

STAR TREK: STARDUST
(working title)
treatment dated 5/9/97

A man might do well to revisit the ideals of his youth as he gets older and settled in his ways. So might the government of man.

This is the story of the greatest crisis in the professional career of Jean-Luc Picard. And not coincidentally, the greatest crisis in the long and noble history of the Federation.

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We fade in to a formal military ball... the young men in their dress uniforms, the pretty girls in gowns of swirling pastel colors. We might be watching the first reel of GONE WITH THE WIND except that officer over there has a blue head and a Vulcan admiral stands guard at the punchbowl, watching the glee of the young dancers with dispassion.

Finding two young male cadets not interested in dancing, but in mischief. One of them is JEAN-LUC PICARD, age 21, his head still sporting dark curly hair, although a trace of a rising forehead can be detected. The other is HUGH DUFFY, 21, not the handsomest of men but his eyes have a passion that could win any man, or woman, to his side. They both have their eye on a certain girl but she's dancing with a stiffly handsome cadet (NORTON). They spike the synthale punchbowl with 100-proof horse elixir and attempt to lure Norton to drink but unfortunately the Vulcan admiral and his wife wind up drinking the punch (and will eventually be seen leading a Conga Line). Picard and Duffy decide to make a quick exit taking the rest of the wicked punch with them...

As they move quickly away from the assembly room, trying to contain their laughter, we begin to understand that these two young men are best of friends. You've had a friendship like this. We all have. It may be light years away. From another time and place. But the memory of it still brings a smile to our lips. It's always with us, no matter how old we grow.

The spirit of swashbuckling heroes from an earlier generation still lives in the hearts of these young men. They joined Starfleet to make a difference, to bring to all corners of the galaxy all that is good about modern man. But there are strong voices already being heard in the Federation Council that are asserting perhaps the very goal of "making a difference" is misguided. It reeks of imperial arrogance. Better not to teach the rest of the galaxy, but to learn from it.

Duffy laughs at the notion, wondering what he could learn from a savage like a Klingon. Duffy, more than Picard, would be more comfortable in the Starfleet of James Tiberius Kirk than in the new Starfleet coming with the 'next generation'.

We begin to learn that Duffy is decidedly a nonconformist. He proudly claims to be a Capitalist, believes that the elimination of currency in the Federation took power away from individuals and gave it to the government. And he embraces the ancient human custom of religious worship as a Buddhist. He's trying to talk Picard into joining him in a protest against the Academy dress code. We get the impression this is not the first time these young men have ruffled the feathers of authority at the Academy. Picard is wary of the latest scheme. But Duffy argues with youthful impudence that it is dissent that keeps a society vital and vigorous and alert. Conformity breeds apathy. Picard is more conservative than Duffy... yet, he too has a youthful arrogance and he goes along.

(Okay, let me pause here to explain about Meredith. You've never met Meredith, but as recently as Tuesday of this week, she was "The Girl" in the picture and in all these scenes and many more to come. She eventually marries Duffy, goes on the trip with Picard to bring him back and as I continued to write her, a voice kept telling me she was in the way. That she was adding nothing and slowing things down. On the ship, there was arbitrary sexual tension between her and Picard while she sat around and served no other useful purpose, plus, by being there, she took Picard away from scenes with his crew (the family). On the planet, it seemed, she was just going to be a third wheel, again adding sexual tension perhaps, but if it's a love story about the two men getting back together again, I could see she was going to wind up a cheerleader. Perhaps the strongest influence on my decision came from the Kipling movies - where there really was no place in the men's lives for women, except as a brief recreational diversion. If it was only about these three (i.e. "Butch and Sundance"), it might be worth exploring more about their triangular relationship, but we have so many other characters to service, I decided we had more important things to accomplish here so I took her out. It's the right thing to do, I think.)

As Picard and Duffy walk across campus, they pass the cottage of the groundskeeper, BOOTHBY (65)4... and hear music from inside... a scratchy recording of Stardust sung by a singer we recognize as Nat Cole. They know Boothby only as a solitary old man (played by Ray Walston) with a remarkable green thumb who seems to love his rhododendrons more than people.

They sneak up to the window and peek inside and see an old victrola playing a 45rpm record... and after a beat, Boothby's stern face appears at the window, startling them. If you want to hear the music, he yells at them, come inside! And so they do.

They find a remarkable study filled with odds and ends from other times and places... objets d'art or d'junk... and they find a man more remarkable than they ever previously considered. Boothby has a sly sense of humor, knows far more about the two cadets than they do about him and, once they stop being intimidated by his gruffness, learn that he has an unusual wisdom. Not interested in giving anybody any advice, mind you... but somehow he manages to lead a young guest to an insight in a conversation.

Picard impresses Boothby with his knowledge of the Hoagy Carmichael song... but wonders why he plays it on a centuries old victrola instead of the ionic pulse discriminator that's so accurate, it could make you think the singer was actually in the room. Boothby scowls: in four centuries, with all their technology, they still haven't come up with anything that sounds as good as vinyl. As he sees Picard appreciate the simple technology of the victrola, Boothby tells him, perhaps in jest and perhaps not, that he'll leave it to Picard when he passes on.

And as they listen...

"Love is now the stardust of yesterday,
"The music of the years gone by..."

DISSOLVE TO:

Twenty-eight years later.

Night. A Federation settlement on the border of the Neutral Zone between the Romulans and the Federation... under attack. We see it from the ground as the Romulan ships strafe the ground... people scattering for cover... buildings exploding, streets being ripped up by the blasts from the ships passing overhead... finding one man desperately transmitting a call for help to any Federation vessel in range... but the transmission towers have been destroyed... it's not clear if their message got out in time... more Romulan vessels move in over the city to strike a final death blow, but then the ship explodes in midair as a photon torpedo strikes it... and as the people below cheer with relief and look to the skies for their rescuers... they see the beacon of light of a starship moving closer into the atmosphere... firing at the Romulans as it comes... and we cut to...

The Bridge of the Enterprise to see the adult Picard in action... organizing the defense efforts, calmly calling orders to his command team... which takes us around the ship to see all our regulars. Worf is already on the Bridge (we will later establish he's on a leave of absence from DS9 following increased tensions along the Romulan border. We will further establish Worf as Starfleet's leading expert on Romulan strategy... a result of lifelong study following the Romulan massacre at the Klingon outpost on Khitomer that left him an orphan.) Riker is leading a squadron of Runabouts to take on the Romulan fighters in air to air combat to control the skies over the settlement. We see his ships ejecting from the Enterprise and go into action... people on the ground look up at the battle above their city with awe... searchlights comb the skies like the Battle of Britain.

During the battle, we establish one of the pilots in the Romulan fighters - a man who is half-Romulan and half Klingon, the child of a Klingon woman who was taken at Khitomer and raped by her Romulan captors (thus he is roughly Worf's age). His name is JOSS and he is a fearless combatant in the skies, a Red Baron for the 24th century.⁸ Furthermore, from the glimpse of him we get here, he enjoys his work. Not sadistically. But as a confident competitor used to winning. Indeed, he has shot down two of our ships and now he has Riker in serious trouble...

But Worf's knowledge of the Romulans helps turn the battle in our favor and the Romulan Commander orders his troops to withdraw, much to Joss' disappointment and Riker's relief... in a last daring move, Joss pulls his ship close enough to see Riker's face through the Runabout window and 'tips his cap' to him... until next time... and zooms away...

Picard orders his people to prepare to evacuate the settlement. Beverly⁹ comes to the Bridge to get Picard's handwritten authorization to use additional doses of sarium krellide radiation to treat the wounded. Due to a temporary shortage of the ore that provides regenerative radiation used in medical tools, Starfleet Medical has imposed a ration on usage. Beverly says she's been told Starfleet scientists are close to perfecting a synthetic compound that will serve as a replacement.

Space. On the way to Earth. Picard's quarters. Riker brings the Captain up to date on the medical progress of the survivors and the political tensions with the Romulans. They're claiming the attack on the settlement was in retaliation for a Starfleet incursion into the Neutral Zone in which two of their ships were destroyed. Picard reacts, unconvinced. They wonder what their longtime adversaries are after. Riker relays Worf's warning that when it comes to the

Romulans, nothing is ever what it seems. Picard doesn't need to be reminded. Riker invites the Captain to join the evening's poker game. Picard declines; admits that he just doesn't feel comfortable and he doesn't think anyone else at the table does either when their Captain is present. Riker insists it's not true. But the Captain declines anyway. And we stay with him a beat as he orders dinner for one from the computer, alone in his quarters, a reminder that it's lonely at the top.

Riker comes looking for Data in the same holodeck program he was in when we first met him in "Encounter at Farpoint." He is meditating about existence much the same way as he was in that first episode. (Die hard fans will see the parallels to the original scene; newcomers won't know the difference.) Riker has been worried about the way Data has been acting lately. He wants Data to come back and join the poker game - he's been a no-show for weeks. But Data declines, melancholy. He explains he is no longer able to bluff. Ironically, I used to be the best poker player on the ship. Now, I have the emotions I always longed for but I can't play poker any more. Riker: You'll learn, Data. It's part of your evolution as a lifeform. Data nods as though he's considered it. Do you think, he asks Riker, that Pinnochio ever missed being a puppet after the story ended? *(I'm still grappling with Data's arc but this is one way to start. I see Data caught between two worlds. His greatest restriction as an android has been lifted and yet his emotional awareness has only made him more aware of his shortcomings compared to humans. What has always made the character special has been his struggle to find his identity and I want to get him back to that. If he has lost faith in his ability to rise to the demands of humanity and finds it through Picard's courage, we have a satisfying through line for him. First, he might have to learn that he can't go back to who he used to be. There's also another significantly different idea that we might want to explore, but for that, read on...)*

Riker arrives at the game and finds to his dismay that Worf is the only one who's shown up to play. Since two-handed poker won't do, Worf suggests darts, a game he learned to play on DS9. Darts?, says Riker exasperated. You want to play darts? Poker is a warrior's game. What's happened to you, Worf? You used to be a Klingon. We never should have let you go to Deep Space Nine. Darts?

Earth. Picard is accompanied by Commander NORTON, Starfleet liaison to the Federation Council (and the same stiff handsome fellow from the Academy days), into the gallery of the impressive chambers... to hear the end of a vigorous debate about a response to the Romulan attack.

Clearly the most enlightened man in the room is the Council President, a Vulcan named SEMARK, 55. He is a man of peace who has invested a great deal of effort in negotiating a treaty with the Romulans that would tear down the Neutral Zone and settle all outstanding territorial disputes. It would be his crowning achievement. But this new outbreak of violence is seriously threatening all of his hopes. Picard watches Semark with admiration as he calmly responds to the angry rhetoric, trying to preserve the peace initiative. And like any citizen watching his government in action, we may sense in Picard a certain pride of being part of the process... in space, Picard is the Federation. It is his life.

That he would ever give up that life, turn against his government, and in the opinion of some, the Federation itself, couldn't be further from his mind at this moment.

As Semark leads Norton and Picard into his office, Picard is informed that what he's about to be told is classified and must remain a secret due to the sensitive political implications. He is surprised to learn there may be a basis to the Romulan claims. Somebody in a starship is creating havoc in the Neutral Zone, leading hostile alien ships in attacks against the Romulans. (The Romulans claim they went into the zone to investigate sensor readings that revealed a Federation vessel was illegally present.) But the Romulans can't find him and neither can we. We've sent in probes, hailed across every com-link bandwidth. Nothing. Whoever it is is hiding in a navigational nightmare known on Earth as The Briar Patch, named after the folk tale. A millennium ago, a group of mysterious, xenophobic aliens escaped from Romulans by fleeing into the seemingly impenetrable SPACETECH much like Br'er Rabbit escaped the fox in the briar patch. The Patch is unexplored space because, frankly, no one wants to go in there. Picard understands that he is being asked to go in, find this ship and bring it back. And he's told it must be accomplished before the end of the current session of the Federation Council. Semark explains the treaty must be voted on before the session adjourns in three weeks. If it is defeated, all of his hopes for peace with the Romulans will be defeated too.

Norton tells Picard they have a theory and some evidence to support it and it has to do with a ship presumed destroyed five years earlier in the Neutral Zone... a ship being flown by a man they both know -- Lieutenant Commander Hugh Duffy. Picard reacts, knows Duffy was reportedly killed in a fight with the Romulans after he violated orders, crossing the border trying to prove that the Romulans were building a secret installation in the Neutral Zone. That assertion was never proved, and even the Enterprise's efforts to investigate it proved futile.

(Hard core fans will remember relevant episodes from the third season of TNG, others won't notice.) New evidence suggests Duffy and his ship may have survived.

They call for a holo-video from the computer... Duffy's last log. It plays right there in the office, wired as a holodeck: Duffy, a man in his late forties, under fire, seemingly killed as he's apparently being forced into The Patch by the Romulans. But now we're beginning to think that Duffy deliberately went into The Patch to escape, just as those xenophobic aliens escaped a millennium ago. No debris was ever recovered.

Our probes have picked up a ship's signature traces that matches Duffy's. In addition, the Romulans say their sensors identified a human lifeform at the helm. We don't know if he's gone mad, gone native or what. According to his record, he was always a malcontent, says Norton. Picard interrupts: he was a man of great passion... adding that he hadn't spoken to him for years before his apparent death. And we are led to believe by Picard's manner that for some reason, the friendship didn't endure.

Before Picard leaves, Semark gives Picard a box that someone over at the Academy sent over for him the day before... Picard, curious, opens it... it's the victrola... and he realizes it means that Boothby is dead... he tells his colleagues that he must make a quick stop at the Academy before he leaves to pay his final respects to someone who meant a great deal to him...

Meanwhile, Data pays a surprise visit to the android lab at the Daystrom Institute (if it's Mars, he took the shuttle) and for the research team, it's like Michael Jordan coming back to visit his high school coaches. They are in awe of Soong's creation, ask to have their holo-grams taken with him. Their own androids have a program that only simulates selfawareness and, reflecting their creators' attitude, they have been programmed to aspire to become like Data. To them, Data is the superstar of androids. They can only imagine how wonderful it must be to have his abilities. And Data may remind us of the celebrity who feels empty as he is worshipped...

(Now, originally I wrote this as sort of a throwaway scene of self-exploration for Data... it seemed like an interesting counterpoint to Picard going back to the Academy. But as I wrote it, I became infatuated with the idea of Data as the object of hero-worship by other androids. I mean, all these years he's wanted to be like us. Now, the tables are reversed and their great wish is to be like him.

I began to wonder if there wouldn't be fun in bringing one or more of the androids along to fuel a Data subplot. You know the old saying about the teacher learning from the pupils he's teaching [quoted in the verse to Rodger and Hammerstein's "Getting to Know You", I believe]. Still not sure what it is Data should learn however. Have to be careful that we don't retell the Lal or the exocomp story again. And the risk is, of course, that it not turn into the new androids' story but that the new androids serve as a catalyst to tell a Data story. Data might get weary of being a hero to these guys. Perhaps, ironically, because they have a simulated self-awareness, he doesn't take them seriously and has to learn to. Although it steps on the exocomp ending, I can see an android sacrificing himself to save Data [rather like Gunga Din]. There is a lot of potential for humor in these androids following Data around. I'm not going to develop this much further until we talk but if we go this way, and I'd like to try, then Data has come to Daystrom to pick out a few androids because the mission requires it.)

As Data examines the blank faces of the other androids deciding which to choose, cut to -

The faces of young cadets on the campus of Starfleet Academy... as Picard walks leisurely across campus... and there is no experience quite like going back like this... seeing the young people walking the same pathways that you once walked...

He comes to the home of Boothby and it seems very much as he remembers it... he lets himself in and clearly it's in a state of disarray, someone's been packing up the dear departed's belongings... but the study looks much the same as it always did... and Picard picks up a few items and looks with nostalgia at them and perhaps even utters a quiet, Rest in Peace, Boothby. Whereupon the answer comes back: The hell I will... And Picard turns with shock to see Boothby very much alive. Boothby: Didn't anyone ever teach you to knock?

Boothby tells Picard he's just been packing up some of the old junk to make more room... but we may also get the impression that he sent the victrola to lure Picard to see him. A curious scene follows in which Boothby, who almost seems to know about Picard's confidential mission, asks about young Mister Duffy. Picard lies to the old man, reminds him that Duffy is dead. Boothby, playing the old dodderer only for effect, nods as though remembering... says what a shame it was that Picard and Duffy didn't have a chance to reconcile their differences before we lost him. Here today, gone tomorrow, they say. There's always so much left unsaid in the heart and then it's too late to say it.

Picard gets the distinct impression that Boothby is telling him not to waste this opportunity. And far from the old dodderer, this is a man who, at a hundred plus, may be the youngest man Picard has ever known.

The Enterprise's departure is briefly delayed by the late arrival of their sarium krellide ration but they finally get under way. The first complication comes as the Enterprise enters the Neutral Zone... a Romulan Warbird decloaks, apparently poised for a fight. The Captain is Joss who insists that his ship will be accompanying the Enterprise. This was not part of the arrangement, but the Romulans do not intend to let Starfleet go in and cover-up all the evidence of their own mis-deeds. As the political liaison on board, Commander Norton encourages Picard to accept the Romulan escort. Joss says he looks forward to closer relations between our peoples... and he seems to have his eye on Troi when he says it. Worf clearly doesn't like the fellow.

The journey is extremely dangerous and full of natural space hazards that force us again and again to retreat from this impenetrable morass that is truly worthy of the name, Briar Patch. It seems impossible that someone could ever get in there, let alone survive... Joss almost enjoys seeing the great Enterprise flounder in its efforts...

At a Captain's dinner, Joss continues his overt pursuit of Troi and at the same time, goes out of his way to provoke Worf. Joss hates Klingons as much as Worf hates Romulans. And when Worf finally wonders aloud how Joss could emulate a race that gave him life as the result of his mother's rape, he calmly replies that he preferred to take after his father... instead of those cowardly Klingon jumbuck who were slaughtered at Khitomer. That is a direct insult to Worf's parents and Joss knows it and it requires satisfaction.

Despite Norton's protests, Picard is forced by his respect for Worf's belief's to allow a bat'telh fight on the holodeck... he does refuse to permit it to be a fight to the death, however. Just first blood for honor. The fight is terrific but there has never been a bat'telh combatant as good as Joss... and Worf is beaten badly. Clearly, he would have been killed but for Picard's mandate. To add insult to injury, Joss catches Troi with a surprise kiss as a reward for his victory. Picard orders him off the ship. (*One of the reasons I've brought them along is to create a true villain so we can cheer when he is defeated.*)

Data and Geordi work on trying to solve the mystery of entering The Patch... and although Data doesn't want to be pestered by his android fans, they ultimately contribute the idea that helps solve the problem: the Enterprise will reenact the exact sequence of events leading to Duffy's ship disappearing and see where it takes us... *(Two notes: perhaps in this scenario, it is smarter not to have Data miss being a puppet at the start but to learn to appreciate the value of puppets as a result of this story. Second, I have not built in stops along the river, talking to natives, etc. because I feel we need to get to the planet by page 50 and, I may be wrong, but I think there's an awful lot upfront...)*

The ploy works and we enter into the core of The Patch's SPACETECH... slipping through the hazards into a dazzling hidden solar system within. Due to the unique space particles, the color of this system is almost a British racing green... it will be like the ancient explorers coming upon their first sight of the Pacific Ocean...

There is little time to appreciate the sight because almost immediately we are attacked by dozens of small alien ships... Joss, in the Romulan ship, immediately opens fire... Picard tries to open communications but there is no response... our sensors pick up a Federation starship hiding behind a moon...

Picard orders us into pursuit... and the starship is forced out of hiding... Picard tries to make contact with Duffy but the only response is a signal to withdraw from the aliens' sovereign space. Joss launches a full-out assault on Duffy's ship... and now Picard must fly the Enterprise between the Romulan ship and the smaller Starship to protect it, all the while demanding the Romulan captain to cease fire. Finally, the smaller ship is damaged and is forced to land on an M-class planet that has a golden ring around it...

Picard is convinced by the events that it must be Duffy in there and decides to go to the planet surface to try and talk him into coming back. He takes Worf, Beverly and Geordi with him on the away team.

They beam down to find a paradise as close to a Garden of Eden as we can imagine. The village, an intriguing architecture of structures built into the natural environment of a cliff, yet extremely modern, is deserted. Worf informs them that sensors indicate that the entire population is hiding in the woods on the outskirts of the village. On the word 'village', his voice cracks. He tries again and his voice cracks again. Picard asks him if he's all right. Worf assures him that he is, although his voice seems a tad high as he says it.

Then a strange thing happens to Geordi... his neo-visor suddenly malfunctions... everything is suddenly too bright for him... when Beverly checks him, she can't believe what her tricorder tells her - Geordi's optical nerve has started carrying visual impulses: Your visor isn't malfunctioning... your eyes are working! And he takes off the eye hardware: and incredibly, his eyes are just beginning to shape genuine images. Picard asks for explanations. They have none.

A beat later, they find themselves surrounded by armed resident aliens. Picard could beam out his team but he allows the capture, knowing that it is the only way to confront the man he's looking for.

They are led into the village and aliens begin to emerge from hiding, look curiously out at them. An enigmatic native host greets them and sees to it they are comfortable and well treated. They are offered fresh vegetables and fruits from the garden. There seem to be flowers everywhere. Picard presses the host for a meeting with the human who lives there. The host surprises him by saying simply - Mister Duffy will join you shortly.

They are left alone to speculate. Has Duffy set himself up as some sort of king here, or convinced these people with technology he's some sort of God? Has he gone mad? Their thoughts are punctuated by continuing odd occurrences to each of them. One of the lingering injuries that Worf suffered in his fight with Joss has disappeared. Beverly gets a pimple. All of their fingernails have grown longer. *(We need a list of this kind of stuff to spread throughout; probably need a TECH advisor to tell us what might occur to the body.)*

The door finally opens and a man emerges from the shadows and moves toward them...as he hits the light, we see it is Duffy. Exactly as Picard remembers him from the Academy. He can't be possibly more than twenty-one years old. *(This is the act one break.)*

The exposition comes quickly: this planet is virtually made of sarium krellide (another 'Stardust' metaphor). On most humanoids, it has a remarkable regenerative effect. The first effects are particularly striking - sort of like going out in a harsh sun without a sunscreen on. But the process begins to slow as the body adapts. The natives who have lived here for a millennium do not get younger but do live for several hundred years. Duffy says he's looked like this for almost two years and does not expect to get any younger. *(Why has he stayed? Maybe he's found true happiness for the first time in his life. I'm not sure.)*

The relationship between Picard and Duffy is civil, even cordial but not intimate. When Picard asks him why he's been attacking the Romulans, Duffy says the Romulans have, in fact, established an illegal installation in the Neutral Zone driven by their need for sarium krellide. Their exploratory missions brought them close to this system... they'd sent probes into The Patch designed to detect the ore and were trying to follow the readings... any time they got too close, we took action to stop them. Picard: Without consideration for the consequences to the Federation. Duffy: The Federation can take care of itself - these people can't. Picard: So you chose to ignore the Prime Directive... Duffy gets angry with Picard: I knew what the Romulans would do to this planet if they found it. And what would happen to the people who lived on it. Check your history books under Bajor or American Indians for reference.

A huge boom sounds in the distance from outside. Then another. Duffy reacts: And now, thanks to you, Jean-Luc, they're here.

They go outside to see what's going on, joining aliens gathered at an overlook to see the Romulans have already started to set up mining operations on the planet. Enraged, Picard and the away team are beamed up. Picard confronts Joss from the Bridge. Joss says in a matter of days, the new treaty will yield this sector to the Romulans. We can do with it as we please.

Commander Norton urges Picard not to interfere, the most important thing is not to do anything that would endanger the treaty. Picard doesn't waste time arguing with a flack like Norton -- he goes to call Semark directly. But he's told Semark is unavailable.

He returns alone to the surface to speak to Duffy; he urges Duffy to return with him voluntarily, address the Council, tell them what's happening here. They will listen. This is the Federation. They will not abandon these people. Duffy laughs sadly at Picard's blind faith. He's convinced the Federation has turned a blind eye to the Romulan activity in the Neutral Zone. During the last several months, there were Romulan ships everywhere, cloaking, decloaking, firing probes... the Federation's perimeter sensors must have picked them up... if Starfleet had done their job and responded to the incursions, we would not have had to take action ourselves. Duffy believes the Federation knew and yet permitted it to happen because they wanted the treaty to go through.

Picard doesn't believe it and it turns into an ugly quarrel. And through this fight, we get to the core of the conflict between the two men. We can infer from what is said that this is very much like the last fight the two of them had as young men. There was, we will begin to understand for the first time, a difficult period of transition between the Federation of Kirk's era and the Federation of Picard's era. The change of direction led to serious protests, especially on the part of young people. Duffy had become quite radical, challenging the leadership of the Federation and the direction they were taking us. Picard couldn't follow him there. Duffy had accused Picard of compromising and abandoning his principles for the sake of career. Picard had accused Duffy of refusing to adapt to the needs of a new era. 'Adapt' was an anathema to Duffy.

Once again they seem to be fighting the old fight... with Duffy's wild charges about the Federation being in collusion with the Romulans. And the scene ends with the two men as angry at each other as ever. Picard returns to the ship, tries again to get to Semark, once again is frustrated when he's told Semark is unavailable. He paces furiously trying to process what's happened. And finally, he goes to Troi and he asks her for a favor, a very difficult favor, and if she turns it down, he'll understand.

The Romulan Ship. Joss is surprised when he's told he has a guest. And it's Troi and she's dressed to kill. She does a Mata Hari number with Joss in his quarters, in a situation that almost gets beyond her control, finally sedates him with a drug under her fingernails and then penetrates the Romulan's computer system...

This is what she discovers: after the Romulan probes had found a significant source of sarium krellide, the treaty negotiations were accelerated with an understanding that the Romulans and the Federation would share the medical ore found in this sector. Then the attacks by Duffy and the aliens began, threatening the agreement. But the Romulans couldn't find Duffy and couldn't penetrate The Patch. So, the Federation agreed to send in their flagship. Picard is horrified to learn that he was in fact being used to lead the Romulans to the ore. And no one even seemed to give a second thought to the aliens who claimed that space as their own. The communications with the Romulans had been handled throughout by Commander Norton.

Picard is angrier than we've ever seen him when he confronts Norton. Confronted with the evidence, Norton admits the truth. The Federation scientists' efforts to make synthetic sarium krellide had failed completely. We desperately needed the ore. As for the aliens to whom it rightfully belongs? Norton sounds like every other bureaucrat in history when he

says, we have the Romulans word that they will be adequately compensated and moved to a hospitable location. Picard: To move them is to destroy them. Their biology depends on the environment of this planet. If you take them from the radiation or take the radiation from them, it is virtually genocide. Norton vaguely tries to assure Picard that it won't come to that, but his empty promises are interrupted when Picard does something I don't believe we've ever seen him do. He punches Norton in anger. Looming over him like Clay over Liston, he asks Norton if this was done with Semark's approval. Norton doesn't answer as he rubs his chin, only says: I'll have you up on charges, Picard. Picard answers simply, You're damned right, you will. He orders the computer to hold Norton incommunicado in his quarters and exits.

In a surprising scene, we find the poker game in progress as Picard enters, greeting everyone warmly and sits down to play a few hands. He has the sort of calm that people who have decided to commit suicide often have. And as he asks a few personal questions and makes eye contact with each member of his senior crew, we may understand that he wanted to see his family once more...

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. He knows he can no longer represent his government as it allows the exploitation of this world and he cannot abandon the aliens as they're about to be destroyed. He is prepared to sacrifice everything he has worked for to follow his conscience to join an almost impossible fight.

In civvies, Picard enters a Runabout and is surprised to find Data waiting for him... Data, as an astute observer of human behavior, knew something was up with Picard and anticipated something like this... *(This will be affected by Data's arc but it would be nice if we used emotions to advance Data a notch or two: something like Data saying to Picard: "I realized I was worried about you, Sir.")* Picard doesn't want Data to come along, telling him that there's a certain court martial in store for him. He won't let anyone share the responsibility for what he's about to do. Data: Very well, sir. I hereby consider myself taken hostage. Or: I believe that pesky emotion chip is malfunctioning again, sir. I'm not sure I can be held accountable for my actions. Picard finally permits him to come.

As he sees the Enterprise through the window as we move away from it... Picard wonders if it may be the last time he ever sees this ship.

(End of act two)

Duffy is not surprised to hear the truth from Picard but he is surprised to see Picard, out of uniform, ready to fight the good fight. You punched him? Perhaps the environment here has already had an effect on you, Jean-Luc, he says with a slight grin. And the reconciliation begins.

They begin by sabotaging the Romulan mining operations and then disappearing into the forest like Robin Hood escaping from the Sheriff of Nottingham (using dampening field TECH to disable phasers and fool tricorders).

Joss is furious and since Starfleet can't seem to control its own officers, he leads his crew to the planet surface to find the rebels, making it clear that he intends to kill Picard and Duffy when he finds them. Norton is equally outraged and orders Riker to take an away team and arrest Picard and Duffy. Riker follows the orders, knowing that he has to get to Picard before the Romulans do. The androids who are worried about Data insist on joining the search party.

The action builds throughout the third act as Picard and Duffy use guerrilla tactics to thwart the Romulans. Joss leads breathtaking sweeps through the forest in anti-grav vehicles firing plasma discharges defoliating the landscape. Picard and Duffy stay one step ahead, go on the offensive, continuing to humiliate Joss. Their goal? The only goal an outnumbered, out-armed force can have. To make the superior force suffer such costs, they ultimately have to withdraw. Meanwhile, there's also a match of wits between Riker and Picard; as Picard manages to craftily elude his own senior officers.

As the sequence continues, we begin to realize that Picard is getting younger, first psychologically and then gradually physically as well. We see that swashbuckling spirit of an earlier era revived in his heart. At the end of a particularly satisfying victory over the Romulans, he hugs Duffy with exhilaration. In a way, Picard is embracing his own youth, feeling again the bond of his lost friendship. It turns into a deeply emotional moment for him.

After Riker and his team find themselves outfoxed and trapped by Picard, he appears and tells them to take the Enterprise back to Earth and inform the council what's happened here. We must delay the approval of the treaty. Despite his loss of faith in Semark, he still believes in the Federation; he still believes in the people. Once they know the truth, they will not allow this to continue. Beverly isn't so sure: there are a lot of people who will suffer without the medical ore. Picard disagrees. Modern

medicine did not begin with the discovery of regenerative radiation. The people of the Federation will make the sacrifice, says Picard. Never underestimate the people.

Riker says Norton won't let the Enterprise leave until Picard and Duffy are captured and on board. Picard and Duffy know they can't abandon the planet to Joss and the Romulans. Picard concludes simply... we'll have to take the Romulans with us. The crew reacts: to Earth? Picard nods...

Picard and his crew, reunited, attempt to capture the Romulans, leading to a final climatic battle. Joss engages Picard in a bat'telh fight. Picard is overmatched but after several beats, he seems to gain a youthful vigor and through special effects, his image grows younger until he almost looks twenty-one again. Still, Joss is a remarkable combatant and finally is about to kill Picard, but his bat'telh is stopped on its downward thrust in mid-air by a new weapon and he turns to see Worf has arrived to save Picard's life. Joss turns to engage Worf: This time to the death, Klingon. And if we thought the first fight was something special, well, this becomes one of the great sword fights ever put on film.

Finally, Worf triumphs and Joss falls to his death and the victory is won. The Romulans are round up for transport to the Enterprise. But Duffy has been mortally wounded.

They take him to the ship to try to save his life... and as they rush him to Sickbay, we see Picard begin to age rapidly... until he looks his real age again...

In Sickbay, Duffy and Picard say a last, touching farewell between best friends. Picard promises that Duffy will not have died in vain. When he dies, Duffy also returns to his normal age.

Picard orders his crew to set a course for Earth. Norton attempts to take command and orders the Romulans released. Picard ignores him, but Riker tells him unless he's prepared to fly this ship alone, he'd do well to get out of the way. Picard gives the order to "Engage!"...

The Federation Council. The debate about the treaty with the Romulans is drawing to a close. Semark calls for a vote. And then the double doors at the rear burst open and Jean-Luc Picard enters and confronts Semark. Semark calls for the sergeant-at-arms to arrest him. But other members of the council want to hear what he has to say. Picard's speech, which I will not write here, is a passionate defense of everything the Federation stands for. He urges the Council not to approve the treaty.

Semark listens with Vulcan cool and suggests that Picard has overstated the seriousness of the situation on the planet; he has seen the reports from Commander Norton and it is clear that Picard let his emotions interfere with his duty. My duty, says Picard, is to the Federation and the fundamental principals on which it is founded. And yes I am emotional when it comes to those principles. Semark dismisses Picard's actions as irrational: he has threatened a lasting peace with the Romulans and deprived worlds of needed medical aide by his criminal acts of sabotage. The criminal act was yours, sir, says Picard impudently, causing gasps among the assembled. And even the Vulcan is having a difficult time containing his emotions. Semark: What would you tell the mother of one of our children who may die without that ore, Picard? Picard: I will not trade the life of an alien child to save one of ours... Semark sees he is not getting anywhere here, lists the criminal charges for which Picard will stand trial. As for his career as a Starfleet officer, as Captain of the Enterprise, that's over. His senior crew has been suspended from duty as well. Semark: I hope you can see the logic in what you've accomplished, Mister Picard. Because I cannot. He orders the guards to take him away and calls for the vote to begin... As the guards begin to escort Picard from the chamber, someone begins to clap in the gallery... and Picard pauses to look up and sees it is Boothby applauding, standing... and as the two men's eyes connect, a second person in the gallery joins Boothby, then a third, and another and another until the whole gallery is cheering Picard by name. As he's led out, the council members look at each other understanding the people have spoken. We can infer the treaty will be defeated and that Semark may have won the battle but has lost the war.

As for Picard's future and the future of his crew, we will have to wait until the next movie to find out...

FADE OUT

THE END

Okay, I'm sure the first topic of discussion will be the Federation's participation in the conspiracy. Picard's decision to resign becomes a far deeper dramatic turn this way. It's really what makes it work. If it were just saving the natives, heck, Picard does that every week. But now, Picard chooses to be the one who will stand up for the principles of the Federation when his leaders have failed him. It's a much more courageous thing to do and will give the film power. The great movies are about heroes who stand alone fighting for what they believe in. Put Ian McKellan in Vulcan ears as Semark and I'll give you a final scene between him and Picard that will resonate for years to come.

Eric points out correctly that some of this comes awfully close to the Maquis arc: the nature of the political situation (new treaty with an enemy), The Patch (impenetrable space like the Badlands) plus the role of Duffy as guerrilla against the enemy encroachment of this world. Part of this will be solved when we create the unique quality of the aliens and their environment. But we need to go out of our way to find the differences. The treaty gives us a clock... but the comparison to the Maquis will end if we lose the formal treaty negotiation. What other kind of clock can we come up with?