

STAR TREK

RENAISSANCE

"Consider the Heavens"

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The stars, bright and numerous, and the bulk of the Milky Way galaxy behind them. An awe-inspiring sight. We watch in silence for a moment until, very gradually, a sound begins to fade in. The sound of a dozen voices chanting in some alien language.

The chanting continues as we watch the stars... then stops abruptly. A pause, then a single voice begins to speak.

VOICE

Medieval theologians believed in the impossibility of an actual spatial or temporal infinity; they devised all sorts of arguments for this, mostly intuitive, and used it to argue for the existence of a personal deity -- for if the universe did not always exist, it must have come from somewhere.

(beat)

We now know that spatial and temporal infinities can and do exist, and it is only in light of this knowledge that we can look back and witness the damage that the theologians of old did to theism. In their zealotry to act in accordance with their -- often barbaric -- notions of salvation, they cast aside the one thing which should never be cast aside: Truth!

The voice continues as, slowly, we begin panning across the starfield, away from the bow of the Milky Way.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Not only do infinities exist in space and time, but they exist in ways which, though natural, we cannot even begin to conceptualize. Only the Transcendent, the One in whose thought all the universes are sustained and nourished, can see the entire picture. Would I say that we are to the Transcendent as ants are to us? I would not say that, unless I wished to pay the ultimate insult to ants.

(MORE)

VOICE (CONT'D)

Particularly when one considers that there are an infinite number of degrees of infinity itself, which can be found in the physical world as well as mathematical, does one understand that the Transcendent and his realm defy all of our concepts, all of our vain attempts to understand.

The panning stops, and we can see, far in the distance, something slowly approaching us -- a ship, perhaps? The voice continues, but fading out now.

VOICE (CONT'D)

This is not to say we should not try to understand; the Order has always maintained that Truth is knowable to within our limitations. But now you see the necessity of the Transcendent, for who else can observe and understand all of the natural realm, with all its grandeur and all its...

The voice fades out to incomprehensibility now, and begins to overlap with another voice, more familiar. As the first voice dies away and the second grows in strength, the ship approaching is now recognizable: it is the Enterprise, sailing through the heavens at a leisurely impulse speed.

CROSS (V.O.)

...and although some historians consider it apocryphal, it is nonetheless an honored tradition in Starfleet that Captains have shared this happy privilege with our predecessors of the first wooden sailing ships...

The Enterprise is now almost upon us. We FLY right through the large windows into...

INT. ENTERPRISE -- REC LOUNGE -- CONTINUOUS

We see, at first, only CAPT. NEIL CROSS, wearing his dress uniform, a small smile on his face.

CROSS

...that of joining two people in the bonds of matrimony.

He pauses, looks at the people in front of him, and takes a deep breath.

CROSS (CONT'D)

And so now it is my honor to unite
you...

We pan away from Cross to see, standing in front of him, NATHANIEL STOLT and MICHELLE KAPLAN, a young woman with the rank insignia of a Chief Petty Officer and ears that suggest some Vulcan ancestry. He wears his dress uniform; she wears a lovely bridal dress.

Sitting in arranged seats nearby are several dozen crew members, including JENNIFER QUINLAN, ERIK GREY, ELRIS LEA, TORAN NOA, BRIAN CALE, HAL the bartender, and many other familiar and semi-familiar faces. Everyone is smiling. A few eyes are wet.

CROSS (CONT'D)

...Michelle T'nara Kaplan, and you,
Nathaniel Lionel Stolt, together in
marriage here in the sight of your
friends and comrades.

(beat)

Ensign Stolt and Chief Kaplan have
served under my command for some
months now. During that time I have
watched their relationship grow,
develop and flourish. I personally
believe that today's ceremony could
not be more appropriate. The
relationship of marriage is based on
love and mutual respect, freely given
and received; although these things
are a part of our everyday living,
they are no less extraordinary for
it.

He pauses again, and smiles down at the happy couple. In the crowd, Toran reaches for Elris's hand and squeezes it. Hal surreptitiously hands Quinlan a napkin to wipe away her tears.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Ensign Stolt and Chief Kaplan -- Nat
and Michelle -- are two complete and
unique persons who now choose to
commit to a life-long union, a
partnership in the truest sense of
the word.

The camera, still watching the proceedings continuously,
flies OUT of the windows into...

EXT. SPACE -- CONTINUOUS

Cross's voice continues as we watch the ceremony for a moment
longer through the Rec

Lounge windows, then begins to fade as our POV starts to move down and across the hull of the ship.

CROSS (V.O.)

In devoting themselves to one another, they affirm their own aspirations to personal fulfillment -- and their responsibility to the greater good of sentient beings throughout the Universe...

Cross's voice fades out completely now as we silently move across the hull of the ship. Eventually we stop at a single window and look inside for a moment before ZOOMING through the window into...

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- Y'LAN'S LAB -- CONTINUOUS

Y'LAN and GRIL DOJAR are sitting in front of the complex equipment that defines Y'lan's workspace. They are silent for a long moment, looking at one another. Suddenly...

DOJAR

Damn it! I can't do this; I just can't talk to you like this telepathically.

Y'LAN

You are communicating sufficiently well.

DOJAR

I can send and receive messages; the problem is knowing what they say. You keep sending me these images, but I have no idea what they are; no basis in my experience -- in our shared experiences -- of determining what you're talking about. That's the problem with sending messages telepathically; it assumes a common frame of reference that, too often, you and I don't have.

Y'LAN

As I explained to you before, the word "send" is inaccurate when it comes to the sharing of--

DOJAR

Not that argument again, please. I would feel better if we vocalized our thoughts for a while, got them out into the open. Is that all right with you?

Beat pause.

Y'LAN

As you wish.

DOJAR

Thank you. Now what are you trying to say?

Y'LAN

Unfortunately, it is difficult to communicate even verbally, as I myself lack a frame of reference for what I am undergoing.

DOJAR

So you're having a unique experience. Can you describe it?

Y'LAN

Perhaps... but only by making use of a humanoid frame of reference.

Dojar raises his eyebrows, his interest piqued.

DOJAR

Well, there's something we don't hear often. You almost never admit to needing humanoids, or humanoid things, for anything at all.

Y'LAN

I remind you that this is entirely for your benefit; you asked about it.

DOJAR

All right, all right. So in humanoid terms, then, what are you going through?

Y'lan looks away for a moment, and appears to think. Then he looks back at Dojar.

Y'LAN

A crisis of faith.

On Dojar's surprised reaction, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Seated in the command chair is TALORA, studying a console readout on her armrest. She stands as the turbolift doors open and Cross and Quinlan, still in their dress uniforms, enter. Quinlan walks to her station as Cross walks up to Talora.

CROSS

Report.

TALORA

We just received a priority two distress call, bearing 147 mark 12.

CROSS

Source?

TALORA

A Bolian passenger ship. The signal is automated; I can't get any specifics. There are no hostile vessels in the area, however.

CROSS

Let's check it out. Helm, set a course to intercept the freighter. Cross to Engine Room. Have you finished the slipstream emission calibrations yet, Miss Boyle?

BOYLE'S COMM VOICE

Sorry, Captain, not for another hour. You have warp speed, though, whenever you want it.

CROSS

Right now will do nicely, thank you. Cross out. Helm, what's our ETA at warp eight?

OFFICER AT HELM

Nine minutes, ten seconds.

CROSS

Warp eight, then. Engage.

He sits down in his chair, Talora sitting next to him, as the sound of the warp engines engaging can be heard.

TALORA

How was the wedding, Captain?

CROSS

Splendid. It was exactly as I pictured my first time officiating at a wedding would be -- full of joy, tears, hugs and kisses, celebration, even some rice, courtesy of Mr. Cale. It was certainly a welcome boost for morale.

QUINLAN

We missed most of the reception, though. I didn't get to eat any cake.

CROSS

And I didn't get to dance with the bride. Oh well. Hopefully this distress signal won't turn out to be very serious, so that we can give Ensign Stolt a decent honeymoon.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- Y'LAN'S LAB

Dojar and Y'lan are as before.

DOJAR

So let me get this straight. The religion, so to speak, of the Q'tami is that you are destined to become gods?

Y'LAN

"Destined" is not the correct term for it; it implies that forces other than natural are at work in promoting our ascendancy. The Q'tami will not become gods because matters have been thus arranged. We see it as an inevitable historical, or rather, psychohistorical outcome.

DOJAR

Okay, so you are... I mean, you will inevitably become gods.

Y'LAN

"Gods" is also an imprecise term to describe the state of events. As you know, the Q'tami concept of personal identity is very fluid. Let us say that the Q'tami race will become godlike.

DOJAR

Whatever. And so it follows from that whatever the Q'tami says is right is right, and whatever the Q'tami says is moral is moral, and that applies to now as well as the future, because a race that can lay claim to deity can justifiably do so in all times?

Y'LAN

That is an accurate enough description. It would be more accurate to ascribe identity where you now see a simple connection; for Q'tami, the right way is synonymous with the Q'tami way; we do not recognize a difference in meaning.

DOJAR

And so I should just get down on my knees and worship you now.

Y'LAN

No. We do not call for your worship of our species. We do expect, however, that all sentient beings will do what is right and moral, and will be what they should be.

DOJAR

As determined by the Q'tami.

Y'LAN

Yes.

DOJAR

(blinking)

Whoa. That must be a nice faith to have.

Y'LAN

As I tried to explain earlier, "faith" is not correct. We see it as a certainty, a simple fact.

DOJAR

"A crisis of faith." Your words, not mine.

Y'LAN

It is a simple matter to extrapolate from the past and present state of affairs. The ascendancy of Q'tami to godhood is, as I have stated, inevitable.

DOJAR

Given certain axioms and assumptions,
of course.

Y'LAN

Of course.

DOJAR

So what's the problem?

Y'LAN

The problem is what the humans call
cognitive dissonance. I have been
observing that humanoids act in ways
which they consider right and moral,
but which the Q'tami would consider
wrong and immoral.

DOJAR

Well, that should be resolved easily
enough. Humanoids aren't future
gods, so they're the ones who are
wrong.

Y'lan stands and begins to slowly pace around the room.

Y'LAN

I fear that matters are no longer so
simple for me.

DOJAR

You have doubts about the Q'tami
ascendency?

Y'LAN

No; the inevitability of our
ascendency is based on axioms and
assumptions which I see no reason to
call into serious question as of
now. However, I am wondering if the
morality of the Q'tami standard
necessarily follows from that. To
put it another way, I am wondering
if the right way may mean something
other than the Q'tami way.

DOJAR

In other words, it's possible that
the Q'tami sense of morality is
flawed, at least in places.

Y'lan stops pacing. He is quiet for a long moment.

Y'LAN

As far as the Hegemony is concerned,
admitting even the possibility of
(MORE)

Y'LAN (CONT'D)

that is heretical; it is even indicative of what you would consider a severe mental disorder. And yet...

DOJAR

And yet, you admit that it is possible.

Another long pause.

Y'LAN

It is possible.

(beat)

The Hegemony would no doubt associate these thoughts with the time I have spent aboard the Enterprise, observing and working with humanoids. They would take as further justification the fact that I did not very seriously entertain these thoughts until my link to the Hegemony was severed.

DOJAR

But?

Y'LAN

But these thoughts had begun to manifest even before the link was severed. You must understand, Dojar, that making these admissions to you is tantamount to admitting that I am demonic, supremely malevolent, in most humanoid religions. In fact, even admitting that the belief system I have outlined is a religion is contrary to the Q'tami way -- we see it, not as a religion, but simply as our relationship to the universe.

DOJAR

Are you sure the Q'tami aren't simply trying to avoid the negative connotations of the word "religion?"

Beat.

Y'LAN

Of course not. The Q'tami consider--

There is a loud POP sound, as of an electrical circuit shorting, and all of the complex machines in the room deactivate at once. The room is silent. Dojar and Y'lan stare at the dead equipment for a time, then look at each other.

DOJAR

That was random.

Y'LAN

Indeed. My equipment contains a number of safeguards to prevent such an occurrence as this; there has never been such a catastrophic breakdown of my equipment before.

DOJAR

Maybe it's a sign that you really are demonic.

Y'lan looks at him.

DOJAR (CONT'D)

Never mind. Let's check the equipment out.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Cross and Talora are standing now, looking at the main viewscreen.

Displayed on it is a Bolian passenger ship, adrift in space. There are no lights glowing, and in a few places gas can be seen venting into space. Cross and Talora look at one another.

CROSS

Sensors?

QUINLAN

All systems on the ship have been deactivated; life support itself is operational in only a couple of compartments. But Captain... I'm not reading any actual damage to the hull.

TALORA

Then it couldn't have been a firefight.

CROSS

Life signs?

QUINLAN

Yes, sir. Fourteen, humanoid, all inside the pressurized compartments.

CROSS

Perhaps a communicator is working. Hail them, Lieutenant.

Quinlan taps buttons.

QUINLAN

We're receiving a signal, Captain.
Audio only.

CROSS

On speakers.

There is a crackling of static, then a voice comes on -- we recognize it as the same voice that was heard in the teaser.

BARUUKA'S COMM VOICE

Hello, can you hear me? This is Baruuka-bey of the Xapori, aboard the Bolian vessel Kesok. Please respond.

CROSS

This is Captain Neil Cross of the Federation starship Enterprise. What is your condition?

BARUUKA'S COMM VOICE

Praise the Transcendent! Bless you for finding us, my friend. There are fourteen of us, stranded inside two of the crew quarters. We think we may have no more than a few hours of life support remaining; most of our fuel has been purged, and most of our air with it.

CROSS

Do any of you require medical assistance?

BARUUKA'S COMM VOICE

There are a few injuries, but nothing serious.

CROSS

Stand by, sir. We'll get you out of there momentarily.

(to Quinlan)

Lieutenant, lock on to the survivors and beam them directly to Sickbay. We won't take any chances.

QUINLAN

Aye, sir.

CROSS

Talora, once we've talked to this Baruuka-bey, I'd like you to break out the environment suits and lead

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

an away team over to the Kesok. Try to find out what happened. This is a peculiar situation, and I'd appreciate some answers.

TALORA

Understood, sir.

QUINLAN

Transport complete, Captain. We got all fourteen of them, no problems.

CROSS

Excellent. You have the Bridge, Lieutenant. I'll be in Sickbay.

He turns to leave the Bridge, Talora following close behind.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- SICKBAY

The Sickbay is crowded with doctors, nurses, and Xapori survivors. The Xapori are humanoid beings who all wear long white robes and small amulet pouches around their necks. They appear a bit shaken up, but are otherwise in good spirits, and chat lively with the medical personnel.

One Xapori, sitting on a biobed with a woman and a girl of about ten years, looks up as Cross enters the Sickbay. A broad smile appearing on his face, he stands and moves to shake the Captain's hand. We recognize him by his voice as BARUUKA.

BARUUKA

Captain Cross, I would presume!
Such a pleasure to meet you in person.

He acts as though greeting an old friend. Cross, a bit surprised but pleased, shakes the Xapori's hand.

CROSS

Mister Baruuka-bey. It was my pleasure to be of service.

BARUUKA

For which you have my undying attitude -- and, I have no doubt, the blessings of the Transcendent.

CROSS

Ah... Thank you.

Baruuka indicates the woman and girl who were sitting with him. They step forward to greet the Captain.

BARUUKA

May I present my wife, Ankhe-bey,
and my daughter, Lusa-bey.

Cross shakes ANKHE's hand, then LUSA's. Lusa looks at Cross shyly, then turns her attention to all the equipment in Sickbay.

CROSS

I trust you are all in good condition?

ELRIS

They're all fine, Captain. The worst injury was a broken arm which I've had to reset -- it should be good as new in a couple hours.

ANKHE

That would be Elora-bey. Poor dear, she tripped and fell on a bulkhead as we were racing toward an emergency shelter. Fallor-bey tried his best to repair the arm, but without a medkit...

CROSS

I understand.

BARUUKA

And then there's Tanee-bey in the corner. She and Yornala-bey were--

CROSS

One moment. Are all of these people members of the Bey family?

Baruuka blinks, and looks confused for an instant. Then, understanding fills his face, and he laughs loudly.

BARUUKA

Oh no, my dear Captain! You misunderstand. That is something each person has voluntarily added to their names. One might say that we are all members of a family, but it is a family of spirit rather than blood.

ELRIS

I've read a bit about the Xapori religion, the Order of the Transcendent. The -bey suffix denotes those who have formally joined the order.

BARUUKA

Precisely.

CROSS

(somewhat blankly)

Fascinating. You must tell me more sometime. In the meantime, let me express my condolences for the loss of your kinsmen. I have a crew over on the Kesok now, investigating what happened, and I assure you we will get to the bottom of this.

BARUUKA

Captain, I'm afraid I can tell you what happened in one word: sin.

Beat pause.

CROSS

Sin?

ANKHE

Or, if you prefer, insanity -- to us, the words are synonymous. We believe that any sane person follows the Path of the Transcendent, whether they are aware of it or not. In the case of the Second Officer aboard the Kesok, however, the Path was nowhere to be found.

CROSS

What happened?

BARUUKA

The man lost his mind. We should have seen it coming but... Well, two days ago, he suddenly took control of the Bridge, and disabled as many systems as he could. Propulsion, communications, he even took out life support in most of the ship. Some of us made it to Engineering and the emergency shelters in time. Many did not.

CROSS

And then?

BARUUKA

And then he tried to make his way to Engineering, to finish the job and completely destroy the vessel.

ANKHE

He had a phaser with him. He started... shooting people, whoever he saw.

(MORE)

ANKHE (CONT'D)

When he reached Engineering, he tried to deactivate the antimatter containment fields.

BARUUKA

And when we prevented him from doing so, he turned the phaser on himself. Afterwards, we tried to patch things up, and managed to send out an automated distress signal.

Cross lets this sink in for a moment.

CROSS

The second officer... He was Bolian?

BARUUKA

He was.

CROSS

Bolians have sometimes been known to be eccentric, but insane? A serving officer in the Bolian fleet? I have a difficult time believing that.

Baruuka nods somberly.

BARUUKA

As you say, Captain, you have a crew on the Kesok investigating. They will confirm that I am telling the truth.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- TALORA'S OFFICE

Talora is sitting at her desk, typing onto her terminal. Cross stands in front of her.

CROSS

And?

TALORA

And, as far as we can tell, he's telling the truth. Second Officer V'ton himself disabled most of the Kesok's systems from the Bridge. He also activated the air and fuel purge systems.

CROSS

That would explain the venting we saw. It must have made his job faster.

TALORA

We then traced his steps from the Bridge to the Engineering. He killed at least two dozen people on the way, including the Kesok's Captain. His body was in Engineering. We've transported it to the Enterprise for an autopsy, but based on my personal observations of the phaser wound, he probably did commit suicide.

Cross shakes his head and paces slowly in front of Talora.

CROSS

What a tragedy.

Talora leans forward, hesitates, then looks up at Cross.

TALORA

Captain, this may be no more than a gut feeling on my part, but I believe that something isn't right here. Something is very out of place.

CROSS

I'm not surprised you feel that way. There is nothing right about insanity -- by its very nature, it defies rational description. With all our medical advances, we may like to think that our society has evolved past shoving all the undesirables into the broom closet, out of sight and out of mind--

TALORA

But V'ton wasn't out of sight. That's the point, Captain. He was a highly respected officer who showed no signs of mental illness before a few days ago.

CROSS

From what I know of mental illness, it can remain latent for years, even decades, before surfacing.

TALORA

But that's why we have screenings, protocol scans--

CROSS

Talora, this doesn't feel right to be either. A part of me feels that there simply must be a rational explanation for this other than the random destructiveness of one man.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

But did you find anything that would conclusively rule out insanity?

Talora thinks for a moment.

TALORA

No, sir. I think that only Dr. Elris can do that, and we'll have her results in a few hours. As for me, all I have is a gut feeling.

Cross nods, and smiles a little.

CROSS

Personally, I feel safer knowing that you have those gut feelings of yours. Don't ever let go of them. But don't ever forget to take them with a grain of salt, either. Sometimes things really are as they appear.

Talora sighs, leans back in her chair.

TALORA

Understood, sir.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- GUEST QUARTERS

A spacious apartment with a nice view of the heavens through the picture windows. Cross enters, followed by Baruuka, Ankhe and Lusa.

CROSS

I trust that you will be comfortable in these quarters until we reach Starbase 84. Starfleet has already arranged transportation from there to Geshel II.

The Xapori are examining their new surroundings, impressed. Ankhe examines the furnishings while Lusa goes over to the windows and stares out at the stars contemplatively.

BARUUKA

Really, Captain, this is much more than we could have asked for. I only hope you didn't uproot some poor crew member and his family for our sake.

CROSS

Not at all; these are guest quarters we reserve for ambassadors, dignitaries, special guests and the like.

BARUUKA

(chuckling)

Again, Captain, you give us too much credit -- we are but humble servants of the Transcendent.

Beat pause.

CROSS

Of course. Anyway, there are two bedrooms through that door, and over here is your food dispenser. Do you know how to use it?

ANKHE

(with a smile)

After where we've been, Captain, we can use just about any standard replicator in the Quadrant.

She turns to Baruuka and says something in gibberish. Baruuka replies similarly. Ankhe nods and walks over to the food slot. As she quietly gives it instructions, Baruuka looks at Cross's confused look and chuckles again.

BARUUKA

The Xapori language is incompatible with the universal translator.

CROSS

Evidently. And right here is a comm panel which you can use to contact myself or another officer if you have any problems. Of course, the Rec Lounge and Gymnasium are at your disposal during your stay. At the moment, we're preparing to get underway again, so unless there's anything else I can do for you...

BARUUKA

Captain, there's something I'd like to do for you.

Before Cross can protest, Baruuka opens the small pouch hanging around his neck and removes an amulet: a small crystal sphere, with a tiny blue gem at its center. The gem sparkles and shimmers in the lights of the room.

BARUUKA ((CONT'D)

This is an Icon, the symbol of our devotion to the Transcendent. All members of the Order keep this on their person at all times. I would like you to have mine.

He places the amulet in Cross's hand. Cross looks uncomfortable.

CROSS

Really, I wouldn't feel comfortable accepting a valued possession of yours.

BARUUKA

Oh, no need to worry about that.

He retrieves a large bag from the one suitcase he managed to bring on board with him, and opens it. It is full of amulets, dozens if not hundreds of them. He chooses one, more or less at random, and replaces it in his own pouch.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

When you have been Called, as we have, it helps to be prepared.

CROSS

Evidently.

He looks at the small Icon in his hand, then, with a somewhat resigned look on his face, slips it into his pocket.

CROSS (CONT'D)

I appreciate the gift, Baruuka. And now, if you'll excuse me...

BARUUKA

Of course, of course. You have a ship to run, and we have a meal to prepare. Once more, my thanks for your hospitality.

CROSS

My pleasure.

The two men shake hands. Then, without warning, Baruuka places his hands on Cross's shoulders, leans forward and kisses him on both cheeks.

BARUUKA

Blessings of the Transcendent.

Cross blinks and pauses for a long beat.

CROSS

Thank you.

He nods at Ankhe, then executes a hasty retreat from the room. Baruuka chuckles as Ankhe carries several plates of exotic-looking food to the table.

ANKHE

Really, my husband, there was no need to cause him discomfort. He seems like a good man.

BARUUKA

Of course he's a good man -- I saw it in his eyes. But there's also a great sadness about him. He could benefit from knowing about the presence of the One in his life.

ANKHE

You say that about everyone.

BARUUKA

And I mean it. But the Captain is an exceptional case. At the same time his soul cries out for the healing power of the Transcendent, it also stubbornly rebels against it with all of its might. I suspect he will pose an interesting challenge. I suspect that many of these people will.

ANKHE

I know that look, Baruuka. You're already planning strategy in that head of yours. But may I suggest it at least wait until after dinner.

BARUUKA

(smiling)
Of course, my wife.

Ankhe finishes setting the table for their meal. Baruuka and Ankhe sit down opposite each other.

ANKHE

Dinner, Lusa.

The young girl turns away from the window and joins her parents at the table. Once everyone is seated, Baruuka and Ankhe join hands across the table and begin to chant together in the Xapori language. Lusa watches them, the contemplative look still on her face. We focus in on her expression as we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- CROSS'S READY ROOM

Cross, alone in his ready room, takes the Icon out of his pocket, looks at it curiously for a moment, then sets it down on his desk. He then walks over to the food dispenser.

CROSS

Hot chocolate, touch of mint.

He thinks for a second, then quickly:

CROSS (CONT'D)

Computer, cancel that. I'm feeling a little bit adventurous today. Let's try a hot chocolate, touch of Saurian brandy.

The food slot chirps and hums, then a cup of hot chocolate materializes. He takes it over to his desk and sits down. Behind him, through the window, we can see that the Enterprise is at warp. Cross picks up a padd and begins to read it. As he is about to sip the hot chocolate, the door chimes. He puts the cup down.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Come in.

Grey enters the room. He holds up a padd of his own.

GREY

My report on the slipstream emission calibrations, Captain.

CROSS

Bottom line?

GREY

The slipstream initiator has accumulated more baryon particles than we calculated -- I didn't think we'd reach these levels for another three or four years. I guess SCE's calculations were off.

CROSS

So the initiator needs a baryon sweep?

GREY

Yes, sir. Until then, I don't feel safe going into slipstream.

(MORE)

GREY (CONT'D)

The quantum interference with the baryon particles could cause a cascade overload which would destroy both the induction core and the ship. I'm just glad we caught this when we did -- another month of running as we were, and it would have been almost a certainty.

CROSS

Well, we're in luck. Starbase 84 is only eight days away by warp, and they have a miniature array we can use. That should work, yes?

GREY

That would be perfect sir.

CROSS

Right, then. I'll contact the Starbase and make the arrangements.

He pauses a moment, thinking, then sighs.

CROSS (CONT'D)

I suppose you had better contact the Leviathan as well, in case they haven't caught the problem in their own quantum core.

GREY

Understood, sir.

CROSS

Thanks, Erik. Dismissed.

Grey nods, places his padd on Cross's desk, and leaves. Cross turns back to his own padd, and picks up the cup of chocolate to sip again. Before he can, the door chimes. Cross groans, sets down the cup.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Come in.

The door opens, and Quinlan enters, holding a padd of her own. She sets it on the desk next to Grey's.

QUINLAN

Security roster assignments for the next week, sir.

CROSS

Very well. Thank you, Jen.

She looks down at the Icon sitting on Cross's desk. Her eyes light up.

QUINLAN

That's a beautiful ornament, sir. I haven't seen it before.

Cross glances at the Icon, disinterested, then turns back to his padd.

CROSS

The leader of the Xapori gave it to me. A thank-you gift. It's an Icon, a symbol of their faith.

Quinlan picks up the small crystal sphere and examines it reflectively for a long moment.

QUINLAN

Do you know much about the Xapori religion, Captain?

CROSS

Not a lot.

QUINLAN

Lea was trying to tell me about it earlier, but she was too busy to go into detail. Their god, what do they call it? The Transcendent? I suppose it's like the boundaries of the crystal transcends the little blue gem and contains it within.

Cross grunts, disinterested.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, I get it. The sphere is the whole, and the little gem is us, a part of the whole. But the central part -- is that just because the Transcendent loves conscious beings?
(beat)

Or maybe I've got it wrong. Maybe the sphere is supposed to represent each one of us. The inner gem is our soul, or maybe -- what did they call it? -- the Divine Spark within each of us. But the shell containing it is transparent, baring our souls to... the Transcendent? Each other, maybe? Or maybe it's a combination of the two: our souls contained within the Transcendent, resulting in a thing of beauty, a whole out of...

She trails off, looking at Cross. The Captain is looking at her, jaw half-agape. She laughs a little, embarrassed, and sets the Icon back down on the desk.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, sir. I didn't mean to wax philosophical like that. Just one of those days, I guess.

CROSS

Was there anything else you wanted, Lieutenant?

QUINLAN

No. Thank you, Captain, I... I'll just leave now.

CROSS

Good idea.

Quinlan leaves quickly. Cross looks after her for a moment, then turns back to his own padd. He reaches for his cup of chocolate. The door chimes.

CROSS (CONT'D)

What is it!?

The door opens, admitting Y'lan.

Y'LAN

Is this a bad time, Captain?

Cross sighs and puts down the cup.

CROSS

It's all right. What can I do for you, Y'lan?

Y'LAN

My lab equipment suffered a breakdown two hours ago.

CROSS

(frowning)

What kind of breakdown?

Y'LAN

Complete.

CROSS

Can you be more specific?

Y'LAN

No.

Beat.

CROSS

I can't tell you how much I enjoy these little talks of ours.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

Could you elaborate on what the hell you're talking about?

Y'LAN

Certainly. At 1552 hours today, every piece of equipment that I had constructed in my laboratory ceased to function. Dojar and I have spent the time since trying to determine a cause for the breakdown. We have been unsuccessful.

CROSS

Hmm. Well, Commander Grey and his merry men are probably going to be bored without the quantum slipstream on-line, so if you ask the Commander nicely I'm sure they'll be able to spare a detachment to help you out.

Y'LAN

That is unlikely to be productive. I have the most knowledge of my equipment of anyone aboard, and I have been unable to diagnose the problem.

CROSS

(shrugging)

Couldn't hurt, could it?

Y'LAN

No. I will do as you suggest, Captain. In the meantime, I have prepared a complete report of the breakdown for your perusal.

Y'lan holds up a padd. Cross rolls his eyes.

CROSS

Toss it on the pile and go on to Engineering.

Y'lan tosses the padd under-tentacle onto the desk, landing it neatly on the other two, and leaves the ready room. Cross shakes his head and taps a button on his panel.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Cross to Bridge.

CALE'S COMM VOICE

Cale here, sir.

CROSS

Short of a life support failure or a Borg attack, I'd like to be undisturbed until further notice. Please see to it.

CALE'S COMM VOICE

Yes, sir. Bridge out.

Cross exhales, leans back in his chair, turns back to his padd, picks up his cup of hot chocolate and sips. Beat pause. Cross makes a face and almost spits out the chocolate.

CROSS

Damn it, Cross, why do you have to be so adventurous?

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise at warp.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- TALORA'S OFFICE

Talora and Grey are sitting opposite a Xapori, FALLOR, interviewing him. They are taking notes on their padds as Fallor speaks.

FALLOR

...and the next thing I remember, I was being dragged out of the Engineering compartment and into a nearby crew quarters. That's where we stayed until you came and rescued us.

TALORA

Fallor, I'd like to go back to where the trouble began. You say there was a security alert that V'ton had starting shooting people on the Bridge?

FALLOR

Yes... but actually, the trouble began before that. V'ton had started to act erratically.

TALORA

In what way?

Fallor considers.

FALLOR

It's hard to explain. But he was acting belligerently, picking arguments with both crew and passengers, sometimes shouting. We never really thought he would become violent, though.

GREY

How long before the violence began did V'ton start acting strangely?

FALLOR

Oh, at least four or five days.

Talora and Grey look at one another.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- REC LOUNGE

Talora and Grey sitting at a table, looking reading their padds and talking over drinks. Behind them we can see the usual Enterprise crowd in the Rec Lounge, with a few Xapori mingling among them.

(Screenwriter's Note: this scene, and every scene in this episode which takes place in the Rec Lounge until further notice, will consist of a single, continuous shot; at no time during these scenes will the camera cut away.)

GREY

His statement agrees with the others. None of it really contradicts what we found on the Bolian ship.

TALORA

I agree.

Pause, as Grey regards Talora thoughtfully.

GREY

But you aren't satisfied.

TALORA

I am not.

GREY

Why?

Talora leans back, a contemplative look on her face. She is quiet for a long moment.

TALORA

Honestly, I don't know. It's purely instinct, or intuition.

(MORE)

TALORA (CONT'D)

I have no factual or evidential basis for suspecting foul play, and I realize we must therefore accept the evidence we have on hand. But my mind -- my very spirit -- rebels against the idea. I have no idea why.

Beat pause.

GREY

I can hazard a guess.

Talora looks at him, eyebrow raised.

TALORA

Oh?

GREY

It's the same reason why I don't want to believe it's true either. A respected officer goes insane and -- what's worse -- betrays the trust of his passengers and colleagues. I know that for a Starfleet crew, accepting that would be accepting the unthinkable.

TALORA

As is the case with any Romulan crew. Perhaps you're right.

Beat pause.

GREY

But?

TALORA

But I find it odd that this happening should coincide with the ship carrying a number of religious zealots from a race we know comparatively little about.

Grey sighs and drinks from the cup in front of him.

GREY

First of all, Commander, they're not zealots. They're devout, but they're by no means the most religious race I've ever seen.

TALORA

(smiling thinly)

Religious evangelists, then, from a race we know comparatively little about.

GREY

Is that a crime? I can tell you it isn't in the Federation; the Fourth Guarantee grants all citizens and visitors complete freedom of religious belief and expression, short only of injury to another's person or property.

TALORA

It seems odd for such a paramount principle to be held in such a secular society.

Now Grey raises his eyebrow.

GREY

We're not all atheists, if that's what you mean.

TALORA

Yet religion is by no means thriving in the Federation. From what I know of your history, the major religions died out in the late twenty-first and early twenty-second centuries.

GREY

There are still scattered sects of Hinduism and Christianity.

TALORA

Small, playing no role in policy making or the shaping of moral ethics. And yet, freedom of religion remains a prime principle of the Federation.

GREY

I can't explain it either, but it seems like a good idea. Almost an extension of the Prime Directive: do not interfere in the natural evolution of a religion, since that is a large part of many cultures. Including most Earth cultures up until a few centuries ago. Imagine if the Vulcans had come along and stamped out Christianity in its formative years.

(MORE)

GREY (CONT'D)

The Federation would probably not even exist today, in its current form, and the shape of the entire Galaxy would have been changed.

Talora thinks a moment.

TALORA

I see your point. But if preserving the sanctity of religion is so important, why did it all but die out on Earth?

GREY

I honestly don't know. I suppose First Contact may have had something to do with it -- the "logic" of the Vulcans made us realize that we didn't really need God anymore.

TALORA

You sound regretful. Do you believe in a deity?

Grey shrugs.

GREY

Not really. I suppose I believe in Something, with a capital S, but that doesn't make me a theist.

Talora nods. A silence, which draws out for a long moment, then they look at each other.

GREY (CONT'D)

What were we talking about?

TALORA

(raising an eyebrow)
We seem to have been sidetracked.

GREY

Ugh. Back to work.

They pick up their padds and start reading them again.

TALORA

The Kesok has been sealed, and alert beacons placed, correct?

GREY

Right. The Bolian government will be out to collect it in a few days. I've spoken to--

Quinlan suddenly appears at the table, smiling brightly. Her hand is clenched around something we can't see.

QUINLAN

Commander. Erik, do you want to have a drink with me? I have something I want to show you.

GREY

(smiling)

Maybe later, Jen. We have some work to finish up here first.

QUINLAN

Okay, well, find me when you're done.

She nods at both of them, then walks away from the table. We follow her as she reaches the bar, and takes a stool next to where Elris and Toran are huddled together, having a drink. They look at her.

ELRIS

Hey, Jen. Did you enjoy the wedding?

QUINLAN

Oh, it was beautiful! I only wish the Xapori were here to see it; Ankhe told me about their wedding ceremony, and it puts our Starfleet ceremony to shame. No offense to the Captain.

She turns to a bartender and quietly places a drink order as Toran nods.

TORAN

I think Captain Cross did a fantastic job of it.

ELRIS

Yeah, and I think he enjoyed it. It finally gave him something positive to do.

QUINLAN

(lowering her voice)

Speaking of the Captain, does he know about you two yet?

Beat pause.

ELRIS

Didn't I tell you? I talked to Neil about it last week.

Quinlan takes her drink from the bartender with one hand and sips, her other hand still clenched around something.

QUINLAN

How did he take it?

Elris and Toran exchange looks.

ELRIS

He wasn't surprised.

QUINLAN

(grinning)

I told you so.

TORAN

I tried to tell her as well. I knew that Captain Cross would understand.

ELRIS

You hoped he would. You didn't know any more than I did.

TORAN

Call it educated wishful thinking.

QUINLAN

Whatever it was, I'm glad it worked out. And I'm very glad that you two are finally together; you deserve each other.

She raises her glass in a toast to them. Toran smiles and takes Elris's hand in his.

TORAN

So are we, believe me.

QUINLAN

So when's your wedding?

Elris and Toran blink, look at each other, and back at Quinlan.

ELRIS

Jen, it's only been a few weeks!

QUINLAN

So? It's never too early to start planning. I remember back in grade school, I had a crush on this one guy who I was so sure I was going to marry, I began planning the wedding right then--

ELRIS

Well we're not in grade school, and Noa and I agreed that we're not going to rush things.

(MORE)

ELRIS (CONT'D)

Let's talk about something else.
Like, what's that in your hand?

Quinlan looks at her clenched fist.

QUINLAN

Oh! I almost forgot about this --
this is actually the reason I came
to see you guys.

She opens her fist, revealing an Icon, identical to the one
Cross received from Baruuka. Elris and Toran ooh and ahh
over it.

TORAN

Is that what the Xapori wear in those
pouches around their necks?

QUINLAN

Yep. It's called an Icon; it's the
central symbol of their faith.

ELRIS

Where did you get that?

QUINLAN

Ankhe gave me one. Isn't it
magnificent?

TORAN

What does it mean?

QUINLAN

That's what I asked Ankhe. She said
there's no one explanation for it;
it means many different things, and
each person and take from it whatever
meaning they wish.

ELRIS

No wonder the Order of the
Transcendent has been so successful
in recent years; they've given
themselves a flexible, universal
appeal.

TORAN

Different people find different things
in it.

QUINLAN

See, but it's really the same thing:
the thing that they need!

TORAN

Which is?

QUINLAN

It's different for each person. But that's what Ankhe told me: the Transcendent appeals to people on an individual basis because the Transcendent is the embodiment of everything that people need or want in this universe.

ELRIS

Among other things, of course.

QUINLAN

Of course.

ELRIS

Jen, you're starting to sound like an apologist for the Order.

Quinlan blinks, surprised, then shakes her head.

QUINLAN

No no no, not at all. I'm just saying that the Order does have theological merits. That is, if you're into that kind of thing--

ELRIS

(smiling)

Relax, Jen, I'm riding you. If you're enthusiastic about this, then that's fine with me. Heck, I might even learn more about it myself.

TORAN

(eyebrows raised)

Funny. I know that you're not religious, Lea, and I wouldn't have figured you as the religious type either, Jen.

Quinlan and Elris look at him, then at each other.

QUINLAN

We're not.

ELRIS

Not at all.

QUINLAN

Nope.

ELRIS

We just see this as an interesting...

QUINLAN

Um, intellectual...

ELRIS

Exercise.

QUINLAN

Yeah.

Now it's Toran's turn to smile.

TORAN

It's okay, I think I understand. So out of curiosity, what else did Ankhe tell you about this religion?

QUINLAN

Well, she said that the Transcendent goes beyond what we would normally think of as a deity; it's actually more like...

Her voice trails off we move away from them, looking around the Rec Lounge. We spot Ankhe and Fallor talking to a few Starfleet crewmen, although we are not close enough to hear the dialogue.

We then pan over and head toward the large windows, where Y'lan is standing by himself, looking out at the stars. He is alone, silent, looking almost brooding. We watch for a moment in solitude, until Baruuka comes up and stands next to him, looking out the window himself. Y'lan does not turn his head. Baruuka is smiling a little as he looks out the window.

BARUUKA

"When I consider the heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have ordained; what is a man, that You are mindful of him?"

Y'lan turns to look at him.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry -- I didn't mean to startle you.

Y'LAN

You did not. Was that poetry?

BARUUKA

It was actually a verse from an ancient Earth religious text -- the Qur'an, I think. I've had the opportunity to study some of them in my time aboard the Enterprise.

Y'LAN

I see.

There is a moment of silence as they both gaze out the windows.

BARUUKA

It seems that we're both a long way from home.

Y'LAN

That is not so. Insofar as I can be said to have a home, the Enterprise is it.

BARUUKA

I see. But surely there are times when you must miss your own kind.

Beat pause.

Y'LAN

The situation is complicated.

BARUUKA

I understand.

Another moment of silence.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

You don't speak very much, do you?

Y'lan looks at him again.

Y'LAN

My unwillingness to take initiative in conversation with you is not indicative of my speaking habits, but of my desire to be undisturbed at present.

BARUUKA

Ah... Well, perhaps you wish to be left alone. Or, if I may so venture, perhaps you are too alone.

Y'LAN

I repeat that the situation is complicated -- and, with respect, not something I wish to discuss.

BARUUKA

You know what my uncle once told me? The people who ask for another's opinion and advice are the people who don't really need it... and vice versa.

Y'LAN

I cannot account for the veracity of what your uncle told you. I can account only for myself.

Y'lan moves a little ways away. Baruuka, undaunted, follows him.

BARUUKA

I've been doing this for a long time, my friend, and it's obvious to me that you need the Transcendent in your life.

Y'lan wheels to look at him, eyes almost glaring, although his voice remains even.

Y'LAN

By "this," I assume you mean religious evangelism. It would not be in your best interest to meet someone whom you did not consider an ideal target.

BARUUKA

(laughing dryly)

You make it sound like witnessing to the blessings of the One is actually a war!

Y'LAN

The goal of your evangelism is to gain converts, is it not? Even at the expense of other religions?

Baruuka blinks.

BARUUKA

My friend, it is no crime to share the good news of the Transcendent to all who would hear.

Y'LAN

It might be considered ethically dubious to spread a falsehood.

Baruuka reacts as though kicked in the stomach. He looks at Y'lan wide-eyed, as Y'lan returns his gaze evenly.

BARUUKA

Oh my... I knew of course that there are those who disbelieve in the One, but outspoken atheism is by no means the norm in the Federation. You are a unique creature, Mr. Y'lan.

Y'LAN

In that statement you mischaracterize me in two different ways; I am not a "mister," and I am not a professed atheist.

BARUUKA

If you're not an atheist, then what are you?

Y'LAN

I am a Q'tami, who knows that the theology of the Transcendent is incorrect.

BARUUKA

(scoffing)

You make it sound so simple.

Y'LAN

It is so simple.

BARUUKA

It can't be. Look out there!

He indicates the manifold of stars beyond the Rec Lounge windows, passing by as the Enterprise travels through warp.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

Can you honestly look at the universe, with all of its order, and complexity, and majesty, and tell me that a Creator such as the Transcendent does not exist?

Y'LAN

Yes.

Baruuka is taken aback once more. He regains his footing quickly, however.

BARUUKA

Very well; kindly explain the origin of the universe absent a Creator.

Y'lan looks from Baruuka to the window, and back to Baruuka.

Y'LAN

I can give you only one honest answer: I don't know. Neither my science nor my theology provides an adequate explanation.

BARUUKA

Then how is it irrational to believe in the One who creates and sustains all of us?

Y'LAN

Because of the methodological principle known as parsimony.

BARUUKA

Parsimony?

Y'LAN

Among humans, it is better known as Occam's Razor. One way of stating it is that, all things being equal, the simplest explanation is most likely to be correct, where simplicity is defined in terms of the number of entities and factors involved. Now, if the existence of the Universe must be explained, how is that done? If we say that it is explained by the existence of a "Creator," then we posit a being who is necessarily much more complex and, to use your term, "majestic" than the Universe itself. We therefore do not solve the original problem; we more than double it. We also initiate an infinite regress, an ultimate violation of parsimony. Therefore, while the existence of a Creator may not be logically disprovable, to posit its existence is unnecessary and irrational.

He turns back to the window. There is a pause as Baruuka digests all this. Then, slowly, he chuckles.

BARUUKA

My mentor at the Seminary would have loved to converse with you. He always complained that my mind wasn't as philosophical as he would have liked. But I believe I see your problem.

Y'LAN

Oh?

BARUUKA

You believe that it's all about logic.

Y'lan turns back to look at Baruuka.

Y'LAN

I do not know how to respond to such an ambiguous statement.

BARUUKA

Let me clarify, then.

(MORE)

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

You believe that logic is the last word in your thinking and feeling processes.

Y'LAN

It is, in the sense that nothing that defies the laws of logic can exist.

BARUUKA

Ah, but you said it yourself: the Transcendent is not logically disprovable!

Y'LAN

I said it may not be.

Baruuka takes a step closer to the Q'tami.

BARUUKA

What if it isn't? What if, in spite of all you just said, the Transcendent is a live possibility? And what if, once you've reached your mortal limit and taken the transcending journey yourself, you discover that you were wrong? Where would that leave you?

Y'lan looks at the Xapori a moment longer, then turns back to the window.

Y'LAN

It would leave me in a state of being incorrect. That is all. I do not fear what theists call Judgment, since a just deity would not punish me for using my reason honestly, whereas an unjust deity might punish you simply out of capriciousness.

BARUUKA

Oh, come, come! Do you think I am so petty that I must appeal to the prospect of reward and punishment? Our theology does not work like that. We believe that everyone will become one with the Transcendent, whether they like it or not. What I am talking about is you, friend Y'lan.

Y'LAN

I would not have you consider me a friend.

BARUUKA

That's your problem. I come to you in friendship, offering the greatest message a mortal can ever hear, and yet you will not listen! The problem is not that your mind rejects the One; the problem is that your heart is reluctant. This is the paradox of the mortal condition: even as we ache for something outside of ourselves, something greater that we can look up to and take comfort from as we suffer the pains and indignities of being alive, we reject the One who is standing outside the doorway to our souls. We all yearn for the Transcendent. Even you, Y'lan, though you may protest all you wish. You have the same desire as we all have: the desire to be bathed in the spirit of the One to be embraced in a love beyond words, beyond form. The desire to belong to the greatness that lies beyond the materialistic plane, and to never again be alone, in any sense of the word. I know you have it, because I have it too. Everyone has it. The question is not whether you have it; the question is what you will do about it. I wish only to help you answer that question.

Y'lan looks out the window, saying nothing. The silence stretches out for what seems like forever. Finally, Y'lan speaks slowly.

Y'LAN

I see no need to address your argument, as its central premise, that all mortals desire your theology, is unverifiable.

BARUUKA

(quietly)

Nonetheless, it is true. It is also true that the deepest part of your being, a part you probably don't admit exists, even to yourself, has already accepted this truth. When the rest of you catches up... then you know where to find me.

He stands there a moment longer, looking at Y'lan with a serene, knowing look. Then he turns away and walks back toward the crowd. We remain focused on Y'lan as he stands at the window, looking at the stars, unmoving. His eyes are unreadable.

He says nothing, and his gaze remains fixed on the heavens.

Behind him, we focus on where Baruuka has joined Ankhe and Fallor. They have gathered a rather sizable crowd around them, and are taking turns addressing them; their words are indistinct, but we can guess the substance of what they are saying.

The crowd listens to the Xapori, their faces intent, occasionally nodding.

On this sight, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- CORRIDOR

Cross is walking down the corridor, passing an occasional crewman, nodding his greetings as he goes. A frown is slowly developing on his face.

AS WE PAN AROUND TO SEE HIS POV, we see why: several of the crewmen he passes are wearing Icon pouches.

He looks at them curiously. None of the pouch-laden crewmen seem otherwise any different; a couple of them notice Cross's odd look, and look nervous themselves before scurrying away quickly. Cross shakes his head slightly and wears a what-the-hell-is-all-this-about? Expression.

Just ahead of Cross, Ensign Nat Stolt and Chief Michelle Kaplan come around a corner and nearly collide with Cross, stopping themselves just in time. They are both wearing uniforms, and Icon pouches.

STOLT

Whoa! Excuse us, Captain.

CROSS

Quite all right, Ensign, Chief.
Say, I'm surprised to see the two of you here. I thought you had another two days of leave.

KAPLAN

Yes sir, we do. We simply like to, er, come up for air every now and then.

CROSS

I understand.

He casts his eye deliberately down on the pouch that they are wearing. Stolt looks down at the pouches himself, and laughs, a little embarrassedly.

STOLT

Michelle's idea, sir. I mean, we both decided to wear them while our Xapori guests are on the Enterprise.

KAPLAN

Yes, sir, I thought it would make them feel welcome, especially after what happened to their ship. You know, sir, diplomacy and all that.

Cross nods slowly.

CROSS

I see. Quite thoughtful of you two.

KAPLAN

Yes, sir. We were trying to be.

Beat pause.

CROSS

Well, carry on, folks. Your honeymoon isn't getting any longer.

STOLT

No, sir. Thank you, Captain.

They nod respectfully and walk away. Cross watches them go, then shakes his a little, a slight smile on his face, and continues along the corridor.

CROSS

(to himself)

Being nice to our visitors, that's all it is. You did something right, Cross, because our crew is getting into the spirit of diplomacy. See? Nothing to worry about.

He stops at a turbolift and waits. A moment later, the doors open, and a female crewman steps out, wearing an Icon pouch. She smiles dazzlingly at Cross.

CREWMAN

Blessings of the One, Captain.

CROSS

(nodding)

Ensign Taylor.

She walks away. Cross steps into the turbolift, and heaves a sigh, making a face.

CROSS (CONT'D)

You were saying, Cross?

The doors close.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Cross exits the turbolift to find Quinlan and Cale at their stations. As they both turn around to nod at him, Cross sees that they are both wearing icon pouches. Cross's eyes widen. His lips clench. He marches up to Quinlan.

CROSS

Lieutenant!

Quinlan flinches.

QUINLAN

Uh... Yes, Captain?

CROSS

Kindly explain the violation of dress code hanging around your neck.

She looks down at the Icon pouch and back at Cross, who continues to glare at her.

QUINLAN

Sir, I thought... That is, I was under the impression that the Starfleet dress code recently made exceptions for religious ornaments, such as Bajoran earrings and the like.

CROSS

Only insofar as the crew member who wishes to wear the ornament is a practicing member of the religion which it represents. Are you a practicing member of the Order of the Transcendnet, Lieutenant?

Beat pause.

QUINLAN

No, sir. Not formally, that is. I mean, I agree with a lot of their--

CROSS

The pouch comes off, Quinlan. Now.

Quinlan looks at her feet, downcast, and pauses a moment before nodding.

QUINLAN

Understood, sir.

She reaches up and takes off the pouch. Cross directs his glare down at Cale.

CROSS

And you, Mr. Cale? What's your excuse?

Cale stands up, and comes to attention facing Cross.

CALE

Captain, I must report that I have officially logged my intention to formally join the Order of the Transcendent.

CROSS

You what!?

CALE

I am to be formally initiated in the Order tomorrow.

Cross walks down and stands in front of Cale, whose face remains even and defiant.

CROSS

Please, Lieutenant, tell me this is a practical joke.

CALE

No, sir.

Beat pause.

CROSS

You're serious.

CALE

Yes, sir. May I ask why the Captain objects? It is not the norm for a starship crewman to be a practicing religionist, but Starfleet recognizes that the Fourth Guarantee--

CROSS

The Captain does not object!
(beat)
The Captain is just surprised.

CALE

May I ask why?

Cross hesitates.

CROSS

Brian Cale-bey. It doesn't really suit you.

Cale finally manages a smile.

CALE

I agree, sir. Happily, the naming is a voluntary part of the initiation. I will not be taking the -bey suffix.

CROSS

(dryly)
Well, then, I'm relieved. As you were.

He stomps off. We follow him into...

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- CROSS'S READY ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The door close behind him. Cross's face is a mixture of frustration and disgust as he paces in front of his desk.

CROSS

My ship is turning into a bunch of lunatics! Why? Why?

He clutches his forehead as he paces, trying to think. After a moment of this he stops, exhales, and looks off at nothing.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Okay, stay calm and think about this. They're being influenced by the Xapori, they have to be. How?
(beat)
The Xapori came on board, and brought with them...

He trails off, then looks down at his desk. We zoom in on the Icon that is sitting there. Cross picks it up and quickly walks to the door.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- SICKBAY

Cross and Elris are standing at one of the medical workstations, Elris scanning the Icon with a medical tricorder.

CROSS

What I'd like to do is order all those pouches taken off and thrown out the airlock. The trouble is, Cale's right -- both the Xapori and the crewmen are protected under the Federation Bill of Rights. So without some proof that something is causing this, my hands are tied.

ELRIS

Well, I don't think you'll find any proof here. The sphere is simple crystal, nothing strange about it. No different from any other crystal I've seen. I can give you a precise printout of its molecular structure if you'd like.

CROSS

What about the blue gem?

ELRIS

A proto-sapphire. Easily replicable, just as ordinary. I'm pretty sure that the entire purpose of this Icon is decorative.

CROSS

Doctor, in the last forty-eight hours, this ship has experienced a rash of religious conversions, formal and otherwise, that so far as I know is unprecedented in the history of any Starfleet vessel. I won't be satisfied with the explanation that the Xapori are just very convincing speakers. Is there some way that this thing might be causing it? Might it have some property that your tricorder scans wouldn't pick up?

Elris considers for a moment.

ELRIS

The only thing that comes to mind is if the Icon is a poly-neuron focus. It's a phenomenon we discovered on Bajor II, where certain minerals reacted with brain signatures in such a way that--

CROSS

Spare me the technical details. Would a poly-neuron focus be a possible cause for brainwashing people into this belief of theirs?

ELRIS

It's possible. But even if this is a poly-neuron focus, I can't rule out other possible causes.

CROSS

How can you find out if it is?

ELRIS

This way.

She takes the Icon and leads Cross to another workstation. She prepares a piece of equipment, programs instructions, and sets the Icon underneath it. She turns the machine on.

ELRIS (CONT'D)

The scan will take a couple minutes to complete.

CROSS

Fine.

They stand there, leaning against the workstation, arms folded, sharing silence for a moment. Elris looks at Cross.

ELRIS

How have you been, Neil?

CROSS

(chuckling dryly)

Irritated. Very irritated. It seems like this entire ship has turned into a madhouse since the Xapori have come on board.

ELRIS

That's not what I meant.

Cross looks at her, sees her serious look, hesitates, then shrugs a little.

CROSS

I'm fine. You know, it's... taking some getting used to. But I'm fine.

Elris smiles a little.

ELRIS

I suppose it's hard for you. I can't tell you how much it means to me, to both of us, to have your understanding about this.

CROSS

Of course I understand. He's a good man. You could do much, much worse.

He doesn't sound very convincing. Elris's smile fades away.

ELRIS

You haven't really accepted it, have you?

CROSS

(dryly)

Of course I've accepted it. In fact, I've been thinking about branching out a bit myself. That Ensign Taylor is quite lovely.

ELRIS

Neil...

CROSS

Sorry.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

(beat)

Well, my mind has accepted it if nothing else. You love him, he loves you, not much I can do about it. The facts of life and all that.

Pause.

ELRIS

If it really makes you uncomfortable, Neil, I suppose that Noa and I could apply for--

CROSS

Don't even think about it. Between you and Dr. Toran, I have the best medical staff in Starfleet. There's no way in hell I'm handing you over to some other Captain.

Elris smiles again.

ELRIS

Thank you.

CROSS

Besides, not long ago I helped you face your past. It's only fair that I now help you face your future.

ELRIS

(chuckling)

Well, when you put it like that.

They share silence for another moment. Behind them, the machine continues to hum as it scans the Icon.

ELRIS (CONT'D)

I just don't want you to have any false expectations, Neil. I mean, I honestly don't know if you're still holding out hope for us, but--

CROSS

Lea, the fact is that you're happy with him, and your being happy makes me happy. Whatever I may be feeling for myself is my own burden to bear; it shouldn't have anything to do with your new relationship.

(beat)

Besides, if I was holding out hope for us, then there would be no reason to feel guilty about it. After all, who knows?

They look at each other for a long moment. Before either one can speak, the machine on the workstation beeps. Elris turns and studies the readout.

ELRIS

No detectable poly-neurons in the Icon. It's not a focus. I'm telling you, Neil, this is not what you're looking for.

Cross exhales through clenched teeth.

CROSS

Well I'm looking for something, damn it.

ELRIS

Why not ask Y'lan for help? He has much more advanced equipment.

CROSS

And it's still broken down for who knows what reason. I talked to Dojar a few minutes ago; he's working on it.

(beat)

There must be something...

His commbadge chirps.

TALORA'S COMM VOICE

Talora to Cross.

CROSS

Go ahead, Commander.

TALORA'S COMM VOICE

I need to see you at once, Captain. It's about the Kesok. I've discovered something you need to know.

CROSS

My ready room. I'll be there in a minute.

TALORA'S COMM VOICE

Aye sir.

Cross taps his commbadge off and raises an eyebrow at Elris.

CROSS

Maybe we just found it.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

Cross enters the Bridge, where Talora is waiting in front of his Ready Room, holding a padd, and Quinlan and Grey are talking in hushed tones at one of the Engineering stations.

They are both wearing Icon pouches.

Cross looks at them sharply. They look up at Cross's glare, looking a little bit guilty. No one says anything. Finally, Cross merely grunts in disgust and walks to his Ready Room, motioning for Talora to follow him in.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- CROSS'S READY ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The door closes behind them as they enter.

CROSS

Report.

TALORA

Captain, I downloaded the sensor and crew logs from the Kesok before we got underway. Much of them were scrambled due to the power fluctuations in the memory core, but we have been able to piece together enough of the fragments to get a better picture of what happened.

CROSS

And?

TALORA

And, it turns out that Baruuka was telling the truth. V'ton "sinned."

Cross blinks.

CROSS

Explain.

TALORA

It turns out that most of the people on the Kesok, passengers and crew alike, were active members of the Order of the Transcendent at the time of the accident.

CROSS

I knew it!

He punches his desk, his teeth clenched.

TALORA

Yes, sir, it appears to have been a similar phenomenon to what is now going on aboard the Enterprise. V'ton himself became outspoken about his views on Transcendent theology. It turns out he had a difference of opinion with the others -- the nature of which I haven't been able to determine, but it was something that the Xapori consider heretical.

CROSS

Go on.

TALORA

V'ton did act as the Xapori indicated: killed off the Bridge crew, made his way to Engineering, and attempted to disable the safety systems. What they left out, however, was what happened just before that.

CROSS

What happened?

TALORA

A theological argument in the Mess Hall, from which we've been able to retrieve some dialogue from the interior sensor logs. Again, I emphasize that this is only fragmentary information--

CROSS

Cut to the chase, Talora. What happened?

Talora pauses, looks down at her padd.

TALORA

V'ton declared that he was the only righteous person aboard the Kesok, and that the Transcendent had pronounced a judgment of "guilty" upon all the others.

Cross lets out a long, slow sigh.

CROSS

Those bastards. They come aboard my ship, they spread their poison to my crew--

TALORA

Captain, this doesn't necessarily change anything. V'ton may actually have gone insane, and it simply manifested itself as an abuse of the Xapori faith.

CROSS

Or maybe whatever it was that brainwashed their crew had too strong an effect on him.

TALORA

Captain, we still don't have any proof that "brainwashing" is taking place.

CROSS

Look around you! More than half the crew are wearing those pouches! You think that's an accident?

TALORA

I think it's too early to--

The door chimes.

CROSS

Come in!

The door opens, admitting LEWIS CARTER. He looks uncharacteristically humble, and he is clutching a small box of isolinear chips. Cross groans softly.

CROSS (CONT'D)

This isn't a good time, Carter. Is this earth-shatteringly important?

CARTER

I'm sorry to interrupt, Captain; I won't take up your time. I just wanted to give this to you, and to apologize.

He hands the box to Cross, who looks at it, and back to Carter, confused.

CROSS

Apologize for what? What is this?

CARTER

It's a collection of unauthorized footage I've been gathering of the crew over the last few weeks.

(MORE)

CARTER (CONT'D)

I was planning to make a candid documentary of the social lives of the Enterprise crew, but I neglected to ask your permission first. It was wrong, Captain, and I ask for your forgiveness in the name of the One.

He bows his head, ashamed.

Cross looks at him, then at the box, then at Talora. A long moment passes. Finally, he slams the box down on his desk.

CROSS

That's it!

Carter flinches, preparing himself for the worst. Cross stomps right past him, and out the room. Carter stares at the closed door, puzzled.

CARTER

I don't get it. Isn't he angry with me for what I've done?

TALORA

I wouldn't take it personally.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- REC LOUNGE

Cross enters the Rec Lounge, to find Baruuka presiding over a large gathering. At least a hundred people, Xapori and crewmen, are sitting in arranged seats near the bar, facing Baruuka and hanging on his every word. Most of the crewmen are wearing Icon pouches.

Standing near the windows, well apart from the crowd, is Y'lan. He is silent, watching the proceedings from a distance, his expression unreadable.

BARUUKA

...again, this is part of what I call the mortal condition. Everyone has transgressions; no one is exempt from--

He breaks off, noticing Cross march toward him at the front.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

Captain Cross! This is an unexpected pleasure, my friend. Won't you join us?

Cross reaches the front and, ignoring Baruuka, turns to the assembled crowd.

CROSS

This gathering is over, as of right now. All Starfleet personnel will return to their duty stations or their quarters at once.

Nobody moves. Everyone looks at Cross, or at each other. There are murmurs of surprise. Baruuka laughs a little, confusion on his face.

BARUUKA

Captain! This is a civil gathering, and these good people are here on their own--

Cross whirls on him.

CROSS

As for you, you and all the other Xapori are confined to quarters until we reach Starbase 84. We'll let them decide what to do with you.

The murmurs of surprise and protest grow louder. Baruuka signals for quiet.

BARUUKA

Confined to quarters, you say? On what grounds?

CROSS

On the grounds that you are brainwashing my people! You're altering their minds somehow in order to convert them to your religion!

BARUUKA

I see. What evidence do you have of this?

Baruuka's tone is not confrontational, only curious, and a little concerned. Cross looks at him, and at the crowd, who look back at him expectantly.

CROSS

What's wrong with you people!? Can't you see what's going on? How do you think they've gained so many "converts" in such a short time? Not only here, but on the Kesok as well! How do you explain this?

Nobody looks impressed.

BARUUKA

(calmly)

I, for one, explain it as a spiritual renaissance. People are thirsting, now more than ever, for the healing power of the Transcendent in their lives. I believe that you thirst for it most of all, Captain.

CROSS

Don't try your voodoo magic on me, sir. It may have worked on them, but it doesn't work on me!

BARUUKA

(shaking his head)

One does not need to be a mystic in order to sense a great deal of anger in you, Captain.

CROSS

You're damned right I'm angry!

BARUUKA

I can only imagine what it is like to be a professed atheist.

There is a pause. Quite suddenly, and very subtly, Cross and Baruuka have exchanged positions. Cross is now on the defensive, and Baruuka is calmly challenging.

CROSS

I never said that I was an atheist. In any case, this isn't about me. This is about the people whose minds you are influencing, their free will.

BARUUKA

We would not dream to interfere with free will. That is a virtue that the Transcendent considers paramount.

CROSS

Yeah, right. That's why he needs people like you to brainwash innocents.

BARUUKA

There is no brainwashing. It is only your professed atheism that has made you angry--

CROSS

There you go again! You speak of atheism in such a way that it is undesirable, a taboo, a moral crime.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

They tried that in the early twenty-first century.

BARUUKA

I do not consider atheism to be undesirable, or criminal. I consider it to be nonexistent.

CROSS

Unbelievable. That must be the oldest rhetorical trick in the book: taking a position you don't like, and defining it out of existence.

BARUUKA

You profess atheism because you don't want to acknowledge a higher power. You want to be completely autonomous, with no god to worship but yourself.

CROSS

I profess atheism because your religion is a crock of shit!

Cross stops suddenly, realizing the outburst he has just made. Everyone in the audience is staring at him. Baruuka remains unmoved. Cross gathers himself quickly and continues:

CROSS (CONT'D)

And if you want to practice your religion in your temples, or in the privacy of your own homes, you won't have any problem with me. It's your right as a sentient being. But when you come out and try to force your mysticism upon my crew, upon me--

BARUUKA

Again I must ask: what evidence do you have of this?

CROSS

The Kesok. We discovered what happened there. V'ton went insane because of your conversion power.

BARUUKA

V'ton was never a member of our faith.

CROSS

There you go again! Defining your opponents out of existence!

BARUUKA

I speak the truth.
(MORE)

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

It is one of our central tenets that the Transcendent does not pronounce judgment upon sentient beings; that we should share his presence with others simply because it is in everyone's best interests to have a fulfilled life. V'ton, however, believed that the Transcendent -- and, by proxy, himself -- judged everyone. He was a heretic.

CROSS

I'll bet he was just fine before you came on board.

BARUUKA

Some people do strange things when confronted with the truth. Look at yourself, for instance.

Pause.

CROSS

I'm not going to dignify that with a response. And I'm not going to stand meekly by while you corrupt the crew of the Enterprise. I'm going to contact Starfleet Command and the Federation Council, right now. I'm going to get their permission to put a stop to this.

BARUUKA

This is your right. In the meantime, I assume we are free to continue?

Cross glares at him, his eyes full of something like hatred. Then, without a word, he turns and walks toward the exit. We follow him as Baruuka, his face still impassive as ever, turns back to the assembled crowd.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

As I was saying, everyone, at some point in their life has committed a transgression; no one is exempt. But we are all sinners; we are all equal in the eyes of the Transcendent, whether we are guilty of a little white lie, or of the atrocity of the mass murder of innocents...

Cross hesitates. His step falters. He then resumes walking past the crowd and toward the exit, but a little bit slower. Just a little. Baruuka is now out of our sight, but we still hear his voice.

BARUUKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...we all feel the guilt of our
transgressions. It weighs upon us.
It burdens us with its memory. It
seems that we can never be rid of
it, however far we move on.

Cross's pace slows further. He nears the exit.

BARUUKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It seems that we can never fully
understand our burden. Even when
years have passed, and the person
grows and changes, the burdens of
our transgressions remain with us.
How can you carry this burden? How
can you carry your past with you?

At the back of the crowd, almost at the exit, Cross stops.
Slowly, he turns to look at Baruuka.

BARUUKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
There are the sins that we have
committed, and there are the sins
committed against us. Whether you
have full responsibility, or joint
responsibility, or whether you have
no responsibility -- sometimes it is
hard to tell which is the case --
these sins are a part of our past.
Our past, in the form of our memories
and the world around us we have helped
to create, is always with us. It
burdens us. But there is the
Transcendent, the One to whom
everyone, saint and sinner alike,
can turn to in their time of need.

We slowly zoom in on Cross's intent face as he listens to
Baruuka's voice.

BARUUKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The bad news is that the One cannot
relieve us of this burden. But the
good news -- the best news of all,
in fact -- is that he can help us
carry it. Understand: with the
Transcendent in your life, you are
never alone. The One can be the wind
at your back, if you would only open
your heart. The Transcendent loves
you. You can feel this love, and
this forgiveness, if you want to.
You can find meaning, and guidance
in your life.

(MORE)

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

You can truly make right your wrongs,
and make the Universe new again.
You need only open yourself. Open
your heart...

Extreme close-up of Cross's face as Baruuka's voice fades away into indistinctness. Cross's face remains intent as he stands there, not moving, not blinking. He stands there, at the back of the crowd, and he listens.

He listens.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise, at warp.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- Y'LAN'S LAB

Dojar is fiddling with a scanner-like tool over the dead equipment in the lab as Y'lan enters. Dojar does not look up.

Y'LAN

What did you want me to look at?

DOJAR

This.

He shows the scanner readout to Y'lan.

DOJAR (CONT'D)

A residual energy pattern in the power distribution nodes. It's the closest I've yet to an explanation for the breakdown, but the pattern signature is unlike anything I've ever seen before. Can you make something out of it?

Y'LAN

Yes. It is a field generated by a standing energy wave buildup within the tertiary sub-processors in the distribution nodes. Well done; you have found the cause of the breakdown.

DOJAR

Not exactly; we still don't know what caused the energy buildup in the sub-processors.

Y'LAN

Their design schematic, coupled with the standing wave output, constricts the possible causes to one: omicron waves.

DOJAR

Omicron waves? Are those like omicron particles?

Y'LAN

No, they are completely different phenomena. While omicron particles are caused by certain interactions between matter and antimatter, omicron waves are a form of neural energy generated by every sentient being. In most cases, the effect is so localized that it does not penetrate the cranium; but in rare cases the field is much more intense.

(beat)

I've never known someone's omicron field to encompass a space the size of a starship. Such a person must have profound mental abilities.

DOJAR

You're saying that someone's brain caused your equipment to break down? That someone is willing the malfunction?

Y'LAN

No; omicron waves cannot be directly or indirectly controlled by the being itself. This breakdown is more likely an incidental circumstance of an omicron generator of enormous power coming onto the ship.

Pause.

DOJAR

The Xapori! The omicron generator must be one of them -- your equipment died just as we approached their ship.

Y'LAN

That is the logical conclusion. It may also explain the recent outbreak of religious behavior aboard the Enterprise.

DOJAR

You're saying that the omicron generator is brainwashing the crew?

Y'LAN

I repeat: an omicron generator cannot directly or indirectly control its output. However...

DOJAR

Yes?

Y'LAN

Because of the extremely localized effects of omicron waves, experimentation on the infringement of one wave signature onto another is impractical. I do not know of such an experiment being conducted. I therefore have insufficient information as to the effects of such a phenomenon.

(beat)

Come.

He starts toward the exit.

DOJAR

Where are we going?

Y'LAN

We require access to the ship's computer; my interface does not function.

Y'lan leads Dojar out of the lab.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE

It's fairly quiet on the Bridge; nondescript crewmen -- most wearing Icon pouches -- are manning the stations as Y'lan and Dojar are sitting at two of the Science stations. Y'lan is typing furiously, intent on his screen, while Dojar pokes around. They study for a moment in silence.

DOJAR

Y'lan, look at this. I've pulled up some information about the Xapori -- it's hard to come by, because their race is nomadic and relatively reclusive.

Y'LAN

(not looking away)

What have you discovered?

DOJAR

Their religion, the whole Order of the Transcendent thing? It seems that for most of recorded Xapori history, the religion was defunct. Most Xapori didn't even practice it, and those that did regarded it as simply a cultural folkway, something symbolic and literal rather than an actual faith.

Y'LAN

Interesting. When and how did it become widespread?

DOJAR

Eight years ago, on Tempest IV, which holds the highest concentration of Xapori in the Quadrant. A rejuvenated interest in the Order was kindled, and spread like wildfire in a very short time. It seems this happened under an initially small movement of devotees, spearheaded by -- wait for it!

Y'LAN

Baruuka.

DOJAR

Baruuka!

Y'LAN

That is useful information. I myself have made an informative discovery: the reports of a Romulan scientist who conducted experiments with omicron waves a half century ago. He made startling discoveries about their effects on the human brain.

Dojar looks over at Y'lan's screen, which is filled with technical words, formulae and diagrams. He blinks.

DOJAR

That's all gibberish to me. What does it mean?

Y'LAN

It means we must see the Captain at once. Computer, location of Captain Cross?

COMPUTER (V.O.)

Captain Cross is in his Ready Room.

Y'lan stands and leads Dojar across the bridge to the Ready Room door. The doorbell chirps as they approach.

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Come in, please.

The doors open, and they step into...

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- CROSS'S READY ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Stepping into the room, Y'lan and Dojar see Cross sitting behind his desk, and Talora sitting opposite him in a chair, looking at a padd. They look up as Y'lan and Dojar stare at them.

Cross and Talora are both wearing Icon pouches.

A long pause.

CROSS

Can I help you gentlemen?

Y'LAN

No.

He abruptly turns and leaves. Dojar looks between him and Cross, then shrugs apologetically and follows Y'lan out. The doors close. Cross and Talora look at each other.

TALORA

What was that about?

CROSS

I have no idea; I stopped guessing about his quirks a long time ago. You were saying?

TALORA

I was saying that total repair time to the Slipstream initiator, including removal and re-installation, should not exceed eight hours.

CROSS

That's good news. Oh, I got a message from Admiral Jacobs on Starbase 84. He has invited both of us to dinner when we arrive.

TALORA

Jacobs... Is he the one with the collection of desiccated Ferengi remains?

CROSS

That's the one.

TALORA

(raising an eyebrow)
It should be an interesting dinner.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- Y'LAN'S LAB

Y'lan and Dojar enter once more.

DOJAR

So they were wearing the pouches.
It doesn't mean--

Y'LAN

It changes the circumstances. Captain
Cross will be unlikely to help us in
his current condition. We must act
on our own initiative.

DOJAR

Wonderful. Well, at least we know
that your equipment breakdown and
the crew's odd behavior are connected;
they have a common cause, anyway.
What do we do about it?

Y'LAN

Theoretically, both equipment and
crew should be restored to normal
functioning once the omicron generator
is removed from the Enterprise.

Dojar peers at Y'lan, his expression growing concerned.

DOJAR

Y'lan... You're not talking about
killing one of the Xapori...

Y'LAN

That should not be necessary. We
need only suppress his or her omicron
wave output to a more localized
capacity.

DOJAR

And how do we do that?

Y'lan starts going through his equipment, laying out small tools after testing their functionality or lack thereof.

Y'LAN

We need a device for the task, of
course. The Enterprise would not be
carrying such a device, since omicron
wave generation is an almost unheard-
of phenomenon. We must therefore
construct it ourselves. But we must
hurry.

DOJAR

What's the rush?

Y'LAN

Recall what happened aboard the Kesok. The omicron waves, or a related effect, caused a crew member to go insane. It is possible that a similar event could occur here on the Enterprise.

Dojar leans over the workbench and begins to help Y'lan assemble components.

DOJAR

Well if this is about to become a ship of madmen -- madder men, that is -- let's just hope it hasn't already started.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- REC LOUNGE

The Rec Lounge is one massive argument. Several dozen people are gathered, including most of the Xapori, all wearing Icon pouches, and everyone is arguing, shouting to be heard over the clamor. Several people are getting right into each others' faces, and although the situation has not yet come to blows, there is a tension in the air, a definite feeling that this could happen at any second.

Baruuka and several other of the Xapori move among the people, trying to calm them down and separate them, but their voices are unheard in the din.

Cross and Talora arrive in the Rec Lounge. From the edge of the crowd, Quinlan, nervously fingering her phaser, walks over to them. They speak loudly to hear one another over the noise.

CROSS

Report!

QUINLAN

I have no idea how it got to this! I was talking with Stolt and Kaplan about the Transcendent, whether he is more inclined to faith or to good deeds -- Stolt and Kaplan started arguing, and shouting at each other! Then several people came over to join the argument, and...

CROSS

And one thing led to another?

QUINLAN

Pretty much, yeah.

CROSS

Unbelievable. Your phaser,
Lieutenant.

Quinlan hands Cross her phaser. He adjusts the setting, aims at the ceiling and fires. There is a loud BOOM sound, and a flurry of sparks, but no actual damage. He does have everyone's attention now, however. A stunned silence.

CROSS (CONT'D)

This is a far, far cry from the
behavior that is expected of Starfleet
officers! Would someone mind
explaining the reason for this chaos?

A pause then everyone starts talking at once, then shouting to be heard. Everyone is trying to explain to the Captain what happened, who started it, etc. Cross and Talora exchange glances.

TALORA

Captain, I don't like where this is
going.

CROSS

Maybe this is a good chance to put
your famous mediation skills to work
once more.

TALORA

In this situation, I think I'll need
help. I suggest we summon Baruuka.

Speak of the devil; Baruuka arrives and rushes up to Cross, Talora and Quinlan.

Behind him, the Rec Lounge doors start to close, then open again to admit Y'lan and Dojar, both carrying modified tricorders. Unnoticed by anyone, they slip into the room and start to move among the crowd, scanning individual people with their tricorders. We stay focused on Cross and company.

BARUUKA

I heard, and I came as soon as I
could.

CROSS

We need your help, Baruuka-bey.

BARUUKA

I can see the problem clearly; I
will do what I can.

He steps forward, and addresses the crowd.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

My friends! Hear me, I beg of you!

The crowd quiets down somewhat, and most of the people turn to look at Baruuka, although some angry murmuring can still be heard.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

I implore, think about what you are doing! These are not--

Dojar appears out of nowhere, steps up to Baruuka, and holds his tricorder up to the Xapori's head. Baruuka looks at him in confusion. After a moment of scanning, Dojar shakes his head and withdraws the tricorder.

DOJAR

Excuse me.

He walks away. Baruuka blinks in confusion, then shakes his head and turns back to the crowd, holding up his arms.

BARUUKA

These are not the actions of sentient beings, but of animals! To walk the Path of the Transcendent means to settle your differences peaceably, not through angry words and deeds!

CREWMAN #1

Baruuka-bey, that's exactly what I'm trying to tell these people! The Transcendent smiles upon deeds and words, not upon metaphysical belief! A non-Transcendentalist can still be a moral person, beloved of the One!

CREWMAN #2

That's a load of crap! You have to believe in the Transcendent in order to receive his blessing!

CREWMAN #1

Oh, come on! There are moral atheists, and there are immoral Transcendentalists!

CREWMAN #2

How can you walk the Path if you don't even know it's there!

The general argument breaks out once more in the crowd. Finally, Stolt steps up to the forefront and waves his hands for silence.

STOLT

Folks, there's a way we can settle this, okay? Baruuka is here; he, as much as anyone, is familiar with the Way of the One. He can tell us which is more important to the One, whether it be faith, or good works.

He turns and looks at Baruuka, expectantly. Baruuka hesitates.

BARUUKA

That's a very old theological question, and one which few theologians have settled upon. Personally, I believe that the One smiles upon both those who hold his Name and those who walk his Path--

CREWMAN #2

But how can you walk the Path if you don't speak his Name?

The shouting begins again, louder than ever, and Baruuka is helpless to stop it this time. He steps up to the crowd and tries to calm them down, but to no avail. The tension nears the breaking point; at any second, someone might throw the first punch.

Meanwhile, we focus on Y'lan, who is moving through the crowd. After scanning several of the Xapori, he looks off to one side.

Standing there past the edge of the crowd, no doubt placed out of harm's way, is the little girl, Lusa. She is looking at Y'lan curiously.

Y'lan returns the look. He then moves over to her, and scans her head with the tricorder. Lusa watches him the whole time. After scanning for a moment, Y'lan nods to himself, takes out another device -- unfamiliar looking, but with an obvious appearance of being home-fashioned -- holds it to Lusa's head, and presses a button. Lusa doesn't even blink as the end of the device glows orange for a moment, then shuts down.

The Rec Lounge is silent.

Dead silent.

It is as though somebody has pushed the mute button; everyone has stopped talking at the same moment, and everyone is looking around, as though something very important just happened, but nothing seems to have just happened. There is nothing but an eerie silence.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- CORRIDOR -- CONTINUOUS

Several people walking down the corridor stop in mid-step, and look around in confusion, as though something just happened.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- BRIDGE -- CONTINUOUS

The crewmen at their stations -- some wearing Icon pouches, some not -- look up from their tasks. They are all silent. They are all confused.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- MAIN ENGINEERING -- CONTINUOUS

Several people in Engineering, including Grey and Boyle, stop what they're doing and look up. All is silent. Grey stands up from his chair and looks around.

GREY
(quietly)
What the hell...?

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- REC LOUNGE -- CONTINUOUS

(Screenwriter's note: From this point on, the Rec Lounge scene is no longer a single, continuous shot; the camera cuts away as normal.)

All is still quiet. Finally...

QUINLAN
Um. Would someone mind explaining
what just happened?

CROSS
I have no idea.

Y'LAN
I can explain, Captain. The omicron
generator on this ship has been
suppressed. Your mental functioning
has been returned to normal.

A long pause. Everyone stares at Y'lan and Lusa in disbelief.

QUINLAN
You're saying someone was interfering
with our mental functioning?

Y'LAN

Yes. Lusa, here, was generating what are called omicron waves. The effect has been re-localized.

Cross's eyes widen.

CROSS

I knew it! I knew that the Xapori were brainwashing us somehow!

DOJAR

That is not precisely correct, Captain.

BARUUKA

I assure you, Captain, we would never turn someone to the Transcendent against their will. I have no more idea about this than you do.

(to Y'lan)

What does my daughter have to do with all this?

Y'LAN

Her mind was generating a field of omicron waves large enough to encompass this entire vessel. At the same time that these waves interfered with the functioning of my laboratory equipment, they also interfered with the normal mental functions of everyone aboard.

STOLT

Interfered how?

Y'LAN

It was discovered by the Romulans that omicron waves tend to make a person's thought patterns similar to that of the generator's. You were not coerced into believing one thing over another; you were simply more inclined to believe in the Xapori deity; you found such belief more favorable than you otherwise would have.

QUINLAN

If we weren't brainwashed, then how did we all become members of the Order?

DOJAR

There was a part of you, however small, that wanted to be a part of it. The omicron waves simply removed most of whatever mental resistance you might have had to that particular belief.

Lusa tugs at Y'lan's tentacle. Y'lan looks down at her. She reaches for the tricorder that Y'lan is holding. After a beat pause, Y'lan gives it to her. She holds it and studies its functions, a look of intense concentration on her face.

Y'LAN

As you can see, Lusa has an innately curious mind. Her curiosities tended to spread, somewhat amplified, to the rest of the crew; this amplification is a side effect of intensely strong omicron waves, which I believe Lusa started to generate as she entered puberty. That is why an argument was breaking out here among the Enterprise crew as to whether the Xapori deity favors deeds or faith.

TALORA

And on the Kesok, the argument was whether or not the Transcendent judges mortals, directly or through others.

Y'LAN

In both cases, these were likely questions that Lusa had been pondering in her mind. I surmise that V'ton was particularly susceptible to the effect of the waves, and was overcome. He went insane.

Lusa holds the tricorder up to Y'lan and scans him. Baruuka looks at the two of them sadly.

BARUUKA

It makes sense. I was not called into the faith until shortly after Lusa was born. And my decision to follow the Path... It was never really my choice at all, was it?

Y'lan peers at him.

Y'LAN

I repeat: there was no coercion involved.

(MORE)

Y'LAN (CONT'D)

The ideas involved in the Order were simply more favorable to your minds, and encountered less resistance. Ultimately, the decision was yours to make. Ultimately, it was everyone's to make.

There is a long silence as the assembled crowd look at one another and take this in.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise at impulse power, moving toward a docking port of a large space station.

STOLT'S COMM VOICE

Enterprise to Starbase 84, request docking clearance.

WOMAN'S COMM VOICE

You are cleared to dock, Enterprise. Welcome to Starbase 84. The baryon array has been prepared for your arrival. Oh... and I'm told that you're bringing us some interesting visitors.

STOLT'S COMM VOICE

You could say that, Starbase. You could say that.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- CORRIDOR

Cross and Baruuka are strolling down the corridor together, the latter with a packed bag -- and still wearing his Icon pouch.

CROSS

From what Y'lan has told me, your daughter has extraordinary mental abilities. I suspect that she'll go far in life.

BARUUKA

I myself has suspected as much since she was two years old. Captain, I want to thank you again for rescuing us from the Kesok. In spite of what happened...

CROSS

There was no way you could have prevented it.

BARUUKA

I feel responsible nonetheless.

CROSS

You need not. And may I say, it was a pleasure having you and your people aboard -- yes, in spite of what's happened. I'm sorry we can't take you all the way to Geshel II.

BARUUKA

It's just as well; your slipstream drive would get us there all too quickly. I suppose we could all use the time to think, and reflect.

They arrive at a hatchway where the Enterprise is connected to the Starbase's docking port; people can be seen coming and going from the station. Cross turns to Baruuka.

CROSS

What will you do from there?

Baruuka thinks a moment, his expression somber.

BARUUKA

Honestly, Captain, I don't know. I still have my family -- and, as you can see, I still have my faith. But it feels like my entire universe has been pulled out from under my feet. I feel as though the last decade of my life has been a lie.

CROSS

I wouldn't jump to conclusions. Remember what Y'lan said about the omicron waves: they make you more inclined toward a certain belief, but they don't choose that belief for you. You make that decision.

(beat)

And for all I know, your theology could very well be correct. Who knows?

BARUUKA

Who knows indeed.

He pauses again.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

Last night I tucked my daughter into bed, kissed her goodnight, went out to have a cup of grendo tea -- this is all my habit in the evenings, you understand. Then I got into bed next to my wife, we talked for a while, and then I extinguished the lights and, as I have always done, closed my eyes in a silent prayer to the One.

(beat)

But, for the first time in eight years, I did not feel his presence.

He looks at Cross sadly. Cross looks back at him, not knowing what to say. Finally, Baruuka composes himself.

BARUUKA (CONT'D)

My family awaits me.

CROSS

Of course.

Baruuka shakes Cross's hand, bows formally with hands clasped, then takes his bag down the corridor, disappearing from sight into the Starbase. Cross stands there for a moment, then starts back down the corridor.

Behind him, Cale comes around a corner and catches up to Cross. He is still wearing an Icon pouch.

CALE

Captain? Engineering reports that the slipstream initiator has been prepared for the baryon sweep. We can move it into the Starbase at any time.

CROSS

Very good, Lieutenant. Proceed at your convenience.

He looks at Cale's Icon pouch, and raises an eyebrow. Cale looks at the pouch, then back at Cross, smiling a little.

CALE

The Order made sense to me when the Xapori first introduced it to me. It still does.

Cross pauses.

CROSS

If that's what you really want, Cale, I'll be the last one to try to talk
(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

you out of it. But are you sure
you've thought this through?

CALE

I'm positive, Captain. I know what
happened, and I know what probably
caused me to feel this way in the
first place. But sir... Nothing's
changed. This...

He looks down at the pouch again, and clasps it in his hand.

CALE (CONT'D)

...this is what I've been looking
for all my life, and I didn't even
know it. This is something to which
I belong. I can't help that. I've
looked at every consideration,
Captain, and the Order is what I
want.

Cross looks at Cale for a long moment, sees the seriousness
in his eyes, and finally nods.

CROSS

Very well. Carry on, Lieutenant.

CALE

Aye, sir.

Cale walks back the way he came, disappearing around a corner.
Cross looks after him for a moment, then continues down the
corridor.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTERPRISE -- Y'LAN'S LAB

All of the complicated equipment is up and running once more.
Y'lan is alone in the lab, working on another device connected
to a small pad. He is putting the finishing touches on it
when the door chimes.

Y'LAN

Enter.

The doors open, and Cross enters the room, looking at the
equipment as he walks up to Y'lan.

CROSS

Just wanted to make sure everything
was up and running once again.

Y'LAN

Indeed it is, Captain. Thank you.

Cross looks at the device curiously.

CROSS

What are you working on here?

Y'LAN

This is a prototype quantum dispersal unit, which I have been developing for some time. This seemed like a good time to finish it.

CROSS

I see. And it does what, exactly?

Y'LAN

It reduces an object down to its constituent virtual particles, which then disperse naturally into the quantum foam -- effectively rendering the object nonexistent. Like a disintegrator, but much more effective.

CROSS

Sounds like it could be quite a weapon.

Y'LAN

At present, its power consumption makes it impractical for use as a weapon. But it is good for taking a thing and, as a human might say, getting rid of it once and for all.

CROSS

Interesting. In any case, I also wanted to thank you for solving the problem with the Xapori.

Y'LAN

Not at all; it was in our mutual best interests to do so.

Cross nods, smiles, and turns to leave. Halfway to the door he stops, pauses, and looks back at Y'lan.

CROSS

It's not a bad thing, is it?

Y'lan turns to look at him.

Y'LAN

I beg your pardon?

CROSS

Baruuka said that I was an atheist, several times. And he was right. That in itself doesn't bother me, but the way that he said it... I mean, to me, metaphysical naturalism is just a fact of life, just like doors and chairs. But the way the Xapori say it, it's such an ugly word.

(beat)

There's no reason for me to be ashamed of it, is there? Or am I really missing something here?

Y'lan considers for a moment.

Y'LAN

Do you know of that which might be called the Q'tami theology?

CROSS

Only in broad strokes; Dojar told me about it the other day.

Y'LAN

It is a part of that theology that, at present, no gods exist. In that sense, all Q'tami might be considered atheists. Yet it would be false to say that they lack any beliefs which might be called sacred.

(beat)

Perhaps that is a justifiable measuring rod by which we may ascertain the value of a person. Perhaps it is not. In either case, Captain, I would say that you have nothing to worry about.

Cross smiles.

CROSS

You know, Y'lan, I think that's the highest compliment you've ever paid me.

Y'LAN

You're welcome. In any case, the measure of a man goes far beyond whether or not he holds a particular religious belief. If a system argues that lack of such a belief is a moral defect in the two of us, I would argue that that system is itself defective.

CROSS

You'll get no argument from me. And you know, most humans are perfectly happy living in a secular society with strong values. There are exceptions, of course -- I saw one of them just a moment ago. But those people manage to find a path that works for them. Just as I have done.

Y'LAN

And just as I will do. I do not know yet whether it will be the path of the Q'tami... But I do know that it will be the path of Y'lan.

Cross nods, still smiling. They share a look for a moment.

CROSS

Good day, Y'lan.

Y'LAN

Good day, Captain.

Cross leaves the room. Y'lan turns back to his device and installs the final component. He tests the device; it chirps and glows, indicating an operational status. Y'lan then reaches down to a small, concealed compartment under the workbench, opens it, and brings something out.

It is an Icon.

He holds it up and stares at it for a long, long moment. We look closely at his eyes and see something there that we don't often see in the eyes of Y'lan: an emotion. A wave of sadness, of regret.

He then places the Icon on the device pad and activates the device. There is a chirp, a brief pause, then the Icon glows a bright white and disappears into nothingness. We focus on the empty pad as we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

THE END