

STAR TREK IX
(Treatment dated 6/23/97)

A small Romulan vessel moves slowly through a spooky, bizarre region of space. Inside, in a setting as claustrophobic as a submarine, the tense crew makes pinpoint navigational adjustments avoiding danger at every turn. The first officer wants to turn back. The Captain orders them ahead. Suddenly, they're shaken by an attack. They can't even see the ship firing at them. Sensors are confused. Another blast and another. They hail their assailant, trying to surrender. No response. Shields collapse. Cracks form in the hull. They beg for mercy. Another blast. The ship breaks apart around us and the last sounds we hear from the Romulan crew are their screams. And, like the dead men, we're sucked into space and only now do we see the ship responsible for this horror -- a compact Federation vessel roaring out of the mist. As it passes remarkably close-by our view, we can see the pilot through the window... is Data.

Picard is being briefed by two ranking members of the Executive Council and the Federation's Romulan envoy (MATT DOUGHERTY, 38), good men that he knows and trusts. Data, who was on a top secret mission, has been missing for six months. Now, he has apparently gone berserk and is shooting down Romulan ships. Picard's mission: find him and, if there is no other choice, terminate him.

After a short, humorous beat during which we pick up Worf at Deep Space Nine, Picard fills in the Enterprise's senior officers on the back story: Data had been recruited for a mission, co-sponsored by the Federation and the Romulans, to make first contact with a newly discovered race of aliens. They had been found by Romulan probes deep inside an unexplored region of space known on Earth as The Briar Patch. The Patch is a navigational nightmare and is unexplored because, frankly, no one ever wanted to go in there. Located for centuries within the Neutral Zone that separates Romulan and Federation space, The Patch has recently been ceded to the Romulan Empire. The agreement ended a long territorial dispute and set the stage for a new era of cooperation. Data was chosen for the mission because his quick android skills gave him a significant advantage piloting the scout ship. Two Romulan crewmen accompanied him. They entered the dangerous region without incident but never returned and did not respond to hails. The attacks began a month ago when the Romulans went into The Patch trying to find them. There is incontrovertible evidence that Data and Data alone is responsible for the attacks.

Worf, who has been assigned to the Enterprise because of his vast knowledge of the Romulan Empire, wonders aloud if the Romulans are telling the truth about the events.

When it comes to the Romulans, nothing is ever what it seems. Picard says they'll do everything in their power to get to the truth. But he adds, for the first time in a century there is a genuine peace initiative between the Romulans and the Federation. Data's attacks have already led to renewed tensions. We don't want to make it any worse. A Romulan admiral will be joining the mission when they reach the border and Ambassador Dougherty is coming along to assist with any sensitive negotiations.

Geordi is the one who asks the question everyone wants to ask: we're not seriously contemplating killing Data, are we? Our orders are clear, says Picard. Anyone who feels they might be unable to carry out those orders should ask to be relieved of duty now. Faces are grim. But no one chooses to remain behind.

Picard may seem controlled, but later, alone as he goes over Data's mission plan and studies the android's last visual transmission, we see in his eyes the emotional connection he has to the android. Doctor Crusher interrupts him, updating him on a few sickbay matters relevant to the mission. Among them, word from Starfleet medical that there's been a delay with the delivery of a new synthetic regenerative compound. It means we'll have to stock doses of sarium krellide, the regenerative ore we've always used to heal injuries, currently in short supply. The Doctor and Picard share a personal moment in front of the frozen image of Data on the monitor. Picard: I've been his tutor in all things human, his drama coach, his art professor... now I'm asked to be his executioner...

At the border, a Romulan Admiral, SCHALK, 55, stiff and imperial, beams aboard with his personal adjutant, JOSS, 35. From the moment we meet Joss, we realize he is not like any Romulan we've met before. Dashing and well-spoken, he has none of the pomp of his superior, doesn't take any of this political stuff very seriously. As Worf and Troi greet them in the Transporter Room, Joss gives her an admiring onceover, tosses his backpack to Worf to carry. Worf clearly doesn't like the fellow, tosses the backpack right back at him. Joss grins at getting a rise out of the Klingon, flirts with Troi as they exit.

The initial studies of the unexplored sector are not encouraging. Although the Enterprise has been supplied with Starfleet's latest scout ship, identical to the one Data used, Geordi reports that in all the computer simulations, every standard navigational program proved inadequate to get the vessel through The Briar Patch. That's why Data was chosen to pilot the ship in the first place. We just don't know enough about the region to adequately prepare for it.

As a long time sailor, Picard knows the best information about a particular area of space can often come from Federation mariners -- traders, ferry operators, and just plain adventurers -- who traverse the quadrant. As a boy, he once even considered shipping out on the 24th century equivalent of a "tramp steamer." The Enterprise travels to an extraordinary location (TBD) where the mariners dock and refit.

They're quite a bunch -- spirited ex-patriots, colorful rovers and indomitable free-spirits -- hearty, well fellows and lusty women who are not impressed by Picard's uniform. Imagine the captain of an aircraft carrier in the Caribbean arriving at Margaritaville to meet with an odd assortment of free souls who don't care much for authority figures and you get the idea. In an amusing sequence, Picard must earn their trust and cooperation.

He eventually intrigues them with his plans to enter The Patch. It's not impossible, they tell him. Our old tubs might not make it, but maybe the latest Starship could. As Picard picks their brains, he begins to fashion a risky strategy (TBD) that might just work...

The night before the attempt, at a Captain's dinner on the Enterprise, Joss continues his pursuit of Troi and at the same time amuses himself by getting under Worf's skin. It quickly gets out of hand and leads to a formal insult to Worf's family that requires satisfaction.

Despite Schalk's and Dougherty's protests, Picard knows he must respect Worf's beliefs. He permits a duel to be fought on the holodeck, but refuses Worf's request that it be a fight to the death. The stakes are honor and the duel will end at first blood. Joss chooses the weapons -- brutal but fascinating Romulan weapons unlike anything we've ever seen before. The fight is breathtaking. For the first time, Joss' eyes really come alive and we can tell he's in his element. We've never seen a duelist as stylish and confident as he is. Worf is beaten badly and would have been killed but for Picard's mandate. To add insult to injury, Joss catches Troi off-guard when he helps himself to a surprise kiss as a reward for his victory.

Using the plan he hatched up with the mariners' help, Picard pilots the impressive scout ship into the Patch, accompanied by Geordi, Worf, Troi and Joss. The Enterprise follows at a safe distance, using a steady flow of technical data from the scout ship to chart the course. A tractor beam is ready in case Picard's ship gets into trouble. The Away Team is mesmerized by the beautiful but dangerous space phenomena they encounter. A close call is narrowly averted as Picard brilliantly dodges the hazard.

Then, suddenly, just like the Romulan ship, they're attacked. Sensors show it is Data's scout ship and that Data is at the helm. Joss wants to destroy the ship but in a quick confrontation, Picard puts him in his place. They try to hail Data but he continues to attack. Picard laces Data's ship with phaser fire, trying to disable it... Data is forced to withdraw, but as he disappears, he fires photon torpedoes, seriously damaging Picard's vessel. Before the Enterprise can engage the tractor beam, the scout ship rolls out of control and they lose contact.

Picard barely manages to stabilize the ship but they desperately need a place to put down. Veering out of the murk, they see a planet directly ahead, its gaseous surface engulfed in flames. Their sensor readings don't seem possible: Geordi can't find any indication of the fire they see through the windows. He's reading M-Class terra firma below. Not only that, he's picking up a humanoid population of about four thousand on the smaller continent. Do we believe our eyes or our sensors?

Picard must make a quick decision: try to find another planet or trust his sensors and ignore the fiery gases. Troi tells the Captain she's feeling some telepathic activity coming from the surface. Picard considers that... then takes the ship down, ignoring Joss' protests, setting a course toward the alien life signs below. If he's wrong, the fire will surely destroy the ship. As they enter the upper atmosphere, dipping into the fire, it disappears like a bad dream. In its place: a beautiful tropical locale. The ship puts down roughly on a wide sandy beach.

Tricorders reveal that Data's ship is near-by and Picard and crew set off to find him. As Data leads them on a surreal cat and mouse chase through the jungle, the Away Team is confronted by more terrifying delusions. They are constantly forced to try to tell the difference between reality and delusion. Just when they think they've got it figured out, they ignore a delusion only to literally fall into a very real hole by doing so. They tumble down a long tunnel and are deposited into a containment field in the center of a small village, finding themselves beside the two Romulans who accompanied Data on the original mission.

The Romulans tell Joss in front of the Starfleet officers that the android just went crazy and turned against them. They think it had something to do with the unusual radiation in The Briar Patch. Geordi doesn't buy it; Data had surveyed The Patch before the mission; he would have been prepared for any radiation. The Romulans angrily denounce androids as unreliable anyway. They're relieved to see Joss who in his typically unflappable manner pats them on the back and tells them to relax; the great Picard will find a way out of this.

The Away Team takes in the setting. The village is built into the side of a mountain. It's a marvel of futuristic architecture with technology our people cannot begin to fathom and yet it clearly displays an appreciation for the natural habitat. The structures in the village are made of a colorful metal that has been crafted and fused into the mountainside.

The aliens slowly emerge from hiding to examine the prisoners. They're stranger than any aliens we've ever encountered... small, with wide foreheads and piercing eyes... they're mute, apparently using telepathy (which we do not hear) to communicate with one another. There is no way for us to communicate directly with these people. Our brains are simply not up to the task. Picard's efforts to make them understand us are extremely frustrating setting in motion a theme that will continue throughout the story. In time, we will come to understand them as a gentle people with an extraordinary intellect who would harm no one.

As the trapped Away Team waits to see what happens next, they observe the villagers as they go about their daily lives. They're clearly a technologically superior people... using extraordinary anti-grav platforms to move about their vertical layout. Geordi studies them with astonishment as they operate an incredible weather shield that creates a shaft of sunlight over the village as the jungle around them is ripped by a heavy rainstorm.

One of the children is an ALIEN BOY, 11 whose face is painted gold just like Data's. The prisoners watch as the boy and a friend play mental games... creating small delusions to scare one another... one turns himself into a snake, then the other turns himself into a dragon... Troi surmises that it is a form of mass hypnosis and that these aliens have learned to use their mental abilities as a unique chameleon-like defense mechanism. Rather than blending into the real world, they create a delusional reality to confuse and disorient a potential enemy. That explains all the strange things they've seen.

Picard is finally released and taken, hands bound, into a dark and mysterious dwelling. He reacts as an alien woman with a face painted gold like Data's meets them, sends his escorts away and leads him deeper into the shadows. The boy with the gold face peeks around a corner at Picard and scampers away. They finally reach a chamber where he can see the silhouetted figure of Data sitting on the floor, motionless, his head cocked at an android angle, almost as though he's performing some kind of positronic meditation. He is dressed as the aliens dress. The woman leaves them alone. The android's head slowly moves to Picard. He opens his eyes, which show no recognition.

Picard realizes quickly that the android has seriously malfunctioned. His voice has trouble shaping words, sometimes he repeats them. He has no memory of his former Captain, and is either unwilling or unable to process Picard's attempts to explain who he is. In vague and unconnected phrases, Data speaks only of the danger Picard and the others bring to his people. Picard presses Data: what kind of danger? But Data in his confused mutterings cannot say. The scene is interrupted by a crackling on Picard's combadge. Data reacts, strips away the combadge, moves to a complex scanning device built into the rock wall...

Outside, the other members of the Away Team hear the transmission too... it's Riker... the Enterprise has almost made it to the interior of The Briar Patch and is searching for the Away Team...

Data studies his scanner and sees the Enterprise arriving... he stands and moves to exit, then pauses and decides to take Picard with him...

With the planet surface below providing a dramatic backdrop, Data attacks the Enterprise, keeping Picard in a containment field on his vessel's small bridge. He opens a channel to allow Riker to see that he's holding Picard prisoner. In a fair fight, the smaller ship wouldn't stand a chance against the Enterprise. But Riker can't use full force without risking his Captain's life. He fires phasers, trying to disable Data's shields so he can beam them out. Data engages an auto-tactical evasive program while he loads photon torpedoes. Picard knows they will seriously damage the Enterprise. Then, one of the Enterprise's phasers connect and the blast frees Picard from the containment field. He struggles with Data for control of the ship. Even in his malfunctioning state, Data is ten times stronger. Getting his hands on a phaser rifle, Picard tries to stun Data but the android is unaffected. Picard ratchets up the power setting several times without results until he is finally forced to do the unthinkable... on maximum power, he blasts Data whose torso breaks apart, fritzes and falls at Picard's feet and then goes dead.

Picard tells Riker to cease fire and tries to take the helm but the auto-pilot program now is taking the ship back to the surface. He tells the Enterprise to follow until they can establish an orbit.

On the surface, the aliens take Data out of the ship... stunned as they can see for the first time that he is a mechanical man. They carry him to the center of the village, ignoring Picard. He watches as the villagers make way for the boy as he moves to the broken body.

There is no resistance as Picard frees the rest of the Away Team and the Romulans. Geordi goes quickly to check on Data. The Enterprise has established its orbit and Riker, Beverly and an armed Away Team beam down, react to the strange scene.

Picard again is frustrated in his attempts to communicate with the aliens. He tries to explain that we are not their enemy. But mostly he wants answers. What happened to Data? What is the danger that Data spoke about? The aliens look at him blankly, go about their business. The only one who continues to study him with curious eyes is the boy. Geordi desperately seeks some signs of life in the android's power cells. There are none. He's gone, Captain.

Picard, tight, controlling the full emotional impact of the events, tells his crew he wants to know exactly why this happened. Geordi and Beverly want to take Data back to the ship to do an autopsy. But as Picard locks eyes again with the boy who remains beside Data, he tells his officers to leave Data here for now. Do the best you can without moving him.

During a short second act, driven by Picard's growing emotional turmoil and rage, Data's malfunction is traced to a Romulan disruptor blast which damaged his memory engrams. Schalk, speaking for the Romulan crewmen, steadfastly denies any wrongdoing. And yet we see Joss and the two crewmen making mysterious plans that clearly indicate a threat to the aliens.

As the investigation continues, Picard realizes that the boy had a particularly close relationship with Data. He forms a unique bond with the youngster, hoping to find a way to communicate with the boy and find out what happened. Picard eventually gets an idea and takes him to the Enterprise's holodeck. He shows him how we make our own illusions there... and they begin to make illusions for each other, some of which include Data. In a sequence that may remind us of the classic breakthrough scene in "The Miracle Worker", Picard and the boy, in a joyous moment together, are finally able to begin to understand one another. This is the bridge in the communications gap that Picard has desperately needed since his arrival.

The boy, now realizing that Picard is trying to learn about Data, takes him to clearing deep in the jungle where there is evidence of a drilling site. There are also signs of disruptor burns in the grass. Picard wonders aloud if this is where Data was hurt. Through an elaborate and metaphorical delusion, the boy communicates that Data saved his life at this spot.

Picard tells his crew that someone was taking deep core samples at the site using a familiar Romulan geologic tool. This is extremely odd because there were no geologic surveys indicated in Data's mission plan. The flight manifest did not show that the Romulans were carrying geologic tools. When Picard orders a special TECH scan of the planet, they discover the crust is practically made of sarium krellide, the same medical ore that is in such short supply throughout the quadrant. It is the first time that the ore has been discovered on a populated planet. In all other instances it had been found on uninhabited moons and asteroids, which was fortunate, because the only way to effectively excavate it was to virtually decimate the environment. Picard asks Geordi if there is any safer way to get to the ore. Geordi has studied the Federation databanks and the answer is no. They might be able to gain access to two percent of the available ore, but to process a meaningful amount, the surface would have to be stripped off. The planet would be turned into molten rock. No life would survive.

Picard begins to piece together a possible scenario. What if the Romulans had learned about the valuable ore from their probes before Data's mission? And tricked the Federation into allowing them to use Data to get through the Briar Patch? I believe it's possible, says Picard, that this alien boy and perhaps others discovered what they were up to and that Data was damaged when he saved the boy's life.

Troi pays an unexpected visit to Joss in his quarters and using her empathic abilities as well as her most seductive manner, she cleverly gets Joss to admit that the Romulans are preparing to mine the planet. And then Joss adds something that sends a chill down her spine: he assures her that the Romulans will keep their promise to the Federation and move the aliens safely to a new planet. Troi now realizes that the Federation is far more involved than Picard could ever have guessed. When Joss realizes that she's tricked him, he explodes with rage revealing his truly dark nature and for a moment, we're afraid he might harm her. But Worf prepared her for something like this -- she tries to use a Klingon marital arts foot maneuver but he's so good, he counters it and seems to have the advantage... whereupon Troi brings her knee up and hard in a most vulnerable spot. He sinks in pain. She exits to the sound of his groans.

Picard is angrier than we've ever seen him as he confronts Dougherty, a man in whom he's had absolute faith. Picard: When the Council finds out what you've done... Dougherty: I'm acting on orders from the Council.

He goes on to explain that Starfleet Medical's efforts to make a synthetic regenerative compound to replace sarium krellide have failed completely. It's been kept quiet but we desperately need the ore. Everyone in the quadrant needs the ore. Romulan probes had found significant deposits in The Patch. But since this was disputed territory, a deal had to be made before anyone could get to it. We gave the Romulans The Patch and they agreed to split the ore with us.

Picard: Without any consideration for the inhabitants of this world...

Dougherty: On the contrary, after realizing there was no alternative to stripping off the planet's surface, I negotiated the agreement myself with the Romulans to move them safely. Every effort was made to take care of them... including sending Data here to survey their living conditions to help prepare for the move.

Picard: But Data didn't know that, did he...

Dougherty admits that it was decided that Data didn't need to know.

Picard understands that Dougherty and the Council have decided to shave a thin layer off Federation principles in order to get the much-needed ore. The Prime Directive says we won't interfere with the natural development of other cultures, so we cede the planet to the Romulans and it's out of our hands. To ease our conscience, we make the Romulans guarantee that these people will be moved safely. What a perfect political solution; it's barely a compromise of our principles at all this way. Picard looks Dougherty in the eye and says, simply: horse shit.

Dougherty argues that sometimes principles collide with hard reality. Modern medicine evolved from the discovery of sarium krellide; virtually all hospital and medical equipment is designed to use it. No one is going to sit still while we turn back the clock two hundred years and return to 21st century medicine. It would be barbaric. Picard doesn't deny that there's a serious need for the ore but at what cost? It's too easy to turn a blind eye to what's happening to a small group of unfamiliar people in a land far away who are forced to suffer to satisfy our needs.

Picard argues that the unique environment of this planet has had a profound impact on the aliens' physiology. Our analysis indicates their bodies have virtually no immune system. The regenerative ore in the ground effectively protects them from most diseases and accelerates healing of serious injuries. Move them and their bodies will be vulnerable to every virus and bacteria in the universe.

Dougherty promises that we plan to do the best we can to see to all their medical needs. Picard: Pump them full of medicines. Put them on life support for our convenience...

Dougherty: For chrissakes, there are only four thousand of them and countless millions who will be helped by the ore. Picard wonders what the cut-off point would be: Fifty thousand aliens? A hundred thousand? A million? How big a population does it require to force open that blind eye?

Dougherty maintains there's nothing we can do now. The sector was legally ceded to the Romulans months ago. To interfere would be a violation of the Prime Directive. He deeply regrets what happened to Data. Admiral Schalk has privately assured me that both Romulan crewmen will be appropriately punished. I understand how you feel, but our mission is complete. The Council expects you now to follow your orders and return to Federation space.

Picard sees that he, and Data, have both been pawns in a dark and terrible game. A game in which he has been forced to kill a man he loved like a brother. And he also realizes, to his horror, that he has been used to chart the course into The Briar Patch for the mining ships to follow. Jean-Luc Picard has charted the course for the destruction of an entire race.

Picard's quarters. Four pips being laid on a counter top one at a time. Picard studies himself in the mirror, begins to remove his Starfleet uniform. It is the saddest moment of his life.

On the surface, dressed in civilian clothes, Picard follows the sounds of strange percussion into a bizarre building, part cathedral, part machine shop. The ceremony he encounters inside seems to be a death ritual for Data who lies at the center of a chamber bathed in a bright light from directly overhead. The percussion comes from the movements of huge bewildering machines that tower over the people like the mammoth pipe organ in the Mormon Tabernacle. The boy sees Picard, takes his hand and leads him to sit beside him by Data. The aliens are painting their faces gold to honor the android. Picard solemnly paints his face gold too. Honoring the man he killed. Symbolically taking Data's place as the defender of these people.

The aliens seem to understand and accept him. Suddenly, Data's broken body slowly rises on an antigrav unit, moving toward the blinding light above. As it moves higher, the boy creates a strange delusion for Picard... a surreal moment as a tree grows from the ground where Data lay. A branch of the tree grows out and touches Picard's shoulder.

As Data and the anti-grav unit disappear into the light, like a casket taking a body into the fires of cremation, the image of the tree disappears too. Picard looks at the boy curiously, unable to comprehend. The percussion from the machines continues.

Above the planet, Romulan ships begin to arrive following the course that the Enterprise charted. Schalk and his men join their crews. Dougherty promises him the Enterprise will be on its way shortly. As soon as they've moved to the Romulan ships, Joss carries out the punishment against his dumbfounded Romulan colleagues, fulfilling the promise Schalk made to Dougherty. He engages them both in an impromptu duel (for his own entertainment)... and quickly kills them.

Picard's last communication from the planet tells his staff to leave as ordered. He will not allow his officers to sacrifice their careers or their lives. This was Data's fight. Now, it's his. Picard signs off and destroys his combadge.

As the action-filled third act begins, Picard, with the help of the boy, trains the aliens for a fight of resistance. It's an inspiring and humorous process as they often struggle to understand one another. Finally, combining their talent for creating delusions with the power of real weapons he has brought with him from the Enterprise, he builds an effective, albeit tiny, fighting force. He feints and punches the Romulans, disrupting Joss' Nazi-like attempts to round-up the aliens and box them for transport, then sabotaging the Romulan's first mining operations, always disappearing into the jungle like Robin Hood. Schalk orders Joss to take a Romulan search party to the surface to capture Picard, alive. But Joss, who still feels the sting of being tricked by Troi, sees this as his opportunity for revenge. When he finds Picard he intends to kill him for sport.

Dougherty demands that Riker arrest Picard and get him the hell out of there before the whole peace initiative collapses. Riker couldn't care less about the peace initiative at this point but his Captain's life is in danger. He takes the senior officers and an armed security team to find Picard before Joss and the Romulans do. Picard plays the fox, outwitting both sides looking for him.

One windy night, as he tries to catch a few minutes sleep, the percussion from the distant village suddenly stops for the first time. The silence awakens him. Curiously, he moves back toward the village to see what has happened.

The wind blows through the leaves of the trees and lightning flashes from an approaching storm... and as Picard rounds a bend, the ghost of Data appears in the lightning... he is naked. Picard reacts with a short gasp and Data speaks to him rather incongruously with the words: "You are out of uniform, sir." Picard reaches out and touches the figure before him. It's no delusion this time. "So are you, Data", says Picard. And only then does Data realize he is walking around without clothes on. "So I am", he says, still gathering his wits.

Data has no idea how he was resuscitated but it is clear that the aliens were not performing a death ritual but one of techno-resurrection. Picard thinks he understands the vision of the tree the aliens created for him. It was their way of communicating new growth, rebirth. They must have been trying to tell him that Data would return.

Data tells Picard that the Romulans killed the boy's father when he accidentally discovered them taking the core sample. They were about to kill the boy too when Data got there and saw what was going on. They fired their disruptors but Data took the blast meant for the boy. Even though Data was severely damaged, he was still able to capture the Romulans. The woman and the boy became his "family," taking care of him after he was injured. Data has no intention of abandoning them to the Romulans. He will stay and fight with Picard. After he gets some clothes on, that is.

Their guerrilla warfare continues, Picard and Data fighting side by side now... Riker and the Away Team finally catch up to them, shocked but happy to see Data.

Riker tries to convince Picard that the Federation Executive Council will listen if he goes back and tells them what's happening here. But Picard, for the first time in his life, has lost faith in the Federation. He knows to go back is hopeless. No one will listen and once he's gone, these people will be moved, the planet destroyed. He can't leave. And he won't. You'll have to arrest me, he says. If you do, all this will be lost. Riker: This is suicide. A Romulan fleet is on the way with reinforcements. Picard: It doesn't matter. Data and I are going to stay and fight for these people.

Riker sees he's not getting anywhere with Picard. All right then, he says, I'll take the Enterprise and go for help. Picard nods, but his eyes say he does not expect any help to arrive.

Worf steps forward. The odds against you would appear insurmountable, he tells Picard. But I will fight at your side. The rest of the officers join him.

Picard is unable to talk them out of it. He tries to order them away, but Riker apologizes saying, sorry, Mr. Picard but once you took off the pips, you lost that privilege. Riker promises to return, beams out. Picard looks around at his officers, his family, reluctantly grateful that they're together again.

Joss leads the Romulans in devastating attacks that destroy the village and defoliate the jungle with plasma charges... it is a huge battle, Romulan fighters coming in over the ocean, strafing the beach... ultimately forcing Picard and his overmatched army into a defensive position. As the Romulans assault their position, it may remind us of the Alamo. They come over the walls... the boy fights bravely by Data's side, saves the android's life with a delusion that confuses a Romulan long enough for Data to knock him out. Picard finds himself in deadly hand to hand combat with Joss. Just as Picard is about to be killed by the Romulan, Worf steps in and blocks Joss' weapon and takes up the fight. This time it will be to the death. At first, Joss seems to toy with him, wounds him once in the shoulder, then another in the leg... but then Worf calls for strength from the Klingon gods and he rises with renewed power and finally conquers Joss, running him through with his makeshift sword. Joss looks up at him in the final shock of death. Worf bellows a Klingon victory cry.

The Romulans withdraw and prepare for one final deadly assault. Picard and his officers know their time is almost up now... their defenses won't withstand another assault... they share some personal memories that bring some smiles, even laughs... personal things are said you only say at the end... the distant sound of a low flying vessel approaching tells them their respite is over... they gird themselves for the final attack.

It's Geordi who hears it first -- that's not a Romulan engine -- I'd know those thrusters anywhere -- I never did get around to realigning the magnetic peristaltic pumps -- That's the Enterprise! And now they see the magnificent ship as it makes a dramatic pass overhead, a deafening roar announcing its presence like a B-1 bomber at an air show. And it's not alone. Behind the Enterprise is a fleet of ships. Not from Starfleet. But the wackiest navy ever seen by man... dozens and dozens of tiny ships, those tubs we saw back at Margaritaville... and now people are beaming down to the beach... not soldiers, but families, the mariners we met in act one and all their friends, hundreds of people of all shapes and sizes, children who scamper along the beach as though on holiday. Riker caps the glorious moment as he appears. Riker to Picard: And you thought the Federation wouldn't listen? Here's the Federation, Captain. They did listen.

Dougherty and Schalk see this scene and know they've lost. A few thousand faceless aliens is one thing. But no one is going to be able to turn a blind eye if the Romulans declare war on a few hundred Federation citizens. The Romulans withdraw.

Later, as the Federation squatters enjoy the hospitality of their alien hosts, Data bids a touching farewell to the woman and the boy. In his ready room, as Picard puts his pips back onto his uniform's collar, Dougherty enters. He informs Picard that the Romulans have agreed to a sixty day moratorium on mining and relocation operations while the matter is reviewed by the Federation and Romulan councils.

Ever the diplomat, Dougherty tries to put a spin on the events that makes everything okay. We all had the Federation's best interests at heart, he says. The Executive Council has decided there will be no formal charges against you (he takes a little of the credit for that, having argued that it would not serve the public interest for the Council to take an adversarial position against the Captain of their flagship). He respects Picard for the stand he took and hopes that everyone concerned can now join together to help avoid making the same kind of mistakes in the future. He's sure Picard would agree that nothing would be gained by pursuing this any further back home. Picard studies him for a beat with eyes that say: Don't count on it... then simply exits to:

The bridge. Picard takes his seat and sets a course for Earth. As he says engage...

The Enterprise moves out of orbit and we...

FADE OUT

THE END