

The following fanfiction story takes place during the events of The Next Generation two-part episode "Best of Both Worlds."

**STAR TREK:
AN END AND A BEGINNING**

Captain's log. Stardate 43988.2 USS Iowa NCC-1973 Captain Edward Casey, in temporary command. *This old vessel is new to me. I have served in Starfleet for 33 years, and yet I've never had the privilege of serving on a Constitution-class ship. Until now. I wish it could've been under better circumstances. The new Borg threat has required all combat-capable vessels in this sector to be mobilized, and the resulting command crew shortages have pulled me from my desk job at Starfleet headquarters. I was set to retire in a few months. And like myself, the Iowa here was slated to be decommissioned. It received a Constitution II-class refit and systems upgrade a few decades ago, and she's the last of her kind. Except for one other Constitution-class ship, a training vessel that never got the big refurbishment. The New Jersey. She was about to join the Enterprise-A at the Fleet museum. The Iowa, in turn, was supposed to take the place of the New Jersey as the academy's new training ship. How suddenly the fortunes of war have changed things...*

"Clear all moorings. Maneuvering thrusters at station keeping until we clear space doors," Captain Casey called out. Although he was unfamiliar with this type of vessel, fleet-wide protocol was something he knew quite well. Officially, this was now the seventh vessel under his command. It wasn't supposed to be, but the impending arrival of the Borg at Sector 001 changed all of that.

Indeed, there was but a skeleton crew on board, and only a dozen or so of them were holdouts from the ship's long-term crew. Still, everyone knew their job, and there were just enough uniformed people at work on this ship right now to perform the task at hand. A task that everyone aboard her seems to dread, yet also accepts readily. Captain Casey had no time to get familiar with the small crew he had with him, but saw right away that there were no cowards here. Everyone wanted a chance to get back at the Borg for the destruction they'd already caused to a number of Federation outposts and colonies.

The ship exited Spacedock, clearing the massive doors with a style and grace that only an old starship with the lines and curvatures that harkened to a bygone era could display with ease. The dread that everyone on board felt included the knowledge that, most likely, this wouldn't just be the final grand exit from Spacedock for this classic vessel, but the final voyage of everyone aboard her, as well.

Before ordering coordinates to be calculated and a warp jump prepared, Captain Casey saw the other Constitution-class ship in orbit above Earth. The New Jersey, with her older, unmodified hull and century-old engine nacelles, spoke proudly of herself without the need for words. She was not a museum piece yet, even though she'd recently been decommissioned. She'd been underway, under her own power, the last of her kind, on a final cruise to the Fleet museum at

Athan Prime when the Borg incursion into Federation space was detected. Now, hastily reactivated and with a civilian crew, she was tasked with evacuating high-level dignitaries and as many important people as possible to a classified location, far away from the Sol System. In command of the New Jersey on this mission was a Federation ambassador who had once served in Starfleet, and had once commanded a vessel of the same class. A vessel, ironically, whose namesake was already permanently moored at the Fleet museum, her spacefaring days far behind her.

Casey knew the captain of that vessel well. A lot of people did, and he wanted to bid him a final farewell. "Hail the New Jersey," he ordered his communications officer.

The bridge screen flickered, the starfield with Earth in the foreground replaced by the image of the New Jersey's current commander. "Spock here," he said in reply to his incoming hail.

"Captain, I mean Ambassador Spock. I wish we could assist you in your efforts. Your ship must be completely full of evacuees. Is there anything we can do to help, before we rendezvous with the rest of the fleet?"

"Ambassador, is sufficient. I never sought command of a starship. Diplomacy has always been my preferred profession. The New Jersey is indeed filled to capacity. It is my hope that our destination will only be temporary."

"We'll do our best to hold off the Borg while you get underway. Admiral Hansen is mustering all that we can put together at Wolf 359 now," Captain Casey replied.

"I do not envy you the task ahead," Spock said. "Our situation is under control, despite the urgency of the matter."

"Live long and prosper, old friend," Casey said, gesturing a Vulcan salute with his Human hand.

"May it be possible for you to do the same. Spock out."

Then, the dreaded order from Captain Casey to his helmsman finally came. "Lay in a course for Wolf 359, and engage at maximum warp."

As the USS Iowa exited warp and arrived at its intended destination, comm traffic was already abuzz with Admiral Hansen issuing commands to his hastily assembled fleet of 39 starships, and their respective crews acknowledging his orders.

Each ship took up a strategic position, in the hope that the single invading vessel could at least be slowed down before help arrives. Help, in whatever form it might be. The Klingons had been contacted; they'd shown an interest in joining the battle. But, Klingon Chancellor K'mpec only sent a small fleet of vessels, and they were too far away to join the fight that was about to take place. There were rumors that K'mpec was in ill-health, and that political instability on Kronos, the Klingon homeworld, was beginning to take place.

The Enterprise-D was also en route, but it was also too far away. There was also -

{Small explosion sound effect, red alert klaxons}

The Borg. The cube-shaped vessel immediately engaged with Starfleet upon its arrival.

Captain Casey issued battle commands, as the Borg attempted to lock onto the Iowa.

"Evasive maneuvers! Rotate shield frequencies and return fire!"

The Iowa shuddered violently as the Borg scored a direct hit. Casey looked around, trying to overcome the ringing in his ears. There were small fires all about the bridge. And debris. His tactical officer and most of the others on the bridge were already dead. Looking at the viewer, he could see the rest of the fleet, what remained of it, attempting to regroup.

The ship's computer sounded a general alert.

"Warning. Outer hull breach."

Manning the weapons console as the fires around him quickly grew, Casey fired off his entire complement of photon torpedoes, scoring direct hits on the Borg cube. He smirked, not even feeling the pain of his own injuries.

His smirk faded, though, and the pain of his wounds, which were numerous, started setting in simultaneously, as he realized the torpedo impacts all did little damage to the Borg vessel, which was already repairing itself.

The viewscreen flickered once again, and the image of Locutus, the Borg drone in command of the cube repairing itself, appeared. Locutus seemed to stare at Captain Casey, before stating the obvious.

"Resistance is futile."

Captain Casey sounded the evacuation order for any surviving crew to get to the escape pods. But, he knew it was too late. He closed his eyes, and awaited the inevitable.

The USS Iowa suffered the same fate as the Kyushu, the Melbourne, and the rest of the fleet at Wolf 359. 39 vessels. 11,000 lives. The Borg were thorough.

{Constitution class, TOS series bridge sound effects in background}

The USS New Jersey arrived at its classified destination. The edge of the Romulan neutral zone.

“Hail the Romulans,” Spock ordered.

On the other side of the neutral zone, an old Romulan Bird of Prey decloaked. Its commander answered the hail.

“Ambassador Spock. We are ready to open diplomatic negotiations with you and your party.”

THE END