

**STAR TREK: RENAISSANCE**

**"Other Things Equal"**

**Written by  
Dan Carlson**

*Dedicated to the valiant men and women of the  
Space Shuttle Columbia, who perished on February 1, 2003.  
Let their sacrifice represent the spirit of all those  
who boldly go where no one has gone before.*

This teleplay is originally from  
[www.startrekrenaissance.com](http://www.startrekrenaissance.com)

"Star Trek" and related names are registered  
trademarks of Paramount Pictures, Inc.  
This original work of fiction is  
written solely for non-profit purposes.  
Copyright 2003 by The Renaissance Group  
All rights reserved

TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE -- ANTARES FLEET YARDS

Open on the blackness of space, and we see a large Starfleet docking facility, similar (but not identical to) the docks at Utopia Planitia.

CROSS (V.O.)

Personal Log, Stardate 79353.6. The Enterprise has been docked at the Antares Fleet Yards for the past week, undergoing repairs to the hull armor after the mission to the Banks Drift.

As Cross speaks, we zoom in towards the station, until we see the ENTERPRISE, moored to the station.

This drydock is unlike those we've seen before, however -- in addition to the usual metal frames surrounding the ship, the frame is covered with a transparent material, completely enclosing the interior.

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

The down time hasn't been exactly helpful... at least, not for me. I've slowly gotten back into the routine of running the Enterprise -- with no small amount of help from Talora and the others.

We continue to zoom in even closer. We see various engineers working on the hull, removing scorched hull plates and welding new ones into place. None of the workers are in spacesuits -- it's a pressurized environment with a normal atmosphere.

Our perspective focuses on one person, not working on the hull, but rather sitting, and watching the repairs. Push in further...

EXT. ENTERPRISE -- HULL

It's NEIL CROSS, sitting with his back leaning against the rise of the Bridge dome. He's narrating to a PADD which he holds in his hand. (Note: Cross should be wearing magnetic boots to anchor his feet to the "deck.")

CROSS

But somehow, I can't shake this feeling of doubt, of reluctance. Fate has put me here again, given me the opportunity to make amends for... for what I did.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

(beat)

But I'm starting to wonder if I'm  
only going to do more harm than  
good...

He trails off, and stares off into space, presumably watching  
the hull work continue.

We hear the CLUMP of a magnetic boot attaching itself to the  
hull.

QUINLAN (O.S.)

Captain?

Cross turns to see QUINLAN coming into view around the edge  
of the dome.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

You turned your communicator off.

CROSS

Something wrong, Lieutenant?

QUINLAN

Not unless you count a panicking  
Romulan.

Quinlan grins.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Talora's been turning the ship upside-  
down looking for you.

Cross turns back, facing away from Quinlan.

CROSS

I just needed a bit of quiet time...

A beat. Quinlan listens -- with the engineers laboring around  
them, the sounds of hull armor being welded into place, it's  
hardly what one would call "quiet."

QUINLAN

You could've gone to your quarters  
for that.

Another beat. Cross sighs, but keeps looking straight ahead.

CROSS

What do you see out there, Quinlan?

QUINLAN

Um... the hull?

CROSS

Exactly.

Quinlan starts to get a concerned look.

QUINLAN  
Captain, are you all right?

CROSS  
(curtly)  
I'm fine.

QUINLAN  
I'm no counselor, but it seems that  
you've got something on your mind.

CROSS  
(mildly annoyed)  
Of course I've got something on my  
mind...  
(beat)  
Take a look around, Quinlan.

Quinlan looks.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
You see engineers working on the  
hull. I see people cleaning up  
another mess that I created.

QUINLAN  
Why?

CROSS  
You know that as well as I do. I  
was so obsessed with doing some good --  
accomplishing a peaceful First Contact  
mission -- that I ended up endangering  
the ship yet again, causing more  
damage.

Cross finally turns around to look at Quinlan directly.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
Even when I'm trying to do something  
good for the ship, there's something  
that bites me in the ass.

QUINLAN  
(quips)  
Isn't that how it always works anyway?  
(beat)  
Captain, you can't afford to keep  
second-guessing yourself. We all  
make mistakes. Hell, I'm one to  
talk about that, aren't I?

Cross smiles briefly.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

At some point you've got to --

Her sentence is suddenly cut off by a blaring ALERT KLAXON. Quinlan and Cross look at each other.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

How can you have a red alert in drydock?

Cross stands up, suddenly all business.

CROSS

Let's find out.  
(taps commbadge)  
Cross to Bridge, report.

INTERCUT:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

TALORA and DOJAR stand together at the Tactical station. Around them, the rest of the crew bustles under the flashing alert lights.

TALORA

Captain, we've just received a distress call from the starship Robert April. Station operations is scrambling all ships.

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Acknowledged. Quinlan's with me -- beam us aboard immediately.

TALORA

Yes, sir.  
(beat, adjusts comm)  
Transporter Room, beam Captain Cross and Lieutenant Quinlan directly to the Bridge.

DOJAR

Commander, I'm reading a power surge from the April.

Change perspective to see the front of the Bridge, as Cross and Quinlan appear in the usual flash of light. He immediately strides forward into the central area, while Quinlan rushes to the helm console.

CROSS

Can you determine the nature of the April's distress?

TALORA

No. The signal was almost  
unintelligible. We only got a few  
words.

CROSS

How long until we can launch?

TALORA

At least --

DOJAR

(urgently)

Captain, they're powering up their  
slipstream drive!

Cross whirls.

CROSS

What?

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

We see the Robert April, a sleek, powerful-looking starship  
with a clear resemblance to the Enterprise. It glides past  
our point of view, and we see it BLAST AWAY in a blazing  
blue streak into slipstream.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Dojar looks up from his console, grim.

DOJAR

Too late... they're gone.

On everyone's reactions, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE -- MOMENTS LATER

Same as before. Cross is PACING in front of his chair. Talora still stands next to Dojar at the Tactical console. Quinlan has taken her place at the Helm.

CROSS  
Come on, come on...

The aft Bridge doors HISS open, and GREY enters and sits at the primary Engineering station.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
(to Talora)  
What's taking so long?

At the OPS console, Lieutenant CALE responds.

CALE  
Sir, Engineering reports that all repair teams have evacuated. Station ops is ready to begin depressurization.

CROSS  
And how long will that take?

CALE  
At least two minutes, sir.

CROSS  
(incredulous)  
Two minutes?

In the background, Grey eyes Cross with annoyance.

GREY  
Sir, the station can't simply blow open the doors. The explosive decompression would damage the entire drydock frame.

Cross frowns in Grey's direction, then turns to look at Dojar.

CROSS  
Do you have a sensor lock on the April?

DOJAR  
Yes, sir. But the signal's fading -- they'll be out of range in less than fifteen minutes.

Cross turns to Talora.

CROSS

How many other ships are launching?

Talora consults her panel.

TALORA

Four.

(reading)

The Rohna, the Challenger, and the Napoleon are underway, and the T'Kumbra is about to launch, but...

Cross's face falls.

CROSS

(completing Talora's thought)

...But none of them is slipstream-capable.

(beat)

We're it, then.

Cross turns to Grey.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Lieutenant, how soon can you have the slipstream drive ready?

GREY

(concerned)

Sir, the induction core was completely shut down for maintenance. I'd recommend at least a ten minute warm-up sequence.

CROSS

(annoyed)

In case you didn't notice, Lieutenant, an unknown party just made off with Starfleet's newest warship. I want to make the jump to slipstream no more than two minutes after we launch.

Grey scowls, and for a moment looks as if he's going to argue the point.

GREY

Yes, sir.

(beat)

If you'll excuse me, I should oversee the launch sequence from Engineering.

Without waiting for a response from Cross, he gets up and EXITS through the rear doors. As the doors close, Talora gives Cross a grave look.

CROSS  
(ironically, to himself)  
Dismissed, Lieutenant.

After a beat, he turns to Dojar.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
Talora, can you find out which other  
slipstream-capable starships are  
deployed in the sector?

TALORA  
Yes, sir. Allow me a moment to access  
the deployment roster.

CONTROLLER'S COMM VOICE  
Enterprise, depressurization is  
complete. You're clear for departure.  
Stand by for space doors.

Cross sits in his chair. On the viewscreen, the huge doors  
enclosing the Enterprise begin to swing open like the petals  
of an alien flower.

CROSS  
You heard the man, Quinlan. Take us  
out, full thrusters.

QUINLAN  
Aye, sir. Full thrusters.

CUT TO:

EXT. ENTERPRISE -- DRYDOCK

Like a wakening beast, the Enterprise rumbles to life and  
pushes away from its enclosure.

EXT. SPACE -- ANTARES FLEET YARDS

The Enterprise soars away from the complex and into deep  
space.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before.

GREY'S COMM VOICE  
Bridge, this is Engineering. The  
quantum induction core is powered up  
and ready for slipstream.

TALORA  
Acknowledged, Mister Grey.

QUINLAN

We've cleared the station perimeter.

Cross nods.

CROSS

Pursuit course, Lieutenant. Maximum speed.

(beat)

Engage!

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

In a blazing streak, the Enterprise jumps to slipstream.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before. Cross turns in his seat to look up at Dojar.

CROSS

Dojar, do have a good reading on the April?

DOJAR

Yes, sir. She's about one-point-four light-years distant, and holding at 120,000 TSL.

QUINLAN

They're pushing awfully fast...

(wry)

Though I would too if I'd just hijacked a Federation warship.

CROSS

(to the comm)

Mister Grey, do you think we can catch up to the April?

A beat.

GREY'S COMM VOICE

I don't think so, sir. Whoever's in control over there is pushing their engines to the limit. We're risking an engine burnout just maintaining this speed.

CROSS

Understood.

(beat)

Talora, what do you have on the deployment roster?

TALORA

(frustrated)

There aren't any slipstream-capable starships listed on active duty for this sector. I've widened the search fleet-wide -- but it appears that the deployments of Starfleet's battle fleet is classified.

CROSS

(disgusted)

That's par for the course these days...

(beat)

Dojar, get me a secure channel to Starfleet Command.

DOJAR

Aye, sir.

Dojar reacts to a beep from his console.

DOJAR (CONT'D)

Sir, Starfleet Command is hailing us. Priority One channel.

(beat, grim)

It's Admiral Delfune.

Cross and Talora exchange rueful looks.

CROSS

(sarcastic)

What a surprise. I'll take it in my Ready Room, Lieutenant.

Cross gets up and heads for the door.

DOJAR

Aye, sir.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- READY ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The doors swish open as Cross enters and walks over behind his desk, which has a relatively large stack of PADDs off to one side at the moment. He sits -- and pauses for a moment, with a pensive look on his face. As if mentally forcing his arm to move, he reaches up and activates the desktop viewscreen. On it, we see ADMIRAL DELFUNE. She appears less than happy.

CROSS

(neutral)

Admiral.

DELFUNE

Captain, we've just received the alert from Antares concerning the situation. What's your status?

CROSS

We're currently pursuing at slipstream, less than fifteen minutes behind them. We're maintaining our maximum speed at 120,000 TSL, but Lieutenant Grey has expressed concern about traveling any faster than that.

DELFUNE

(nods)

Maintain your current speed. Better to keep up with them than risk falling behind because of an engine failure.

CROSS

Understood, Admiral. We'll catch up with them when they have to drop out at the twelve-hour limit.

Cross tries to meet Delfune's piercing gaze.

CROSS (CONT'D)

We'll get them, Admiral. Whoever "they" are.

Delfune smiles with thinly veiled contempt.

DELFUNE

I have no doubt that you will, Captain.

A beat. Delfune glances offscreen to consult something on her desk.

DELFUNE (CONT'D)

Towards that end, Command is assembling a task force to help recapture the Robert April. We've called in Captain Joel and the Leviathan, along with the Marshall, the Katana, the Firebrand, and the Sting. They should be assembled and ready to launch within three hours.

Cross's eyes widen as Delfune rattles off the ships' names.

CROSS

Admiral, with all due respect... don't you think that's a bit of an overreaction?

Delfune glares through the viewscreen, as if trying to literally bore through Cross's face.

DELFUNE

(biting)

Let me be very clear on this, Captain. Regardless of my or Command's opinion of your abilities as an officer, we absolutely cannot allow the Robert April to fall into enemy hands. No Federation starship has been seized during peacetime in over twenty-five years. We cannot allow such an embarrassment now. Furthermore, Starfleet's defensive capabilities rely more than ever on technological superiority over the neighboring powers. If the Robert April is allowed to escape, our enemies will have access to the most advanced military systems in the galaxy -- slipstream drive, quantum induction energy systems, reactive hull armor, not to mention vast quantities of classified data in the ship's computer core. We cannot afford to have our secrets fall into the hands of the likes of the Breen, the Sheliak, the Tholians, or heaven forbid some rogue faction like the Cardassian supremacist groups or Klingon Reformists...

(beat)

Need I go on?

Cross's face falls, conceding the point.

CROSS

No, Admiral.

DELFUNE

Good.

(beat, back to business)

The Leviathan's task force will launch as soon as it can, but they will still be at least three hours behind you. Your job is to maintain constant sensor contact with the April, provide the Leviathan with all available tactical data, and attempt to determine who has seized the ship. Engage the April if you have an opportunity, but do not risk everything in some overconfident attempt at heroics.

(beat)

Don't screw this up, Cross.

Stung, Cross can only manage a weak response.

CROSS

Yes, Admiral.

Delfune continues as if she's just discussing the weather.

DELFUNE

Captain Joel will have overall command  
of the task force; inform her  
immediately of any change in the  
April's status.

Another blow. Cross practically reels.

CROSS

(weakly)

Understood, Admiral.

Delfune smiles, rubbing salt in the wound.

DELFUNE

I'll make sure you're provided with  
all necessary data on the April's  
capabilities and outfit at the time  
it was commandeered.

(beat)

Good luck, Captain. Starfleet Command  
out.

She reaches over to an unseen control, and her image  
disappears.

CLOSE-UP OF CROSS

As he sits back, trying to absorb the enormity of the  
conversation. He stares off into space, and we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE -- QUANTUM SLIPSTREAM

In the ethereal blue tunnel of slipstream, the Enterprise blazes past.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIEFING ROOM

At the table, Cross, Talora, Dojar, and Quinlan are seated. Off to the side, the doors open, and Grey and ELRIS enter. Cross looks up and gives her a brief NOD before turning to the others, as Elris sits.

CROSS

All right, let's get started. Dojar --

Cross is interrupted as the doors open again, and Y'LAN enters.

Y'LAN

I apologize for my tardiness.

CROSS

(surprised)

Y'lan, we didn't call you...

Y'LAN

I believe I can be of assistance during this operation.

Cross quickly glances at the others; offering assistance was rarely Y'lan's style before.

CROSS

I have no doubt about that, Y'lan. Please, sit down.

Y'lan awkwardly plants himself in one of the seats at the table. Cross turns to Dojar.

CROSS (CONT'D)

As I was saying, Dojar, what's the April's status?

DOJAR

The April is maintaining its course at 120,000 TSL. I've managed to perform a few scans of the ship in the past hour, but they're all of relatively poor resolution due to our relative speeds and distance.

(MORE)

DOJAR (CONT'D)

Also, we've been unable to determine a destination -- their current vector doesn't pass near any star system or known outpost.

CROSS

For the moment we'll have to assume they'll continue on their present course and wait as long as possible before exiting slipstream. What's in the sector near their presumed exit point?

DOJAR

Not much -- a few uninhabited systems, the Chratinor Nebula, no major outposts to speak of. Although something could certainly have developed there that we don't know anything about. The last Starfleet survey of the sector was performed over forty years ago, by the starship Malinché.

TALORA

Essentially, we have no idea what we're heading into.

DOJAR

(grimly)  
That's right.

Cross looks unhappy, and turns to Talora.

CROSS

Have Ops perform a long-range sensor sweep of the sector when we get close enough. I don't want to walk into an ambush.

Dojar nods. Cross then turns to Grey.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Grey, what's the situation with the slipstream drive?

Grey straightens into a formal posture -- even more formal than usual.

GREY

Sir, the induction core is operating at full efficiency. Hull ionization is currently within tolerance levels; however, we will likely be forced to exit slipstream within three hours.

CROSS

What about the April?

GREY

The Robert April carries the same type of slipstream drive as the Enterprise; based on the specifications I've seen, they are limited by the same restrictions.

Cross nods.

CROSS

I'll be relying on you to keep us in slipstream long enough to get the jump on them, Lieutenant.

Grey looks unhappy.

GREY

Sir, I can't guara --

He is cut off by a BEEP from the comm.

LESMI'S COMM VOICE

Security to the Briefing Room.

Cross looks up.

CROSS

Go ahead.

LESMI'S COMM VOICE

Captain, Mister Carter is demanding to speak to you immediately.

Everyone reacts, and none of them favorably. Rolled eyes, exasperated sighs, and muttered curses by everyone except Y'lan.

CROSS

(annoyed)

Inform Mister Carter that I am currently in the middle of a strategic briefing and cannot be disturbed. I will speak to him later.

CARTER'S COMM VOICE

(muffled, in background)

Captain, you can't jus --

LESMI'S COMM VOICE

(interrupting)

Acknowledged, Captain. Lesmi out.

The connection terminates. Cross SIGHS.

CROSS

(joking)

Let's drag this meeting out as long as possible, shall we?

(beat, to Grey)

Continue, Lieutenant.

GREY

Captain, I can't recommend remaining in the slipstream any longer than the regulations specify. The increasing ionization of the hull plating will begin to interfere with the slipstream, and eventually cause a cascade fail --

CROSS

(interrupts)

Lieutenant, all I need to know for now is whether or not you can allow us to maintain pursuit as long as possible.

GREY

(sullen)

I'll do my best, sir.

Cross turns to Elris.

CROSS

Doctor, is Sickbay ready?

ELRIS

Yes, Captain. Trauma teams are equipped standing by for any casualties, and medkits have been double-checked at all locations.

Cross nods.

CROSS

Good. If that's all on the readiness front, there's another issue -- just who are we dealing with here?

TALORA

Frankly, Captain, we haven't a clue. Antares Station provided us their sensor telemetry on the April just before it took off. All we can say for certain is that the April was boarded by an unknown force which gained control of the entire ship within a matter of minutes and managed to escape into slipstream -- a technology which would almost

(MORE)

TALORA (CONT'D)

certainly be difficult for someone unfamiliar with the technology to learn in so short a time.

CROSS

Y'lan, do you think we have more Q'tami on our hands?

For a moment, Y'lan doesn't respond. As Cross is about to repeat the question:

Y'LAN

It is highly unlikely that Q'tami have perpetrated this attack. Although they certainly have the capability, the only motive for hijacking a starship would be to obtain it as an example of its technology. The Q'tami -- even the Faction -- have no need for obtaining more primitive technologies.

CROSS

I see... Do you have any idea of who might be on the April?

Y'LAN

I do not.  
(beat)  
However, I will attempt to obtain more data on this matter.

CROSS

Thank you, Y'lan.

Cross looks around.

CROSS (CONT'D)

(to everyone)  
If there's nothing else, you're all dismissed.

Everyone except Cross stands up. Grey somewhat hurriedly exits, while the others leave at a more normal pace.

Talora is the last one, but pauses by the door when she notices that Cross hasn't gotten up, and instead holds his head in his hands.

TALORA

Captain?

CROSS

(over his shoulder)  
I'm fine, Commander.

TALORA

Actually, I was about to ask you if you wanted to join me for lunch before the April drops out of slipstream.

(beat)

But now that you mention it... Quinlan never told me where she found you this morning. She just said something about quiet never being so loud?

Cross laughs, briefly, but his entire demeanor has changed -- his posture is slack, passive.

CROSS

I went for a little walk. I just wanted a bit of time on my own.

(beat)

From our conversation a few hours ago, I got the impression that Admiral Delfune was almost eager for us -- for me -- to fail at this assignment.

(beat)

She told me, "don't screw up."

TALORA

Admiral Delfune is hardly the most objective individual to judge a "screw up."

CROSS

Maybe... but she's also perfectly right. The last time I was in combat, I wiped out a hundred innocent lives.

Talora pauses for a moment, then returns to sit at the table next to Cross.

TALORA

Captain, four weeks ago you said that you had learned from your mistake. I don't think anything has changed since you said that.

(beat)

One of the worst things a soldier can do is second-guess himself.

Cross looks up, upset.

CROSS

I'm not a soldier.

TALORA

No, you're a Starfleet captain. And sometimes, Starfleet captains are called to fight. It's your duty.

CROSS

(ironic)

Haven't we had this conversation  
already?

TALORA

Perhaps we did... but it doesn't  
hurt to remind yourself that you can  
keep going. You can keep pushing  
yourself to be better.

(beat)

And make sure that you don't repeat  
the mistakes of the past. That's  
always possible.

Cross smiles, but faintly.

CROSS

I suppose so... I hope so.

TALORA

I know so.

Talora stands up.

TALORA (CONT'D)

Would you care to have lunch, Captain?

Cross looks up, and pauses for a moment, then stands up as  
well.

CROSS

Sounds good.

They both EXIT, into...

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE -- CONTINUOUS

Dojar, Quinlan, and Cale occupy their respective stations as  
Cross and Talora enter from the forward left door, from the  
Briefing Room.

Hovering defiantly in the rear near the science stations,  
under the baleful gaze of Ensign LESMI, is CARTER.

As Carter notices Cross's entrance, he immediately rushes  
over.

CARTER

Captain Cross! Why haven't I been  
informed about the Enterprise's  
involvement in this crisis?

Cross stops short, staring at Carter. Talora stands aside,  
expecting something very ugly -- Cross has straightened,  
presenting an aura of command again.

CROSS

(biting)

Mister Carter, we are currently in the middle of a serious crisis and are about to head into a combat situation. I don't have time to satisfy your curiosity right now.

He starts to move off, but Carter steps up to block his path.

CARTER

Captain, I was guaranteed reasonable access to all starship operations in order to give the public an accurate and truthful account of the Enterprise's activities by Admiral Delfune herself. I can't perform my job if I'm continually kept in the dark by your offic --

CROSS

(interrupts)

Mister Carter, in case I didn't make myself clear: the Enterprise is about to head into battle.

Carter blanches.

CROSS (CONT'D)

I've tolerated your presence so far. But I will not allow this ship to be endangered by you poking your nose around and interfering with our jobs.

Cross turns to Lesmi.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Ensign Lesmi, escort Mister Carter off the Bridge. Perhaps he'll find something interesting in Mission Operations.

LESMI

Yes, sir.

She forcefully takes Carter by the arm and guides him out through the rear doors.

CARTER

(struggling)

Captain, you can't do this! I'm going to make sure som --

He's cut off by the closing doors. Everyone lets out a collective sigh of relief.

QUINLAN

That man gets more annoying every week. Is there any possibility of moving his quarters to an open airlock?

CROSS

Maybe another time, Quinlan.

Cross, followed by Talora, exits through the right-side doors into the Ready Room.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE -- QUANTUM SLIPSTREAM

The Enterprise blazes past in the blue tunnel.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- READY ROOM

Cross and Talora sit at the desk, both with a mostly-finished meal in front of them. The stack of PADDs we saw earlier has been shoved to one side.

The pair are in the middle of a conversation. They continue eating while they talk.

CROSS

...And as I was listening to her orders, I just got the feeling that she was expecting me to fail somehow.  
(beat)  
And of course, there's the additional humiliation of sending the Leviathan.

TALORA

It seems reasonable for Starfleet to send both of its slipstream-capable heavy cruisers on this assignment.

CROSS

Oh, of course it does. But in this case, Delfune gets to rub in the fact that the Enterprise isn't the flagship anymore -- and that I have to report to Joel.

TALORA

(doubtful)  
I think you might be reading too much into this.

CROSS

With Delfune? She relishes every chance she gets to twist the screws just a little bit tighter.

TALORA

That still doesn't change the facts.  
Regardless of her opinion, the chain  
of command is what it is.

CROSS

Still, despite Delfune's words, it's  
crystal clear that she has no  
confidence in my abilities --

TALORA

(interrupts)

Captain, forget about Delfune. She  
is not the supreme judge of anyone,  
and especially not you. What matters  
is that you have confidence in your  
own abilities.

Cross nods, but doesn't respond immediately, instead focusing  
on the remains of his lunch.

TALORA (CONT'D)

(gently)

Captain, if you are encountering  
these kinds of doubts, perhaps...

Cross raises his finger preemptively.

CROSS

Ah, ah -- don't tell me to talk to a  
counselor about this. Even if we  
had one on board right now, I wouldn't  
go.

Before Talora can respond, the comm BEEPS.

DOJAR'S COMM VOICE

Bridge to Captain Cross. Sir, the  
April has just dropped out of  
slipstream.

CROSS

Acknowledged, Lieutenant.

Cross and Talora both rise and head for the door.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before: Dojar, Quinlan, and Cale are at their stations,  
with various supernumeraries in the background.

Cross and Talora ENTER from the right-side doors.

CROSS

Where are they?

DOJAR

They're about half a light-year  
outside the Tolpani System.

Cross and Talora sit in the center seats.

CROSS

What have we got on the Tolpani  
System?

DOJAR

Not much. It's a class-F2 star,  
with seven planets -- none of them  
habitable.

CROSS

Keep a close sensor lock on them,  
Lieutenant. And inform the Leviathan  
of their location.

(beat)

Quinlan, don't take us too close --  
drop out of slipstream at least fifty  
million kilometers away from them.

QUINLAN

(flippant, but nervous)

I'll try -- but I don't know how  
precise I'll be able to get when  
you're traveling a hundred thousand  
times the speed of light...

CROSS

I have full confidence in your  
piloting skills, Lieutenant.

Quinlan manipulates her console.

QUINLAN

Okay, folks. Hold on to your hats...

EXT. SPACE -- QUANTUM SLIPSTREAM

We get an "over the shoulder" view of the Enterprise, facing  
ahead as it careens through the blue tunnel.

As we watch, there's a brilliant FLASH of blue-white light  
ahead, and the ethereal rings of the slipstream tunnel fade  
in its brilliance. We get the impression of numerous streaks  
of light suddenly whipping past, and just as suddenly the  
streaks themselves disappear as the Enterprise emerges into  
normal space.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before.

CROSS

Do you have a fix, Dojar?

DOJAR

(concentrating)

Yes, sir, I've got them. They're holding position, about sixty-five million kilometers away, bearing 12 mark 21.

CROSS

Well done, Quinlan.

At Ops, Cale frowns.

CALE

Captain, I'm picking up a strange sensor reading about two hundred thousand kilometers away.

Dojar works his console.

DOJAR

Confirmed... but I'm unable to get a definite lock.

CROSS

(concerned)

Is it the April?

DOJAR

Definitely not a sensor ghost, sir. Stand by.

(reacts)

Wait...

WHAM! The entire Bridge ROCKS under a massive impact, and the lighting immediately dims under the alert conditions. A second later there's a second impact. And ANOTHER...

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

SMASH CUT IN:

EXT. SPACE -- ENTERPRISE

We see the Enterprise holding still in space... just as a dark torpedo-like projectile shoots in from off-camera to IMPACT in a brilliant shower of light against the forward saucer.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Continuous action from the end of Act Two. The Bridge continues to rock under a series of explosions.

CROSS

(shouts)

Get the shields up! Quinlan, evasive maneuvers!

Dojar claws to his feet during a lull between impacts. He punches a quick command into his console while struggling to maintain balance at the same time.

DOJAR

Shields activated.

QUINLAN

Evasive maneuvers, aye.

CROSS

Get me a damage report. And find out what's hitting us!

Talora gets up and hurries to the aft consoles as the Bridge ROCKS again -- albeit less violent than before.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- ENGINEERING

Around the induction core, it's a scene of utter chaos as engineers run around trying to keep on top of the damage.

Grey stands to the side at one console, also directing the response.

GREY

(to himself)

What the hell has he gotten us into this time...?

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before.

DOJAR

I'm picking up a faint warp signature.  
(beat, urgent)  
Everyone hang on!

WHAM! Another rapid series of blasts rock the ship, none as violent on its own, but creating a more drawn-out rumble.

QUINLAN

(to herself)  
Where the hell are they shooting from?

DOJAR

(responding, but to himself)  
From a long way off...

TALORA

(reading a console)  
Damage reports coming in. Casualties on Decks Ten and Eleven. EPS ruptures in sections five through eighteen. Hull breach on Deck Twenty, emergency forcefields active.

CALE

Lieutenant Dojar, I'm getting another of those readings...

DOJAR

Acknowledged. Stand by...

EXT. SPACE -- ENTERPRISE

The Enterprise, still motionless in space as before. Along the saucer, one of the phaser arrays quickly charges up, letting loose a short burst at...

EXT. SPACE

...Another incoming projectile, which promptly EXPLODES.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Reaction shots from everyone. Cross turns in his seat to look up at Dojar.

CROSS

Dojar, what the hell was that?

DOJAR

It appears, Captain, that the April is equipped with Starfleet's new long-range ambush missiles.

Cross hangs his head, frustrated.

DOJAR (CONT'D)

...Another one incoming! Firing.

We hear the (O.S.) effects of the phasers firing again, and a more gentle rumble as the missile explodes.

QUINLAN

Ambush missiles? When the hell did they get those?

CROSS

We'll save the recriminations for later. Quinlan, move to intercept the April. Warp 8.

QUINLAN

Warp 8, aye.

CROSS

Dojar, target the April and be ready to swat down any other missiles they shoot at us. Attack pattern Sierra.

DOJAR

Yes, sir.

CROSS

Quinlan, engage!

EXT. SPACE -- ENTERPRISE

A fast shot past the Enterprise it blasts past our perspective and jumps to warp.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Same as before.

QUINLAN

Twenty seconds to intercept.

DOJAR

They're launching two more missiles... Firing phasers again.

(beat)

First target destroyed.

(beat)

The second one overshot us, it's moving away.

CALE

Sir, the April's moving -- they're breaking off at full impulse.

CROSS

Stay with them, Quinlan...

QUINLAN

Yes, sir. Adjusting... dropping out of warp in five seconds...

EXT. SPACE

The Robert April cruises past our perspective -- heading away from us. Without warning, it turns to port and launches a barrage of quantum torpedoes.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before. Watching the viewscreen, Cross leans forward urgently.

CROSS

Quinlan, pull up!

EXT. SPACE

The April's torpedoes hurtle past, right as the Enterprise appears out of warp... and right into the torpedoes' path. The Enterprise's forward shields erupt in a quick flurry of explosions.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Once again, the Bridge ROCKS under the pressure of multiple detonations.

CROSS

(shouts)

Evasive pattern epsilon! Dojar, return fire, torpedo tubes two and four!

GREY'S COMM VOICE

Bridge, this is Engineering. We're taking heavy damage to the EPS conduits in the outer sectors. What the hell is going on up there?

Cross glances at Talora.

CROSS

(tersely)

Acknowledged, Lieutenant. Keep me apprised. Bridge out.

Cross gets up out of his chair, turns around to face Dojar.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Dojar, prepare a staggered launch of quantum torpedoes. First sequence, target one hundred meters in front of the April. Second sequence set to dispersal pattern sierra, bearing... 133 mark 0. Wait for my order.

DOJAR

Aye, sir.

Cross hurries over to stand behind Quinlan at the Helm.

CROSS

Quinlan, on my signal, pull us into a 360-degree loop to port at full impulse -- as tight as you can make it.

QUINLAN

Yes, sir.

CROSS

Dojar... fire first sequence.  
(beat, suddenly)  
Quinlan, now!

EXT. SPACE

With a cluster of torpedoes in the distance, the Enterprise suddenly twists like a wild animal attempting to catch its own tail.

The April seems to be caught off-guard, faltering at this radical maneuver.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before.

CROSS

Dojar, fire second salvo!

EXT. SPACE

While it's still in its tight spin, the Enterprise spits out a quick flurry of torpedoes which disperse across a huge range of space due to the spin. Two of these torpedoes catch the April amidships as it attempts to swing in.

The April then turns away... and begins to move off.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before.

DOJAR

Captain, they're moving off... it looks like they're preparing to go to warp.

CROSS

Quinlan, stay with them...

Quinlan's sweating, concentrating on the wild maneuvering.

QUINLAN

Aye, sir...

EXT. SPACE

With the April a barely-recognizable pinprick in the background, the Enterprise breaks out of its spin and heads off in pursuit. We pan along the length of its hull as it moves past... and what's that tiny glint of light BEHIND the Enterprise?

The glint of light quickly approaches the Enterprise until we make it out to be another missile -- and it EXPLODES like an ancient firework, showering the Enterprise with brilliantly glowing debris which also explodes in multiple subdetonations, amplifying its effect.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before. The entire crew is again rocked, but much harder than before.

CROSS

What the hell was that?!

Dojar furiously works his console.

DOJAR

Telemetry indicates another missile exploded directly behind us... but the April didn't launch it.

QUINLAN

(urgently)

Captain, the April's gone to warp.

CROSS

Match their course and speed, Quinlan!

QUINLAN

Aye, sir.

(beat, frustrated)

Sir, warp engines aren't responding!

Cross turns furiously.

CROSS

(to comm)

Bridge to Engineering, we need warp speed immediately!

INT. ENTERPRISE -- ENGINEERING

The room is in even more chaos than before. Grey works urgently at the console in front of the induction core.

GREY

(to comm, incensed)

Bridge, that last shot caused a rupture in the starboard warp plasma conduit. I'm going to need at least an hour to get it patched.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before.

Cross turns in his seat to look at Talora, crushed. He doesn't respond.

TALORA

Acknowledged, Lieutenant. Keep us informed. Bridge out.

Cross turns back to stare straight ahead. Talora notices this and gets up from the console she's been sitting at off to the side.

TALORA (CONT'D)

Dojar, do you have a lock on the April?

DOJAR

(checking the console)

Yes, commander. They're currently at Warp 9.99, on a direct course for the Chratinor Nebula.

Still silent, Cross turns his attention to the status panel of his command chair.

TALORA

How soon until they'll be able to use the slipstream again?

DOJAR

Assuming they're limited by the same restrictions we are, it'll take at least six hours for the hull ionization to subside -- and there's no good way to speed up the process. At their current speed, they'll enter the nebula in about...

(MORE)

DOJAR (CONT'D)

(checks)

Two point three hours.

TALORA

(nods)

Maintain constant surveillance.

Cross straightens again.

CROSS

Lieutenant Dojar, open a channel to the Leviathan.

DOJAR

Aye, sir.

(beat, working)

On screen, Captain.

On the forward viewscreen, we see CAPTAIN ERIKA JOEL, Captain of the Leviathan. (Last seen in "I'm Not Scared.") She's sitting in her Ready Room, which from our limited view appears identical to Cross's.

JOEL

(all business)

Captain, you have something to report?

CROSS

(pensive)

Yes, Captain.

(beat)

I'm afraid I must report that the April has managed to escape for the moment.

On the screen, Joel's eyes narrow, but she gives no other immediate reaction.

JOEL

Clarify.

CROSS

We dropped out of slipstream about sixty million kilometers away from the April, and were immediately ambushed by some type of long-range missile. We attempted to engage the April directly, but our warp drive has been temporarily disabled and we are unable to pursue.

Through Cross's explanation, Joel's face begins to harden, clearly disapproving.

JOEL

You allowed the target to catch you  
off-guard and escape.

CROSS

(hurriedly)

No, Captain, we didn't allow them to  
escape at all...

JOEL

(interrupts)

Have your tactical officer transmit  
all data concerning your engagement.  
Maintain sensor contact with the  
April -- if you can.

(beat)

We expect to rendezvous with you  
within three hours. Leviathan out.

She reaches for a control, and the viewscreen reverts to the  
usual starfield.

Cross sighs, then rises from his chair and begins to walk  
towards the Ready Room doors.

CROSS

(subdued)

Dojar, transmit our battle records  
to the Leviathan. Talora, organize  
the damage control teams and try to  
find out where the hell that last  
missile came from. I want a staff  
conference in thirty minutes.

Without waiting for a response, Cross exits. Dojar looks at  
Talora questioningly.

DOJAR

Commander...?

TALORA

(quiet)

Just send that transmission to the  
Leviathan, then coordinate with  
Lieutenant Grey on the repairs.

DOJAR

Yes, Commander.

Talora starts to walk away, but Dojar reaches out.

DOJAR (CONT'D)

Commander... we can't let him stay  
like this.

TALORA

I know.

On Talora's look of concern, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

A close shot of the Enterprise, coasting through space, with several black scars marring the hull.

PAN OUT to see that the Enterprise is no longer alone -- alongside is the Leviathan, identical in appearance. Surrounding the two ships are four smaller, needle-like cruisers identical to the Scimitar, which we saw in the previous season finale.

INT. LEVIATHAN -- BRIEFING ROOM

Identical in appearance to the Enterprise's own briefing room -- except for the presence of unfamiliar faces. Along both sides of the table sit four people in Starfleet uniform, all with Captain's rank pins. Captain SOVEK, a Vulcan; Captain SURRHA, Captain CAJAL, and Captain OKAZAKI, all Human.

All are discussing quietly among themselves when the doors open and Cross ENTERS. All four turn to look.

CROSS

(nods)  
Captains.

Everyone nods in polite greeting, but it's clear that there's no real friendliness from most of them. For a brief, awkward moment Cross stands where he is, but then seats himself at the table.

Captain Surrha sits to Cross's right. As Cross sits down, he offers his hand with a smile, greeting an old friend.

SURRHA

Good to see you again, Neil.

Cross accepts the handshake with a wan smile.

CROSS

You too, Olin.

The other three officers stare for a moment -- not quite hostile, but certainly not willing to offer similar welcome.

SURRHA

(grins)  
I'm glad to see you're still up and kicking... How's the Enterprise? Holding together?

CROSS  
(hesitantly)  
Reasonably well.

Surrha pauses, uncertain at Cross's aloofness. Before he says anything, the doors open and Captain Joel enters. Right behind her is a Starfleet Marine officer -- Major HOGAN.

Joel briefly glances in Cross's direction as she takes her seat at the head of the table. Hogan sits immediately to her right.

JOEL  
(all business)  
Thank you all for coming. This meeting will be our primary strategic and tactical assessment prior to engaging the April.

Joel presses a panel which activates a holographic display of a nebula.

JOEL (CONT'D)  
Based on the telemetry from the Enterprise, the April entered the Chratinor Nebula approximately forty minutes ago. Our long-range scans have not detected her since, so we will operate on the assumption that whoever is in control of the ship intends to wait us out. I don't plan on giving them that opportunity.  
(beat)  
Since we have no information available concerning the origin or identity of the hijackers, I feel it is crucial that we get as much intelligence as possible. The ship needs to be retaken, intact, and if possible with prisoners.

A beat, as everyone considers.

SURRHA  
What kind of sensor resolution can we count on inside the nebula?

JOEL  
The Chratinor Nebular is a class-O particle drift surrounding a young protostar cluster. Suffice to say, it'll be thicker than pea soup in there. Our range will be limited to a few billion kilometers, at best.

CAJAL  
A needle in a haystack, then.

SOVEK

The most direct course of action would be to perform a coordinated sweep inside the nebula.

SURRHA

(doubtful)

But we'd still be chasing a moving target... not to mention that we can't possibly cover the nebula in one pass.

CROSS

We may be able to tilt the odds in our favor. Ambassador Y'lan has some equipment that may let us extend the sensor range.

Joel leans back -- she can see where this is going.

CROSS (CONT'D)

We'd be able to sweep the entire nebula in much less time, give them less of a chance to evade us.

HOGAN

(pointedly)

Or outwit us?

Cross bristles.

CAJAL

I'm not willing to trust that... being... with a mission of such importance.

(to Cross)

Or have you forgotten about the attack on Utopia Planitia already, Captain?

CROSS

(heated)

Now just a damn min --

JOEL

(interrupts, calmly)

I agree with Captain Cajal. Despite your... personal rapport with the Q'tami envoy, quite frankly I don't trust him one whit. We can take care of this on our own.

A beat, as Cross backs down.

CAJAL

What if we could herd them in a specific direction? Box them in, cut off avenues of escape?

SURRHA

We'd need to expend an awful lot of firepower for that... Even combined, we don't have enough torpedoes to reliably cover the whole area.

CAJAL

(pointedly)

Or we could deploy the transphasics.

A moment of silence as everyone takes this suggestion in. Cross is stunned, Captain Surrha surprised but willing.

CROSS

Transphasic warheads haven't been fired outside of a test range more than a dozen times in the past two decades...

JOEL

(cutting in)

But there's nothing out here to stop us from using them, either. It's an isolated region -- just a nebula, after all...

SURRHA

...And while we're lighting fireworks under their noses, a couple of us can be waiting by on the outside to cut them off when they try to run.

Cross casts a sharp glance at Surrha. He faces Surrha, but addresses the whole room.

CROSS

We're talking about superweapons here...

HOGAN

(snorts)

Weapons which we'd be fools not to use when they're available to us.

CAJAL

(derisive)

Don't tell me you're against using overwhelming force when necessary. I was at Coular, after all...

SURRHA

(slightly apologetic)

...It makes sense, Neil.

Cross sits back again, the wind taken out of his sails, especially with Cajal's reference to Coular.

Joel, meanwhile, has been entering information into her PADD, manipulating the tabletop hologram.

JOEL

(briskly)

All right, then. The Leviathan, the Katana, the Sting, and the Firebrand will sweep through the nebula, detonating transphasics at strategic coordinates to block off any escape.

On the display, tiny icons indicating the different ships slowly move along.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Meanwhile, the Enterprise and the Marshall will hold position on the nebula perimeter, ready to swing in when the April emerges.

Again, the holo-display reflects Joel's outline.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Once we've cornered them, Major Hogan and the Marines will beam over and retake control of the ship.

Hogan nods. Joel looks up and around, glancing at each officer in turn.

JOEL (CONT'D)

If there's nothing else, then we're done here. We launch as soon as you've returned to your ships.

(suddenly recalling)

Oh -- Captain Cross, I presume repairs to your warp drive are complete?

Cross winces at the reminder. Joel's question isn't sarcastic in tone, but there's a faint trace of mockery in her attitude.

CROSS

Yes, Captain.

JOEL

Good.

(beat, nods)

Dismissed.

Everyone rises, begins to filter out. Cross remains still, staring off into space, as if in a trance. The doors HISS close, and it's quiet.

SURRHA (O.S.)

You okay, Neil?

Cross turns around to see Surrha watching him. He tries to muster a halfhearted smile.

CROSS

I'm fine. Just... thinking.

SURRHA

Don't let Cajal get to you... he's a hothead. Won't let anything or anyone stand in the way when he's set on something.

CROSS

(quiet)

Yeah. Sure.

A beat.

SURRHA

(worried)

It's more than that, isn't it?

Cross nods, mutely.

SURRHA (CONT'D)

Coular?

Another nod. Surrha comes back and sits down next to Cross.

CROSS

Too often now, I feel like I'm being toyed with, yanked around on some invisible string, pushed wherever some casual and uncaring fate wants me.

(beat)

I've lost control, and I feel like a failure.

A beat as Surrha absorbs this.

SURRHA

It's only a failure when you roll over and accept it.

(beat)

Neil, I remember when you had enough drive for practically everyone and everything back on Marcus Base. Some terrible things have happened -- Admiral Portman's death not the least of them -- but we can't do anything but move on.

He gets up again, and gives Cross a friendly clap on the shoulder.

SURRHA (CONT'D)

Come on. Can't have your ship taking  
off without you.

Cross rises. Hold on the two as they head out the doors,  
then we...

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The task force in formation, as we saw them earlier. In an  
awesome blaze of light, all six ships jump to warp.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- ENGINEERING

Grey is hard at work, focusing on manipulating an engineering  
tool. A floor panel has been pulled up, exposing a conduit  
underneath which Grey is currently working on.

GREY

Gronseth, get me a reading on the  
polaric discharge...

No response. Without looking up, Grey calls again.

GREY (CONT'D)

(insistent)

Gronseth, what's the discharge  
reading?

DOJAR (O.S.)

Need some assistance, Lieutenant?

Grey looks up, to see Dojar approaching, PADD in hand.

GREY

No, I'm just trying to make sure  
that the warp drive doesn't blow up  
under us.

Dojar chuckles.

GREY (CONT'D)

(sharp)

What's so funny?

DOJAR

Well, I... just thought you...

He trails off.

GREY

I don't see anything funny about major battle damage that prevents us from doing our jobs.

DOJAR

Are you all right, Erik?

GREY

Oh, I'm just fine. Just running around to and fro, cleaning up the mess. Then, just as everything's back in proper order, our good Captain charges into the thick of things and throws it all out of whack again.

DOJAR

I'm not sure that's entirely fair...

GREY

Isn't it? I've just spent a whole week overseeing the replacement of six thousand square meters of hull plating in drydock. Barely half a day after we launch, we're sitting ducks with a damaged warp drive.

(beat)

Did you know that I had to call Rob Kinnan on the Leviathan for some help? Luckily he had a few crewmen to spare and sent them over -- I wouldn't have been able to get us underway in so short a time otherwise.

Another beat. Grey turns back to the work in the floor panel, but he's clearly building up a full head of steam.

GREY (CONT'D)

And all because our good Captain Cross saw fit to charge to the rescue once again. Not only did we take unnecessary damage, not only was our quarry allowed to escape, but I've also been embarrassed in front of my fellow engineers. The Enterprise is a tarnished ship, and it's a mark against everyone who serves aboard her.

Grey looks up to give Dojar a sharp glance.

GREY (CONT'D)

What are you doing here anyway, Lieutenant?

Dojar is completely taken aback by his friend's forceful attitude.

DOJAR

I... just wanted to check with you  
on the repairs to the forward phaser  
arrays. But... maybe I'd better  
check with Lieutenant Boyle instead.

Grey has already turned his attention back to his work.

GREY

(dismissively)

Sure.

Hold on Grey as Dojar moves off...

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The six ships, a grand display of the pride of Starfleet,  
soar past at warp.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- READY ROOM

The lights have been dimmed somewhat, providing a rather  
moody atmosphere. Cross sits at his desk, with the pile of  
PADDS heaped in front of him. But he's turned to the side,  
looking out the forward windows at the stars streaking towards  
him.

As we watch, the streaking stars vanish as the ship slows.  
In the distance, we see the Chratinor Nebula -- a dark reddish-  
orange cloud that seems simultaneously bright, yet shadowy.

The comm BEEPS.

TALORA'S COMM VOICE

Bridge to Cross. We're approaching  
the Chratinor Nebula.

Cross slowly lumbers to his feet.

CROSS

Acknowledged, Commander.

He exits into...

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE -- CONTINUOUS

As in earlier scenes, Talora, Dojar, Quinlan, Cale, and some  
supernumeraries man the various stations as Cross enters.

CROSS

Report.

TALORA

We are currently twenty thousand kilometers from the nebula perimeter, holding position with the task force.

DOJAR

Message from the flagship, Captain.

CROSS

(frowns)

Put it through.

JOEL'S COMM VOICE

All ships, deploy to preassigned positions.

CROSS

Quinlan, you heard her.

QUINLAN

Aye, sir.

EXT. SPACE

With the foreboding nebula in the background, the Enterprise and the Marshall break off, while the remaining Scimitars form up in a wide wedge around the Leviathan and head into the nebula, gradually fading from view.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before.

The mood is tense as everyone watches the viewscreen. We see a sudden FLASH from somewhere inside... then another... and another.

DOJAR

The Leviathan's started the firing sequence.

The tableau is broken by a sudden comm beep:

Y'LAN'S COMM VOICE

Captain Cross, my instruments are detecting an energy signature that may indicate the location of the starship Robert April.

Cross looks at Talora, surprised and questioning.

TALORA

(shrugs)

Y'lan offered to provide additional sensor readings from his own instruments.

QUINLAN

(amazed)

He volunteered to help? What happened to his "inferior beings" spiel?

CROSS

There's a first time for everything, I suppose.

(beat, to comm)

Y'lan, thank you very much. Can you reroute your information to Lieutenant Dojar on the Bridge, please?

Y'LAN'S COMM VOICE

I shall do so immediately. Stand by.

Dojar works his console, gathering information.

DOJAR

Tracking the source...

Talora raises her head suddenly, as if realizing something.

TALORA

Dojar, put a tactical display on the viewscreen -- overlay the ships' positions with the approximate location of the energy reading.

A moment later, the forward screen changes to show the appropriate information -- the wedge of Starfleet ships, labeled, and a singular blinking dot.

CROSS

They're attacking...

(urgent)

Dojar, get me the Leviathan, NOW!

Dojar works feverishly on his console. Cross barely waits.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Captain Joel, we're detecting an unidentified energy signature approaching your flank -- bearing 38 mark 25!

Silence -- Cross stands, anxious, as the silence continues even longer. Finally:

JOEL'S COMM VOICE

Enterprise, we're not getting any energy reading. There's nothing there.

CROSS

Dammit, Captain, the April's moving to attack!

DOJAR

(quietly, to Cross)

Sir, the disturbance is approaching the Firebrand -- approximately half a million kilometers.

(beat)

I still can't get a direct reading, but I don't think it's a ship -- might be another missile.

Cross whirls around.

CROSS

Dojar, get me the Firebrand directly.

DOJAR

Aye, sir.

(beat, working)

You're on.

CROSS

Olin, you've got to break formation -- we're tracking the April moving in on your position.

Another long, agonizing beat. Cross paces around the forward section of the Bridge.

SURRHA'S COMM VOICE

I get no reading... are you sure?

CROSS

(insistent)

Yes, I'm sure! Dammit, pull up!

JOEL'S COMM VOICE

(breaking in)

Marshall, maintain formation. Captain Cross, you will cease causing interference immediately. Remain in position and stand by to intercept the April when it's time.

CROSS

(furious and pleading)

Captain, the April is intercepting you!

Over the comm line, there's a sudden BURST of STATIC.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The sleek starship Marshall soars past our perspective, launching a small number of bright-orange torpedoes in apparently random directions but at regular intervals. We watch the ship fly into the distance, and suddenly we see an incredible EXPLOSION erupt directly in front of it.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Close on Cross's intense features.

CROSS

No...

On his face, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE -- MOMENTS LATER

Same as before. Cross is standing in front of his seat, staring at the viewscreen.

CROSS

Dojar, do you still have contact with the Firebrand?

A beat.

DOJAR

(quietly)

No, sir. The ship is intact, but adrift. I can't detect any life signs from this range.

Cross takes a deep breath, then turns resolutely to sit back in his seat.

CROSS

Quinlan, stand by to take us in.

QUINLAN

(surprised, but eager)

Aye, sir!

She grins.

TALORA

(concerned)

Captain...

CROSS

Dammit, Talora, I'm not going to just sit on the outside watching in while whoever's on that ship wipes out the entire fleet. If Joel won't listen to us, then we'll do it ourselves.

Talora nods.

TALORA

Yes, sir.

CROSS

(to comm)

Y'lan, we're going to need some more of that old Q'tami magic. Can you find out where that damned missile came from?

Y'LAN'S COMM VOICE

One moment, Captain. I will provide the information when I have it.

CROSS

(to comm)

Thank you.

(to Dojar)

Dojar, what's the Leviathan and the others doing?

A beat as Dojar reads the console.

DOJAR

(surprised)

They haven't even stopped... the Katana and the Sting have adjusted their formation and they're continuing the sweep of the nebula.

CROSS

(curses)

Damn you, Joel... what happened to taking care of our own?

(firm)

Quinlan, take us in, full impulse.

QUINLAN

Aye aye, sir!

EXT. SPACE

The huge bulk of the Enterprise heaves forward, into the nebula. In the background, the Marshall can be seen holding position.

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before. Dojar reacts to a beep on his console.

DOJAR

Incoming hail from the Marshall.

CAJAL'S COMM VOICE

Cross, what the hell are you doing? Our orders --

CROSS

(interrupts)

Captain, in case you didn't notice, one of our ships just got hit because Joel didn't listen to our warning. The Enterprise can do more good in there.

CAJAL'S COMM VOICE

(seething)

Cross, you fool... you pulled this same stunt at Coular. Stay where y --

Cross signals to Dojar with a slashing sign, and the connection is cut off.

Talora frowns, and leans close to Cross so only he can hear.

TALORA

Captain, are you sure about this? Cajal is right... we should stay in our assigned position.

CROSS

Talora, Y'lan's just proven that his sensors can help us find the April. Joel won't listen to us, won't trust us. So we'll do it ourselves.

Still somewhat dubious, but still understanding, Talora nods.

INTERCUT:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- Y'LAN'S LAB

Y'lan is beavering away at his Q'tami table in the center of the room, manipulating various alien-looking controls with his tentacles. In the center, above the table, is a projection of the nebula, with a number of flashing vectors that seem to intersect at random points.

Suddenly, one series of vectors seems to TWIST and metamorphose in the projection, and begins pulsing brightly.

Y'LAN

(to comm)

Bridge, I believe that I have located the starship Robert April. I am providing Lieutenant Dojar with the coordinates now.

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Acknowledged, Y'lan. Good work.

The table emits a strange PURR, and suddenly the pulsing vectors FLASH for a second, then split in two. Y'lan's three eyes narrow.

DOJAR'S COMM VOICE

(puzzled)

Y'lan, I'm picking up a second signal. Did they just launch another missile?

Y'LAN

No. The signal is stationary... it appears to be holding position with the Robert April.

Suddenly, lights on all sides of the table subtly LIGHT UP, and Y'lan's eyes narrow even further in a reaction of surprise.

Y'LAN (CONT'D)

How interesting...

(beat, to comm)

I am unable to attain a full sensor profile of the second signal. Its characteristics do not match any profile known to the Q'tami.

INTERCUT:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before. Cross exchanges a worried glance with Talora.

Y'LAN'S COMM VOICE

One moment... I appear to be losing the signal...

CROSS

Quinlan, intercept course for the April, now! Dojar, hail the Leviathan.

DOJAR

(beat, working)

Yes, sir. You're on.

CROSS

(to comm)

Captain Joel, we've found the April. It's located...

(reading his console)

Located about 500 million kilometers from your port bow. Bearing 319 mark 274. Stand by, we're moving to intercept.

JOEL'S COMM VOICE

Negative, Enterprise. Our sensors don't read anything. Hold position and follow the strategy.

DOJAR

We're almost in range... on screen, Captain.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise's perspective, as it pushes through the nebula. A vague dark shape in the distance ahead gradually resolves to become the Robert April -- motionless. Almost... drifting?

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

As before. Cross and Talora stare at the viewscreen.

QUINLAN

I wonder what they're waiting for..

TALORA

Dojar, have they locked weapons?

Dojar reads from his panel.

DOJAR

No, Commander. In fact... I'm not reading anything active over there but the emergency systems.

(beat, reacts)

Captain, the Leviathan is approaching. They're hailing us.

JOEL'S COMM VOICE

Enterprise, you will stand down immediately and --

She breaks off, and the comm goes quiet.

CROSS

(whispers, to Talora)

I guess they just saw what we saw.

JOEL'S COMM VOICE

(brusque)

Enterprise, you will stand down while we board the April and regain control.

CROSS

(to comm)

Captain, request permission to send a boarding party of our own along.

JOEL'S COMM VOICE

Negative, Enterprise. You've done quite enough here already.

Cross rolls his eyes at Talora.

CROSS

Captain, in case it escaped your notice, we've got some equipment over here that's pretty good at

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)  
sniffing things out that normal  
Starfleet sensors can't.

Silence on the comm.

JOEL'S COMM VOICE  
(sighs)  
Very well, Captain. I'll inform  
Major Hogan to expect your detachment.

CROSS  
Thank you, Captain. Enterprise out.

Cross nods to Dojar, with a slashing motion of his hand.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
Mister Dojar, perhaps you would care  
to lead the Security team over?

DOJAR  
(smiles)  
With pleasure, sir.

Dojar heads for the rear doors. Just as he reaches it...

CROSS  
Oh, and Dojar -- I think Y'lan is  
anxious to take a look, too.

DOJAR  
(nods)  
Yes, sir.

Dojar exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

A close shot of the Robert April, drifting and well-lit by both its internal lighting and the reflections of the nebula, yet eerily dark at the same time.

INT. ROBERT APRIL -- TRANSPORTER ROOM

Identical to the Enterprise's transporter rooms in layout and appearance -- except that the entire room is in shambles. Wall panels have been ripped out, its contents strewn apart on the floor. A MARINE mans the main console.

On the pad, six figures materialize -- Dojar, Y'lan, Lesmi, and three other (N.D.) Security officers. As the beaming finishes, the five humanoids react in disgust.

LESMI

By the stars... what happened in here?

Y'lan has no such qualms, and eagerly scuttles down to examine the wreckage. At the console, the Marine taps a control.

MARINE

(clipped, precise)

Major Hogan, the Enterprise boarding party has arrived in Transporter Room One.

HOGAN'S COMM VOICE

Copy that.

Dojar steps down from the pad, and nods to the Marine, who is staring suspiciously at Y'lan.

DOJAR

Anything of interest yet, Sergeant?

MARINE

No sir. Engineering and the Bridge have been secured, Companies A and C are sweeping through the lower decks. But it looks like whoever was here took off in a real hurry.

(beat)

They left an incredible mess, too... flooded all the decks with methane gas for some reason.

Dojar winces.

DOJAR

No wonder it stinks in here...

(beat)

All right. We're going to be taking a look around, see if we can figure out anything about our mysterious friends.

MARINE

Yes sir.

The Enterprise officers exit.

INT. ROBERT APRIL -- CORRIDOR -- CONTINUOUS

The corridor is in about the same condition as the Transporter Room -- panels torn out, scorch marks on the walls, light fixtures blown out.

Y'lan scuttles along, pointing a small tricorder-like device at anything and everything.

Y'LAN

Most curious... I have not observed  
such an energy dispersal pattern  
employed in this region before.

Dojar leads the group around a corner, where they all STOP  
COLD upon seeing...

The body of a dead Starfleet officer, one of the April's  
crew members. Not only is the chest blasted open with some  
energy weapon, but the torso practically ripped apart as if  
something were trying to dig inside.

Behind the body, in the distance, we can see several MORE  
corpses, each in similar condition...

DOJAR

(stunned)

What kind of monsters were here?

With a quick flash, we...

FLASH TO:

INT. REFORMIST SHIP -- CORRIDOR (FLASHBACK: "DEAD AND BURIED")

A dim, dismal corridor, littered with Klingon corpses.

FLASH TO:

INT. ROBERT APRIL -- CORRIDOR

Dojar shudders at the sight, and turns away in disgust.  
Behind him, the other humanoid officers react similarly.

FLASH TO:

INT. CARDASSIAN SHIP -- TRANSPORTER ROOM (FLASHBACK: "RTBY 1")

Dojar stands on a transporter platform, looking around in a  
state of semi-shock.

DOJAR

Y'lan... I...

He doesn't get to finish his sentence, though, as he pulls  
his hands up to his head and SCREAMS in pain.

On the scream, we slowly...

FADE TO:

INT. LEVIATHAN -- READY ROOM

Captain Joel sits at her desk, with Cross sitting opposite  
her. The room is rather spartan, with fewer decorations  
than we're used to seeing in Cross's room.

We get the impression of a precise, organized office.

Joel is reading from a PADD.

JOEL

And your Q'tami says he has no idea who did this, then?

CROSS

That's what he said.

JOEL

(caustic)

And I'm sure he's the very model of righteous truth. For all we know, the Q'tami are trying to pull another deception on us.

CROSS

(confident)

This wasn't the Q'tami, Captain.

JOEL

Oh, really?

CROSS

I'm positive. This isn't the way they operate -- not to mention that they have no real motive for doing something like this.

JOEL

"The way they operate" being what your Q'tami has told you?

CROSS

I trust Y'lan, Captain.

JOEL

(countering)

And I trust what I know. I don't know the Q'tami, so I certainly don't trust him.

A beat, as Joel shuffles PADDs. Cross watches in silence.

JOEL (CONT'D)

I suppose it's only fair to let you know about the report I'll be submitting to Admiral Delfune. I've completely laid out your failure to prevent the April from reaching the nebula, and also your blatant disregard of the mission plan and my direct orders as task force commander.

(MORE)

JOEL (CONT'D)

(beat, cavalier)

Certainly nothing exceptional given your past record, but I doubt that Command will be pleased with yet another incident involving the Enterprise.

Joel looks Cross right in the eye.

JOEL (CONT'D)

And I certainly don't look forward to the next time you're assigned to my task force, Captain.

Cross stiffens in indignation.

CROSS

Captain, if it weren't for my initiative you wou --

JOEL

(interrupts)

I'm not interested in a debate, Captain. You broke the chain of command. I'm just informing you of the consequences.

(beat, derisive)

Now kindly get out.

Cross briefly glares at Joel, but wilts under her cold gaze. Without a word, he rises and exits.

FADE TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- READY ROOM

The same room, but now Cross's room. (Use an identical angle from Cross's exit in the last scene -- only the room's decorations have changed.) The lighting is dimmer, the feeling more comfortable, yet also more disorganized, even messy.

He walks in, towards his desk, and carelessly tosses the PADD he's carrying onto the growing pile. He starts to move around the desk, to sit down... and stops.

Instead, he turns around and goes to look out the window.

CROSS

(to computer)

Begin Personal Log, Stardate 79357.7.

(beat)

I think I did it. It's the first time I've been in battle since I... since I... returned to service.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

I did my job, reasonably well.  
Depending on who you ask, I even  
saved the day.

(beat)

Maybe.

A beat. Cross sinks into a nearby chair.

CROSS (CONT'D)

A few weeks ago, I almost felt like  
I was ready to take on the universe  
again. I haven't forgotten what  
I... what I did.

(beat, quietly)

The killing. But I was able to ignore  
it, for a while. I told myself that  
I'm doing some good here.

(beat)

I'm not so sure about that now. I  
keep telling myself, I've saved the  
day. I saw what needed to be done  
and did the job I was sent to do.

Cross turns in his seat, to stare out the forward window.

FADE TO:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise cruises past our perspective.

CROSS (V.O.)

But I just can't shake the feeling  
that I'm such a failure...

The ship slowly recedes into the distance, moving on -- and  
then jumps to warp. As the flash of its departure subsides,  
we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

THE END