain. They're at ninety five percent and holding.

The viewscreen is filled with multicolored streams of plasma and bright flashes of lightning.

CALE

Entering the Drift... now!

There's another jolt, this one far worse than the last. Several crew are thrown to the deck. It takes everyone a moment to recover.

DOJAR

Shield generator has shorted out!

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

As the Enterprise enters the Drift, we see massive flashes of lightning off in the distance... and getting closer. There are also bursts of plasma in every color of the rainbow exploding all around.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The ship is constantly rattling and vibrating now.

CROSS

Hold your course...

QUINLAN

Picking up a gravity whirlpool, five hundred kilometers to port... compensating...

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

We can see Quinlan's whirlpool, a vortex sucking in plasma, as the Enterprise struggles to stay on course.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- ENGINEERING

Grey is barking orders at his crew, trying to supply more power to keep the ship intact.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The lightning is coming closer and closer... and finally one tendril of electricity strikes the Enterprise. It's just a glancing blow, but enough to leave a black scorch-mark on the saucer.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- ENGINEERING

Grey runs to the warp core, shouting orders as he goes.

GREY

Reroute shield power through the secondary feed!

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Engineering, this is the Captain!

GREY

(annoyed)

What is it, sir?

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

We need the shields back up!

GREY

Working on it, sir!

Grey closes the channel.

GREY (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Fool. You'll kill us all!

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The ship is shaking violently; the crew is struggling just to stay in their chairs or on their feet.

CROSS
(to Dojar)
Lieutenant...

DOJAR
(working fervently on
console)
Working, sir... The generator just
came back online... just one more
minute... if I can reset shield
harmonics... almost got it...

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

A huge lightning flash, the biggest one yet, lights up the Drift, and it arcs towards the Enterprise... and just in the moment before it hits...

The shields flare up... the lightning strikes, and the shields go a bright, almost blinding blue-white... but they hold, and the lightning dissipates harmlessly.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Same as before.

CROSS
(relieved)
Good work, Lieutenant.

DOJAR
The shields shouldn't short out from
plasma discharges anymore, captain.

CROSS
Excellent. How far are we from the
Investigator?

QUINLAN
Two thousand kilometers, Captain.
We should see it any moment now...

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

True to Quinlan's word, as the Enterprise passes through a violet-orange plasma cloud, a slowly-spinning asteroid comes

into view in the distance. Several other asteroids and other debris dot the area, which in general is relatively calm, compared to the region the Enterprise just passed through.

As the Enterprise approaches it, the Investigator rotates into view.

The old Constitution-class ship has seen much better days; as we saw earlier on the viewscreen, only the saucer and part of the secondary hull remain; both nacelles and one pylon are completely gone.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

There's silence on the Bridge as everyone stares at the wreck of the Investigator. Finally:

CROSS

They must have taken shelter in the shadow of the asteroid..

QUINLAN

Some shelter.

CROSS

We'll see. Let's find out exactly what they were doing, and what happened to them...

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise has taken up station only a couple of kilometers from the wreck of the Investigator; the starship is motionless relative to the wreck and the asteroid, and is well within the asteroid's shadow.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- TRANSPORTER ROOM

Cross, Grey, Dojar and three Science Division crew are on the transporter pads. All are in spacesuits. Talora and Chief Ozran stand at the controls.

TALORA

Captain...

CROSS

Yes, I know. Be careful. Don't take any unnecessary risks.

TALORA

I was going to say, "good luck."
But please do not take any unnecessary risks. We'll keep a constant lock on you.

CROSS

Thank you, Commander. Energize.

The Away Team vanishes in a sparkle of Transporter Effect.

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR -- BRIDGE

The Away Team reappears on the Investigator's Bridge. They all activate flashlights; that's the only illumination here.

From the little we can see, the Bridge is identical to the Bridge of the movie-era Enterprise -- except for smashed consoles and scorch marks on the walls.

Grey goes to one console, begins fiddling with the controls there, as the rest of the team makes their way slowly around the Bridge. We can see that there's no gravity on the Bridge; with every step our heroes take being a methodical plod because of the magnetic boots.

A moment later, the emergency lights come up.

GREY

(whistling, impressed)

They really did build these things to last, didn't they?

(beat)

There's still power in the emergency batteries.

CROSS

Enough for life support?

GREY

No. And it wouldn't matter in any case; the hull integrity is shot to hell. This ship couldn't possibly hold an atmosphere now.

CROSS

I see. Lieutenant, you and...

(waves towards one of the other crew, a Vulcan female, call her T'Val)

Ensign T'Val, you head to Main Engineering. See what you can learn down there. Mr. Dojar, you and...

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)
(gesturing to one of
other Science
personnel, a human
male; call him
Harrison)

Mr. Harrison, see if you can access
any navigation charts they plotted
while in the Drift.

DOJAR
What about you, Captain?

Cross points towards the third crewman, a Tellarite male,
call him, Trenk.

CROSS
Me and Mr. Trenk are going to the
Captain's quarters.

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR -- JEFFERIES TUBE

We watch Grey and T'Val climb down a Jefferies Tube. In the
dim emergency lighting. As they go, they have to climb around
various bits of debris.

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR -- CORRIDOR

Cross and Trenk make their way down a corridor.

CROSS
If I recall correctly, the Captain's
quarters were on Deck Five...

Cross stops in front of a door, turns his flashlight on it.

TRENK
You recalled correctly, sir.

CROSS
You know what they say, Ensign.
Even a broken clock is right twice a
day.

Cross ignores Trenk's puzzled look, and examines the door.
He sets himself to try and pull it open.

CROSS (CONT'D)
Ensign...?

Trenk joins him.

CROSS (CONT'D)

On three. One... two... three...

With grunts of heavy effort, Cross and Trenk force the door open. They enter...

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR -- BRIDGE

Dojar and Harrison are working at the science station.

HARRISON

It's hopeless, sir.

DOJAR

A hundred years of constant pounding by radiation? I agree. I hope the Captain is having more luck...

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR -- CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

Cross and Trenk are looking around, moving very slowly. We can see the Drift from the big window behind the Captain's desk, plasma storms roiling and flashing out in the distance.

We see a desk, with two books on it, and a chair, turned with its back to us.

Cross goes to the chair, spins it around, and in it...

...a skeleton, clothed in the remnants of a movie-era Starfleet uniform, the gold emblem still gleaming.

CROSS

Captain Banks, I presume?

Cross looks at the two books on the desk, picks one up.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Mr. Trenk...?

Trenk comes over to Cross's side, shines his flashlight on the book so Cross can read.

CROSS (CONT'D)

(reading)

Stardate 8394.7...

As Cross reads, we fade out, and back...to 124 years ago...

FADE TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR -- CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS (124 YEARS AGO)

As before, but instead of a skeleton, CAPTAIN AVERHILL BANKS sits at his desk, writing in his journal book. Banks sits ramrod straight, his brown hair short and neat, his uniform 100% regulation-perfect. Instead of Cross' voice, we hear Banks himself; it's a strong, calm, British-accented voice.

BANKS

...the Investigator has been trapped in this nebula for nineteen days. I do not believe we will escape. Our emergency batteries are down to six percent, our shields are damaged beyond repair, and the crew is rapidly succumbing to starvation.

beat; Banks stares out his window at the Drift

BANKS (CONT'D)

Our namesake, the original HMS Investigator, put in at a place they called Mercy Bay, in the middle of an Arctic winter, and she never left that spot again. It seems we will share her fate...

FADE TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR -- CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS (PRESENT DAY)

We're back to the present; Trenk is listening to Cross read with rapt attention. Cross is interrupted by the chime of his communicator.

CROSS

Go ahead.

GREY'S COMM VOICE

We've found the backup logs down here in Engineering. We should be able to restore them and see exactly what happened to the Investigator.

CROSS

Good work. We've found the Captain's log up here... and the Captain. Finish your work and get back to the Enterprise. We'll only be a few more minutes here.

GREY

Understood.

The communicator clicks off, and Cross returns his attention to the logbook.

TRENK

Captain? Take a look at this..

Trenk is holding the other book that was on the desk. When he shines his flashlight on it, we can see written on the cover:

HMS INVESTIGATOR
CAPT. ROBT. MCCLURE
ANNO DOMINI MDCCCXLVIII

CROSS

It's the log from the original Investigator. The oceangoing one. From Earth. Pre-spaceflight.

Cross takes the book, flips it open to a random page.

CROSS (CONT'D)

(reading)

"9 September, 1850. We believe that a mere twenty miles separates us from our goal. Can it be that so humble a creature as I am will be permitted to perform that which has baffled the talented and wise for hundreds of years?"

(beat; he puts the book down)

Apparently not.

Cross takes a final look around.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Let's get back to the Enterprise. We can go through all this with gravity and atmosphere. What do you think, Ensign?

TRANK

Yes, sir!

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIEFING ROOM

We see out the window, the roiling storms of the Drift.

At the briefing table are seated: Cross, Talora, Dojar, Grey, Lewis Carter, and Cale.

CROSS

Lieutenant Grey, why don't you go over what you found in the backup logs...

GREY

It seems that the Investigator detected a transmission from somewhere within the Drift. Apparently they believed it was from an intelligent civilization, and they went in to... well, investigate. They took a severe beating, had their nacelles blown off by a plasma discharge while inside the storms, and then they were forced to take shelter in the calm pocket we're in...

CROSS

(holding up the Investigator's logbook)
...So the ship could slowly die in peace.

TALORA

And there they stayed.

CROSS

Indeed. Captain Banks had an old artifact in his quarters... a log from an old Earth sailing ship. The namesake of his ship. It was lost on a mission as well. And you'll love this... the original Investigator... her sister ship... was called the Enterprise. The Investigator and Enterprise were both looking for the fabled Northwest Passage through the Arctic. That Enterprise couldn't rescue them, and Kirk's Enterprise couldn't get to Captain Banks. But at least an Enterprise made it. And we're going to finish their mission.

TALORA

Their mission?

CROSS

We're going to find the planet they were looking for and make first contact. It's well past time that we did some actual exploring. That's what Starfleet's supposed to be about... what it used to be about, anyway.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

It's the least we can do to honor
the memory of Captain Banks and his
crew.

GREY

Captain, is this wise?

CROSS

I don't know, Lieutenant. And I
don't care. For once in this damned
mission we have an opportunity to do
something good, something noble, and
we're going to take it. Is that
understood?

There are nods around the table; from the fierce look in his
eyes, it's clear that Cross isn't going to be talked out of
this. For his part, Lewis Carter is tapping away on a PADD,
making notes for the story that will come out of this.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Good. Let's get to work. We've got
a big job to do...

And on that note, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise flies around the asteroid, as if she was anxious to get underway.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The nervous center of the ship is abuzz with activity, as repair teams are locking down sensitive systems in anticipation of the rigors of the Drift.

Captain Cross sits in the Big Seat, reading a PADD, as Talora and Quinlan enter from the turbolift. They take their respective seats.

CROSS

Let's hear our course, Quinlan.

Quinlan punches some buttons on her console, changing the main viewscreen to a map display, largely red, with short slivers of blue with small points dotting the blue parts.

QUINLAN

Talora and I have used the data that you recovered from the Investigator to determine the safest possible course that we could. Most of the Drift's core is comprised of violent plasma storms, making it near-impossible to get through. However, we've discovered a path full of gravitic anomalies.

Quinlan punches up a subsection on the map, one of the larger blue slivers. We can now see small labels next to all the dots, some much larger than others.

CROSS

(interjecting)

Our own Northwest Passage.

QUINLAN

(continuing)

I believe that we'll be able to navigate around the gravimetric anomalies using slingshot maneuvers. The stretch is over 40 AU's long, so it would take much longer to traverse than just plowing through to the center, but it is safer.

CROSS

Good. Then let's get going.

Beat.

CALE

Captain... what if Quinlan makes an error? What if we end up in the plasma storms?

Quinlan looks flustered that someone would question her skill.

CROSS

Well, then we'll just have to grin and bear it, Lieutenant.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise breaks off from orbit of the asteroid, around the Investigator's final resting place, and heads into the murky abyss. Several spherical objects in the distance slowly pull in swirling gases unto themselves.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

QUINLAN

(nervous)

Here we go...

The viewscreen drifts to the right a bit, prompting Quinlan to enter some new input into the console.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise appears caught in the grip of one of the gravity wells. Instead of attempting to break free, she steers into the well and whips around. She disappears around the edge, and reappears on the other side with much greater momentum. She whips around and flies free of it and out into more open space.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

CROSS

Keep her steady, Quinlan.

QUINLAN

One well down, one hundred forty seven more to go...

Quinlan sighs, and goes back to steering the ship to the next well to pass.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise flies towards her next hurdle, being somewhat bigger than the previous well. She intrepidly flies right into the well, and begins flying around.

Unlike the last well, the Enterprise flies around three times to gain the momentum to break free.

FADE TO:

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise still traversing through the dangerous field full of gravity wells. She has just slung-shot herself free of a particularly large one, and is now barreling towards an even larger one.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

All but the same as before, except some of the crew have changed shift, with the exception of our command staff and anyone else specified.

CROSS

Would you look at that...

CALE

That's the biggest one yet...

CROSS

Quinlan?

Quinlan looks as ready as she'll ever be to tackle this monstrosity. She narrows her eyes at it as though she is just about to give it a good whack in the face.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise continues flying towards the gigantic, hungry swirling whirlpool. She gracefully inserts herself into the slingshot orbit around the monstrous well, flying around several times to gain momentum.

The camera pans to a nearby gravity well. It look like it's moving towards the well that the Enterprise is currently orbiting.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Cale's Ops station begins to BEEP.

CALE

Something's wrong...

Suddenly, the entire ship begins to rumble.

CROSS

What's happening?

CALE

There is another gravity well coming towards the one we're orbiting. The added gravity is causing massive gravimetric fluctuations in this area.

TALORA

How? They showed no sign of movement when we analyzed our course.
(beat, then realizing)
The Enterprise...

Cross looks at her, nods.

CROSS

The ship's mass ever so slightly disturbed the gravity forces in the area.

CALE

But surely the Enterprise's mass is insignificant compared to the wells?

CROSS

All it takes is a feather to tip the scale.

Talora looks at him.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise laboriously plods around the well under an increased force of gravity. It's apparent they're on the side opposite the approaching errant well, since it is unseen.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Same as before.

CALE

Captain, the combined strength of the two wells is exerting more gravimetric force on the ship.

QUINLAN

If we continue to fly around, we'll get stuck in between the two wells!

Cross contemplates for a short moment.

CROSS

Quinlan, bring the ship's bow away from the well, and go to full impulse.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise steers herself away from the orbit and attempts to fly away from the massive sphere attempting to swallow it. It doesn't seem like she's making it.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Same as before.

QUINLAN

We don't have enough power...

Cross swivels around to the junior officer manning the Engineering station on the bridge.

CROSS

Cut the EPS taps to the impulse reactors. That should give us some more power.

The junior officer responds, and his console beeps after he enters in the order.

Quinlan looks at her console.

QUINLAN

Still not enough...

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise continues the apparently futile effort to break free. She is now reeling back and forth like a truck pulling something by rope on slippery ground.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Same as before.

CROSS

Bridge to Engineering!

GREY'S COMM VOICE

Grey here!

CROSS

We need more impulse power!

GREY'S COMM VOICE

Sir, I wouldn't recommend it, the impulse engines are already being pushed to their limits.

CROSS

Do it anyway!

Cross sits back in his chair, uneasy.

INTERCUT:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- ENGINEERING

Engineering is a flurry of activity as various crewmembers attempt to stabilize various systems, or increase power.

GREY

Aye sir!

Grey punches up some commands on his console.

GREY (CONT'D)

(under his breath)

The man's gonna kill us all!

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

A close up on one of the impulse engines on the Enterprise. It suddenly releases a torrent of flame, and from the now visible exhaust trail, it seems to be pushing a whole lot harder.

The Enterprise finally seems to be gaining some ground in her struggle. She slowly inches forward.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The ship's superstructure begins to groan and creak under the structural stress between the impulse engines and the gravity pull.

QUINLAN

We're breaking free!

She continues to work, sweat running down her brow.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise is now moving much faster, though she still struggles against the pull of gravity. The two gravity wells are now both visible in the distance, and it looks as if they're about to collide.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Same as before.

QUINLAN

We're out!

CALE

Captain, the two wells are about to collide.

CROSS
(standing up out of
his seat)
On screen.

The viewscreen changes to the two spheres, now almost touching each other. They are both glowing bright red, and some of the gases rupturing from them begin issuing lightning bolts forth from them.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The two spheres explode, spewing bright glowing red gas everywhere, with several more plasma discharges.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The crew witness the event on the viewscreen, as a shockwave undiscernibly passes out in all directions, no shock is felt.

CROSS
(sarcastically)
Well, it seems we know how the plasma clouds form inside the Bank's Drift...

CALE
Sensors are showing that several other gravity wells are on the verge of colliding.

DOJAR
We're trapped.

One very long beat.

CROSS
No we're not. Starships in the twenty third century lacked the tenacity to get this deep into the Drift, we did. We didn't come this far just to be trapped like the Investigator.

He stands and walks around the Bridge.

CROSS (CONT'D)
Quinlan, plot the shortest course through the plasma storm to our destination, and take us in at one quarter impulse. Dojar, shields up at maximum.

Quinlan and Dojar tap away at their consoles. Dojar's console begins beeping. He looks up, triumphant.

DOJAR
Captain, I'm picking up a signal... very faint. Barely discernable.

Beat.

CROSS

Put it on speakers.

Dojar puts it on speakers. Through the heaping amount of static, a vague, barely audible humanoid voice can be heard. Talora looks at Cross.

TALORA

The source cannot be far away.

CROSS

Agreed. Keep her flying, Quinlan.

QUINLAN

Aye, sir.

Determination fills her eyes, as she guides the Enterprise into another region of the Drift.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise slowly flies towards an ominous red cloud, as if it were awaiting her to enter inside its maw. Discharges flashes from the cloud, from within its great bulk.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Close up of Cross, who's watching the red cloud approach on the viewscreen. The ship rocks gently to the side from a distant shockwave. We hear the turbolift doors open.

VOICE (O.S.)

Captain, you are aware that we're heading into some mean-looking nebula gas?

Cross swivels around in his chair to see who it is. It's CARTER. He's wearing a camera on his head and has it aimed directly at Cross. Cross turns back around, obviously not happy to see Carter.

CROSS

(sighs)

Yes, Mister Carter...

CARTER

Why are we heading deeper into the Rift?

CROSS

(talking down)

Because we were blocked off from our intended course.

CARTER

I see.

Beat.

CARTER (CONT'D)

When will we make it through?

Cross is irritated. He looks like he's contemplating getting up to give Carter a verbal lashing, but shakes her head at him, and Cross calms down somewhat.

CROSS

(reluctantly)

Sit down and see for yourself.

Carter walks off to the alcove of stations to the aft-right of the bridge and takes a seat. The operator of science station in the alcove is busily watching his console.

CARTER

Interesting dis...

CROSS

(interrupts)

And be quiet!

The operator, looking away from Carter, rolls his eyes. It's apparent that it's not just the senior staff that aren't fond of Mr. Carter.

A faint flicker on the display begins traveling towards the Enterprise. The operator doesn't appear to have seen it, but it catches Carter's attention. Carter rolls his chair a bit closer and points to it. The operator squirms a bit as Carter butts in.

CARTER

What's that?

The operator is about to respond, when suddenly, the entire ship JOLTS. Red alert alarms and klaxons begin to go off. The lights flicker for a second, then return to their normal luminance.

CROSS

What the hell was that?

DOJAR

Direct hit, starboard side. Shields down to fifty four percent. Looks like it was a plasma discharge from the storm.

CROSS

And so it begins.

Short beat.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Ops, keep a close eye on the static buildup on the hull and give us a warning if it reaches too high. Quinlan, increase speed to one half impulse.

CALE

But that will only increase the rate that the charge builds up!

CROSS

I'm well aware of that, Mister Cale. Helm, carry it out.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise makes due haste through the storm. A faint glowing aura floats around the ship as she makes her way through.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The room feels much more tense now.

TALORA

(softly, to Cross)

Captain, what do you intend to do by increasing the speed?

CROSS

The sooner we get out of here, the better. Going slower will mean more discharges, and the shields are already weakened.

Beat.

CARTER

Am I the only person who doesn't quite get the logic in his plan?

No one responds. He nervously gets up to leave.

DOJAR

Where are you going?

CARTER

(nervously)

Ah...

CROSS

The safest place at the moment is on the Bridge, Mister Carter. I suggest you stay put.

Carter nervously walks back to his seat. The ship rumbles again from another distant discharge. Cale's console suddenly starts beeping.

CALE

Static buildup of one hundred gigawatts!

CROSS

All hands, brace for impact!

EXT. SPACE -- PLASMA STORM

The aura around the Enterprise is now very visible as she continues to traverse the hostile storm. Suddenly, a bolt of what would be LIGHTNING on Earth, streaks out of the murk and strikes the Enterprise, jerking her.

The shields FLASH into existence at this point of impact, and residual arcs dance across the shields.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The bridge is shaking around like crazy, wires fall from the ceiling, and smoke is emitted from the casing of what once held them.

DOJAR

That hit all but took out our shields!
We're defenseless!

CROSS

(sighs)
Quinlan, how much longer?

QUINLAN

(checking her console)
Another three minutes!

Cross contemplates.

CROSS

Increase speed to full impulse.

CALE

(urgently)
But the charge will build up again
in seconds!

CROSS

(annoyed)
Mister Cale, if we don't high-tail
it out of this storm as fast as
possible, we're liable to take even
more strikes than we would at this
speed!

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

Now quit warning me of something I'm
already aware of and mind your own
damn console!

CALE

(meekly)
Y-yes sir!

He gets back to work, embarrassed at Cross's anger at him,
he looks around at the other crew who are thankfully all
engrossed at working their stations.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise is barreling through the storm at a huge speed.
The aura around the Enterprise is now visibly growing larger.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The mood is tense as ever.

CALE

Buildup is at seventy gigawatts!

DOJAR

Captain, the shields! They're still
out!

CROSS

The armor, Dojar!

DOJAR

But that won't stop it from striking
the hull!

CROSS

It's better than nothing! Do it,
Dojar!

Dojar frantically presses buttons on his console.

DOJAR

Armor online!

The Bridge crew brace themselves.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise races forward.

We cut to a lightning bolt-"eye" view, careening towards the
starboard side of the Enterprise's saucer.

The lightning bolt STRIKES the bare hull of the Enterprise!
A brilliant explosion erupts from the point of impact, sending
pieces of hull armor everywhere!

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The entire Bridge jolts incredibly hard, tossing everyone from their seats onto the floor. Sparks begin flying from the ceiling, several lights blitz out and several consoles explode.

Cross lands hard on one of the steps in front of the command chair. Carter frantically clambers to find shelter underneath one of the consoles in the alcove he's in.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- ENGINEERING

Just as chaotic as the Bridge was: consoles exploding, lights blitzing out.

One unfortunate engineer gets an exploding console to the face and is tossed across the room. Grey ducks as the body nearly hits him in the back.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The huge fireball from the explosion still lingers. A shard of armor flies towards the camera as we...

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The explosion that resulted from the bolt has faded, and now exposes a huge black scorch mark on the saucer's starboard side. Residual electric arcs pulsate over the center of the scorch mark.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

A haze of smoke fills the Bridge, and several sparks still fly from various blown out wires and consoles. Several people are getting up and coughing.

We cut to a close up of the command chair. A grimy hand suddenly reaches up and grabs one of the arms. The camera pans down to show Cross clambering back up. He quickly retracts his arm and gasps in pain; he apparently has broken his forearm when he hit the step. Using the other arm, he hoists himself up.

CROSS

Damage report!

Dojar is already up at his station. He presses some buttons on his console.

DOJAR

(reading off console)

Direct hit, starboard dorsal saucer. Multiple EPS conduit blowouts throughout the ship. Main computer core suffered power disruption, reboot in progress. Seventeen casualties, mainly around the point of impact.

CROSS

The hull?

DOJAR

(relieved)

No breach! The armor appears to have taken the brunt of the concussive force.

Cross repeats what he said earlier, manages a weak smile.

CROSS

Better than nothing, Dojar.

Talora clammers back into her seat and notices Cross cradling his arm.

TALORA

You're hurt?

Cross looks down at his slightly disfigured arm.

CROSS

I'll manage...

CALE

Captain, the charge is building up again!

CROSS

Quinlan, how much longer?

QUINLAN

About 40 seconds.

CROSS

Override the impulse speed limit!
Get as much speed as you can out of her!

Quinlan enters some commands into the helm.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise rockets past the camera, almost literally a blur.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

The hum of the engines can be heard throughout the ship. The gases and bright flashes of lightning fly past the main viewscreen at incredible speed.

CALE

Buildup at one hundred gigawatts...

Cross tightly grips the arm rests.

CROSS

Quinlan?

QUINLAN

Almost there...

Cross shakes his head, apparently about to succumb to the Rift's attack.

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

Another calm pocket, looking towards the murky abyss of the storm. Suddenly, the Enterprise rockets forth triumphantly from the storm.

The camera pans as she flies past the camera, revealing that this calm pocket has an entire star system in it.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Same as before.

QUINLAN

We're out!

Cale lets out a relieved sigh. The camera pans to Dojar working at his console. He looks to the side and sees Carter still huddled up under the console.

Carter takes his hands off the back of his head and looks about. Dojar rolls his eyes and goes back to his console.

CROSS

Ops, Give me a scan of this region.

Cale enters commands into his console, which immediately begins giving him telemetry.

CALE

Second-generation star system...
One G3-type star, ten planets. Five
inner-system solid planets, five
outer-system gaseous planets...

CROSS

Signs of life?

Cale pauses for a moment, as if he doesn't believe what his console is telling him.

CALE

All over the place...

TALORA

Explain.

CALE

There's multiple instances of what
appear to be colonies throughout the
system; one particular planet in the
inner system is densely populated.
And I'm picking up several subspace
distortions throughout the system.
I think they're warp drive signatures.

TALORA

You think?

Cale looks down at his console.

CALE

They are.

Beat. Cross gives Talora a wry look.

DOJAR

Captain, I think we've been spotted.
I'm detecting a vessel coming straight
at us.

CROSS

On screen.

The screen changes its view to show a small, primitive vessel,
flying towards the Enterprise. From the looks of it, it
appears to be a small military vessel of some kind.

DOJAR

I'm picking up a lot of subspace
traffic going both to and from the
vessel.

CROSS

Good. Open a channel.

Beat as Dojar works. The Bridge is unusually silent, many
of the crew have minor injuries, for which a medical team
finally arrives.

DOJAR

We're on.

Cross straightens himself for the first contact.

CROSS

This is Captain Neil Cross of the
Starship Enterprise, United Federation
of Planets.

Beat.

COMM VOICE

(both timid and excited)

Th.. this is Captain Arn Shial of
the Vargan Extra Planetary Corps...
the, the ship Loran.

CROSS

Pleased to make your acquaintance,
Captain.

SHIAL'S COMM VOICE

We never expected any outsiders to
make it through the Abyss.

CROSS

We came here after finding one of
our older ships, that a civilization
existed within your... Abyss.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

We almost suffered the same fate as them in coming here.

SHIAL'S COMM VOICE

Which ship?

CROSS

(confused)

The Investigator.

SHIAL'S COMM VOICE

You have discovered the Investigator?

CROSS

You know of it?

SHIAL'S COMM. VOICE

I think it's best you come to Vargas Prime, Captain. There is much that we must discuss.

Cross and Talora exchange a glance.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE -- INSIDE THE DRIFT

The pocket of normal space the Enterprise entered a moment ago. Vargan vessels flank the mighty starship as she gracefully flies past the screen.

CROSS (V.O.)

Captain's Log, supplemental. I'm proud and honored to be leading an away mission to the Vargan capital city to initiate first contact -- a part of my job description that I haven't had the chance to partake in for a very long time.

The Enterprise sweeps past our view and we look down at the planet below.

EXT. VARGAS PRIME -- COURTYARD -- DAY

Four figures BEAM DOWN in the familiar dissolve of a transporter beam. As they materialize we see that they are Cross, ELRIS, Dojar, and Carter. Carter has a camera attached to his head.

We pull back to reveal an entourage waiting for them. They look quite alien, serpent like with fish like features, and wear bright clothing, a look that matches the well decorated, proudly painted walls and mosaiced floors that surround them.

KLAKUN

Captain Cross, welcome to Vargas Prime. I'm Emperor Klakun. We salute you in the time honored tradition of our people.

He holds up a large glass ball that he is holding in both hands. Inside it we can see what looks to be the Rift. Cross smiles and outstretches both hands, ready to receive it.

Just as it looks like Klakun is about to give Cross the ball, he cracks it in to two pieces and the 'drift' breaks free and expands around the away team, a beautiful show... until we cut to the view from the inside and see Cross and the others wincing as it passes by them.

It finally clears and Carter begins to whiff his eyes to get the remaining smoke away from him. He stops when Cross shoots him a glance, but his eyes continue to water.

CROSS

Then I wish to salute you in ours.

He outstretches his arm and shakes what looks to be a flipper. Klakun smiles.

KLAKUN

What brings you here, Captain?

Beat.

CROSS

We're here to complete the mission of the USS Investigator, one of our earlier vessels that was sent to explore this region of space. We've come to make first contact. With you.

Klakun smiles.

CROSS (CONT'D)

I hear that you've heard the name Investigator before?

KLAKUN

The Investigator's signal was a force what has positively driven my people ever since we detected it. Our world was divided into many different countries, our people divided over such petty arguments as religion and territory. The signal changed all that.

CROSS

How so?

Klakun turns, and nods at another Vargan present, ELUN, apparently female.

KLAKUN

I think Elun may be able to explain better than I, Captain.

Elun steps forward excitedly. She looks around at their guests before looking up into sky.

ELUN

(in awe)

We could never understand what the entire signal said as it's clarity had been upset by the Abyss. But we knew that the signal could not be natural, that it must be some form of communication.

(she looks at them)

It took our linguists nearly sixty years to decipher your language, but once we heard the name Investigator... it changed our world.

KLAKUN

The Investigator's signal helped us to unite our world, Captain. We became as one.

Cross smiles.

CROSS

It was a similar event that brought my people together. We made contact with an alien ship...

From this we slowly FADE TO a montage...

FADE TO:

INT. BANQUET HALL -- LATER

The hall looks just as elegant as the courtyard we saw earlier. A large amount of food has been laid out, before our crewmembers enter. Carter looks impressed.

FADE TO:

INT. THRONE ROOM -- LATER

More like the Oval Office crossed with the inside of a Palace. Carter talks to Klakun as Elris talks to Elun. Dojar talks to another Vargan.

FADE TO:

EXT. CITYSCAPE -- LATER -- DUSK

The sun in the sky above appears to be beginning to set, and we begin to see the bright colors of the Banks Drift appearing, though they shouldn't be entirely visible yet.

Cross and the others walk through the streets admiring the impressive architecture and the civilized society that live there.

FADE TO:

INT. LARGE HALL -- LATER

The camera is looking at a large ceiling, with a mural painted on to it. It's the drift, with a Vargan figure ascending into the heavenly Abyss.

The camera swings around to reveal Cross looking up at it, impressed. The camera closes in on him as the montage reaches a close.

FADE TO:

EXT. COURTYARD -- LATER -- EVENING

It appears that our crewmembers are saying their goodbyes.

KLAKUN

I am impressed that you should come all of this way, through all of this peril, to risk your lives just to contact a race so lowly as us, Captain.

Cross smiles, he looks up at the sky. The sun has set, and the only thing we can see in the sky is the magnificent wonder of the Abyss in all of its glory.

CROSS

It's who we are, Emperor. It's what drives us to see past the next hill. To see what's over the horizon. And to explore what's orbiting the furthest star.

He smiles, Klakun looks genuinely touched.

KLAKUN

You sound like a remarkable race of people, Captain.

CROSS

I think that we'd like to think,
that we're as equal as every other
race in the universe.

(beat)

Lieutenant?

Dojar steps forward, and opens up a bag that he has been carrying. From it he pulls out a book. It's the original sailing ship Investigator's handwritten journal, from so long ago. Dojar passes it from Cross, who passes it to Klakun, who smiles.

KLAKUN

What is it, Captain?

CROSS

It's a journal. When our people
first set out to explore our world,
we sailed across our seas in great
sailing ships. One of those was
called the Investigator, and it was
also lost on a mission of discovery.
It's a sign of our determination,
Emperor. A token of our thanks.

Klakun smiles, as we begin to slowly...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise in orbit of Vargus Prime.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- REC LOUNGE

Cross sits in a chair, staring down at the planet below through the giant observation windows. We see Elris walk up from behind him.

ELRIS

Hi.

CROSS

Hey.

Elris looks down at the planet also for a moment, before:

ELRIS

What are you thinking about?

CROSS

What I said to the Vargans.

A mischievous glint crosses Elris's eyes.

ELRIS

Wondering if you should have mentioned the Prime Directive to them?

CROSS

(smiles)

I won't tell them if you don't.

They laugh.

ELRIS

What were you really thinking about?

CROSS

I hope that what I said is really true. I was ready to say that I'd like to have been able to them that our mission is one of exploration and discovery and that we'd been sent to find civilizations such as them.

ELRIS

But you didn't.

CROSS

No.

ELRIS

Why didn't you?

CROSS

I don't know.

ELRIS

Maybe it's because you have hope?
That the Federation is destined for
something greater than what it is
now?

CROSS

I'd like to think that.

ELRIS

(smiles)
So would I.

They continue to look at the planet in silence for a moment.
With the Banks Drift's huge form lurking all around it, it
is a wondrous sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE - INSIDE THE DRIFT

The Enterprise slowly leaves the Vargan system, preparing to
leave the Drift.

CROSS (V.O.)

Captain's Log, Stardate 79326.1.
The Enterprise is leaving the Banks
Drift after making first contact
with the Vargan Planetary Republic.
Y'lan informs me that he has devised
a way to repel the dangerous static
discharges in the plasma storm, so
our return trip should be much easier.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- READY ROOM

Cross is sitting down behind the desk, reading a padd.

CROSS

But it seems that no matter what we
do, bad news seems to follow us.
Fortunately, this time around I was
able to catch it before any damage
could be done.

The doorbell chimes.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Come in.

Carter enters the room. Cross looks up from his PADD at him.

CROSS (CONT'D)
Mister Carter.

CARTER
(talking down to Cross)
Can you make this quick, Captain? I have to get ready for my show.

CROSS
Actually, that's what I wanted to talk about.

CARTER
What about it?

CROSS
You seem to paint a rather unfavorable picture of us.

CARTER
It's the truth.

CROSS
But not all the facts.

CARTER
What do you mean?

CROSS(reading from padd)
(reading from a PADD)
"Disobeying orders," "reckless endangerment of ship and crew," "causing heavy damage to starship and major casualties among crew" -- and there's more.

CARTER
I don't see the problem.

Cross looks irritated, obviously by Carter playing hard-to-get. He tosses the PADD down and stands up.

CROSS
(sternly)
Mister Carter, unfortunately, you are now a member of this crew, and, as such, you have certain responsibilities to the ship and your fellow crewmates. Ultimately, every crewmember has the same job; to sustain and foster this ship through whatever his or her duty is.
(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

As of late, you have not only been neglecting your duty, but you have been doing harm.

CARTER

How so?

Cross slowly walks around the deck.

CROSS

(belittling)

"Carter's Enterprise," Volume 1, Episode 2. In particular, you focused on Doctor Elris Lea. A story on how a supposed double standard was held towards me and towards the victims of Coular Three.

CARTER

Yes, I remember that one...

CROSS

What exactly did Doctor Elris say to you?

CARTER

(slightly nervous)

Ah... Captain, I um...

CROSS

(continuing)

I believe her exact words stated in your recordings were that she "sympathized on some level with what he went through," and that "any loss of life is appalling," regarding the Coular attack. Now how, may I ask, does that even remotely imply a double standard?

Cross has now walked up right up in front of Carter.

CROSS (CONT'D)

(seething)

You're scandalous, Carter. You've heavily distorted the truths that people have told you, you've conveniently left out facts that are relevant to your story, you've blown simple things grossly out of proportion, and you've ruined people's reputations, and all just for good ratings. And that's only your first program!

Carter gulps.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Now if you want to continue to have a starship to write stories about, I suggest that you start trying to rebuild her reputation and stop trying to destroy what remains of it. Do I make myself clear, Mister Carter?

CARTER

Crystal.

CROSS

Good. Dismissed.

Carter exits the room. Cross seats himself again, looking slightly pleased with himself.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- REC LOUNGE

The Rec Deck bustles with activity. HAL is quite busy handing out drinks to patrons, several people are happily playing away in the arcade, and several more people are sitting, looking through the gigantic windows as the Enterprise safely travels through normal space, an assuring sight compared to the Banks Drift.

The camera closes in around a table, which Talora, Quinlan, and Elris sit around. Elris is listening intently as Quinlan describes the adventure from her point of view.

QUINLAN

And it was incredible! A race against the clock, as we tried to outrun the next strike. We're lucky I got her out when I did.

TALORA

You would not have gotten the maximum power out of the engines had the Captain not ordered you to.

Quinlan gives Talora a "well lah-dee-dah" look to Talora.

QUINLAN

How were things down in Sickbay, Lea?

ELRIS

Well, despite the damage I hear we took, I was surprised we had as few casualties as we did. It could have been a lot worse, had the hull given way. No one died, thankfully.

Grey walks up, holding a drink.

GREY

Mind if I join you, ladies?

QUINLAN

Not at all.

TALORA

How bad is the damage? I have yet to read the damage report.

GREY

(fuming)

The whole damned ship is one big mess. Thanks to the Captain's need to plow through the thickest part of the plasma storms, we have thirty five EPS conduit blowouts, four overloaded processing clusters in the main computer, seventy five control panels to replace, and over five hundred square meters of damaged armor on the hull!

TALORA

I'm sure the workers at Antares Shipyards will provide some much needed help.

GREY

I'm sure I could do it on my own if I had a full staff. I had five of my engineers on the casualty lists, and they're all going to have to stay at least a week in Sickbay, thanks to the ever-adventurous Captain Neil Cross.

Talora sighs and exchanges a glance with Elris, before looking at a chronometer display on the center piece of the table they're sitting at.

TALORA

Looks like it's time.

GREY

Time for what?

QUINLAN

To see how bad the damage is.

GREY

(confused)

I thought I just told you?

QUINLAN

Not that damage, Erik...

TALORA

Computer, activate holovision,
Federation News Network.

The computer gives a confirming chirp, and the centerpiece projects a flat image a few meters away from the table the four are sitting at.

The "screen" then displays "CARTER'S ENTERPRISE" in bold letters.

ANNOUNCER

Today, on "Carter's Enterprise"...

The screen changes, to something none of the four expect: A graphic of the Enterprise flying by, with the bold words "ROAD TO REDEMPTION" displayed. Quinlan's mouth is slightly open, and Talora raises her eyebrow. Grey and Elris look suitably confused.

ELRIS

Are you sure we're on the right
channel?

Talora nods.

CARTER (V.O.)

The Enterprise began her long, and
apparently painful, road to redemption
this week, as she and her crew and I
went where no one had gone before...

Elris and Quinlan smile. At this point we close in on the "screen" and our entire view cuts to the actual broadcast.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise emerges from the drift.

CARTER

She has earned the distinction of
being the first starship ever to
brave the perils of the treacherous
Banks Drift and survive. The Drift
has been known to have consumed twelve
other ships within the past century
and a half.

The Enterprise turns slightly, and we can now see the large black scorch mark from her harrowing experience in the plasma storm, a scar worn proudly to show her experience.

CARTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

While inside the Drift, the Enterprise
discovered a previously unknown warp-
capable civilization, and made first
contact...

At this point Carter's voice begins to fade out, as the Enterprise turns, and flies off at warp into the starry night.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

THE END