

"Unbroken Chain"

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TEASER

EXT. SPACE

Distant view of the Enterprise in deep space. A fair distance ahead a shuttlecraft heads away from the ship, towing two objects in a tractor beam, one behind the other. The one further back is the TEMPORATOR; it's about the size of the shuttlecraft, and looks like three concentric, coplanar rings connected by an axle, with a small, honeycomb structure at the middle. The second object is an experimental APPARATUS, a dull, silver cylinder six meters long, two wide, with an S-shaped antenna etched on one side and a one-meter diameter hatch on the other.

The shuttle comes to a stop, rotates to face the Enterprise, and releases the temporator. It then travels a short distance back towards the ship and releases the apparatus.

PICARD (V.O.)

Captain's log, Stardate 47822.3:
The Enterprise has traveled into deep space in Sector 541 to assist with temporal-jump experiments conducted by Dr. Devika Sahgaram. Dr. Sahgaram's highly regarded earlier work laid a theoretical basis for forward time-travel; she now hopes to use a device built on these principles to demonstrate that physical objects can be transported into the future in a controlled fashion.

INT. CORRIDOR

Picard and DEVIKA are walking. She is in her early thirties. Her long black hair falls in a single pony tail along the length of her back. Her skin is tawny, her eyes dark brown, alert, catching everything. She is somewhat heavy, but walks with the spring of youth. She wears a cream-colored sari with rich red embroidery, and on her forehead is a prayer-dot, also red. She speaks rapidly, in a pleasant, high, animated voice, with a definite (but not too strong) Indian accent. Her mood at the moment is buoyant with anticipation.

PICARD

I must confess, Doctor, that while I've attempted to study your work, I find the physics rather

(MORE)

CONTINUED

PICARD (CONT'D)
mystifying. Is it that for an object inside the temporator's field, time passes extremely quickly?

DEVIKA
No, Captain. The temporator's field creates in effect a warp into the future. It takes the kinetic energy of any object entering the field and transforms it into temporal energy. At that point the field collapses and whoosh!, they jump into the future.

PICARD
How far?

DEVIKA
All depends on the object's energy. More energy: further. I have predicted that one joule will lead to a jump of between 6 and 8 seconds. That shall be the first experiment.

They enter a turbo-lift.

INT. TURBO-LIFT

Picard and Devika, standing.

PICARD
I see.
(to turbo-lift)
Bridge.
(to Devika)
Doctor, something about your experiment concerns me a good deal. Is there any possibility of traveling to the past? And changing it?

DEVIKA
None. You see, the temporator can only jump to a point of higher entropy. This is a fundamental law of its physics. Another fundamental law is that entropy is always increasing, it is always greater in the future. Thus, jumps always go into the future.

PICARD
But isn't it possible to find a
(MORE)

PICARD (CONT'D)

region of higher entropy, somewhere
in the past?

DEVIKA

No, Captain. That is not how the
universe works.

Picard nods, just as the turbo-lift doors open.

INT. THE BRIDGE

Riker, Worf, Troi, Data, and additional crew. The
atmosphere is business-like but not tense. Picard and
Devika enter from the turbo-lift, Devika going to the
science station.

WORF

Captain, we've picked up distant
sensor echoes; possibly a vessel,
but no positive identification at
this time.

PICARD

Very well, keep me informed.

RIKER

Geordi just reported in: the
experiment is in place and we're
receiving telemetry. We're ready
to begin.

DEVIKA

Good, good.

She begins poring over her console's readings.

PICARD

Experiment on viewer, magnification
ten.

The temporator and the apparatus appear in the viewscreen,
the apparatus' hatch facing the temporator.

DATA

Ready to activate temporator field.

PICARD

Proceed.

Data activates the field. The three concentric rings of
the temporator, which were lying coplanar, now rotate along
the axle so that each ring is at 120 degrees to the other
two. The central honeycomb begins to blur, and a spherical,
deep-blue glow emanates from it, spreading outward. It
grows about a meter wider each second.

CONTINUED

DATA

Ready to launch test subject.

Picard turns to Devika. She nods.

PICARD

Make it so.

The hatch on the apparatus dilates and a small, shiny metal sphere emerges, traveling a meter per second towards the growing blue field.

DATA

Successful launch. Test subject energy is 1 joule to one part in ten-to-the-tenth.

DEVIKA

Excellent!

The sphere continues towards the field. The instant it touches the field the blue field lightens considerably and then suddenly vanishes, along with the temporator and the test subject, leaving just the apparatus. For a brief instant the space where it was becomes completely black, no stars visible, and then the stars return.

DATA

The test subject and the temporator are gone. Cutting magnification.

The viewscreen shows the apparatus from a considerable distance.

PICARD

Hmmm, where is it . . .

DEVIKA

Or where will it be?

There is a short pause and then the test subject and temporator reappear, in long view and some distance from the apparatus.

DATA

Test subject and temporator have reappeared, 168 meters from original position, bearing 140 mark 62. Elapsed time, 7.2 seconds.

PICARD

Congratulations, Doctor.

DEVIKA

Ah! It works!

DATA

Full telemetry received. Ready to proceed with the next experiment.

DEVIKA

Good, we now calibrate with a quarter kilogram mass traveling two meters per second.

WORF

Captain! I am reading an unknown vessel approaching rapidly.

PICARD

On screen.

The viewscreen shows a small spacecraft, a catamaran-like design with twin engines and a slim cabin mounted between and above them. The craft glistens with sharp angles and bright markings.

WORF

Checking known registries . . .
I have a possible match of a Pryterrian scout ship . . . Sir!, they appear headed on an intercept course with the temporator.

PICARD

Hail them.

WORF

No reply.

PICARD

Weaponry?

WORF

Scanning . . . Highly maneuverable craft. Powerful communications equipment. No heavy armament.

PICARD

Can they damage the device?

WORF

Only if they collide.

They watch as the spacecraft approaches the temporator, slows, and comes to a stop a short distance away.

WORF (CONT'D)

We're being hailed.

PICARD

Put them on.

CONTINUED

The main viewer shows KATYANTA in close-up, the cramped cabin of her ship a blurry smear in the background. She is humanoid, with a fine, symmetric network of indentations in the brown skin of her face, almost like a tattoo. Her hair, a deep red, lies shoulder-length, braided into patterns in counterpoint to the markings on her face. Her eyes are dark and flash with energy. She looks very serious.

KATYANTA

Federation starship, I am Katyanta of Pryterria. Speaking for all my people, we demand you cease these tests immediately!

PICARD

This is Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the starship Enterprise. We are engaged in a controlled scientific experiment. On what grounds do you make such a demand?

KATYANTA

Don't play us for fools, Captain. We've monitored the progress of this "research" at length. We know what you're up to.

Picard glances at Devika.

PICARD

Then you have the better of us. What are we up to?

KATYANTA

Developing a terrible weapon of war.

Troi suddenly looks upset. Picard begins to reply, but she interrupts him.

TROI

Captain . . .

Picard signals Worf to close the channel and turns to Troi.

PICARD

Yes?

TROI

She's certain of what she says. That this device can destroy . . . an entire civilization.

All eyes turn to Devika, who shows only perplexed surprise.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. THE BRIDGE AGAIN

Picard, Devika, Riker, Worf, Troi, Data, and additional crew.

DEVIKA

Whoever she is, she's deluded!

PICARD

(to Data)

Who exactly are the Pryterrians?

DATA

The little we know has come from isolated, deep-space contacts. No hostile incidents. They are believed to possess technology comparable to our own. There also are reports of attempts by them to acquire Federation databases, perhaps with the assistance of the Ferengi.

WORF

Whoever they are, that ship is no threat. Captain, recommend we tractor them away from the experiment and continue.

RIKER

If she believes what she says, then proceeding with the experiments may be unwise. We should find out more about the possible dangers.

PICARD

Agreed . . .

DEVIKA

Preposterous! These experiments are well controlled. There is no possibility of . . . of an explosion, or whatever she imagines!

PICARD

Doctor, that may well be the case, but until we understand the grounds for any implied dangers to this ship, we will suspend

(MORE)

CONTINUED

PICARD (CONT'D)
further experimentation. Lt. Worf,
reestablish communication.

WORF

Aye, sir.

Katyanta reappears on the viewer.

PICARD

Katyanta, I assure you and those
for whom you speak, we are engaged
in peaceful, scientific research.
We are not aware of any dangers
this device or its technology pose.

KATYANTA

I find that difficult to believe.
And even if true, we have studied
you. We know you will pursue
your experiments and exploit
the results, regardless of any
warnings. This technology cannot
be allowed to exist. We are
prepared to destroy it -- and you
-- if we must.

WORF

They are incapable of damaging the
Enterprise.

RIKER

Perhaps they have something up
their sleeve.

PICARD

Indeed.

(to Troi)

Does she believe she can actually
damage the ship?

TROI

I don't know. I don't perceive she
feels they can actually destroy the
Enterprise. But she is confident
she holds a trump card.

PICARD

(to Devika)

And you are quite convinced the
temporator cannot be used to
destructive ends?

Devika attempts to control her anger.

CONTINUED

DEVIKA

Yes, Captain. The temporator generates a tunnel into the future, nothing more.

PICARD

(to Katyanta)

It appears we are suffering from a misunderstanding as to the nature of these experiments.

KATYANTA

I doubt it.

Picard has become quite annoyed, but controls himself.

PICARD

Perhaps you would consider visiting our ship, that you may observe the process first-hand.

WORF

Sir!

Picard gestures for silence.

Katyanta starts to reply No, but then turns to consult with someone out of view. She begins to nod.

KATYANTA

I accept your offer.

PICARD

Good. Stand by for transport.

Worf closes the channel and the viewer returns to the scene of the temporator and the Pryterrian ship.

WORF

Captain, I must protest! She has made threats against the safety of the ship!

PICARD

I'm well aware of it, Lieutenant. You shall accompany her personally at all times.

WORF

Understood . . . Also recommend we raise shields.

RIKER

I have to agree. I'm starting to feel pretty uneasy with that ship so close and openly hostile.

CONTINUED

PICARD

Make it so, Lieutenant.

Worf raises the shields and then heads for the turbo-lift.

INT. TRANSPORTER ROOM

The transporter CHIEF stands at the console.

Worf enters.

CHIEF

Ready for transport, sir.

WORF

Make certain she has no weapons.

CHIEF

Of course, sir.

The chief begins transport, calmly checks the readouts twice, and finishes. Katyanta appears on the transport pad, looking grim. She is almost Worf's height, lean and tense.

WORF

I am your security escort,
Lt. Worf.

KATYANTA

Understood, Klingon.

There is no love lost between them. They exit the transporter room.

INT. OBSERVATION LOUNGE

Devika, Picard, Troi, and Riker are seated at the table. Worf and Katyanta enter. They remain standing.

PICARD

Welcome to the Enterprise.

He gestures to a chair, she sits, Worf standing behind her.

PICARD (CONT'D)

This is First Officer Riker, Counsellor Troi, and Dr. Sahgaram, the experimenter. Dr. Sahgaram assures me, Katyanta, that this experiment involves only controlled, forward time travel, and has no destructive energies associated with it.

CONTINUED

KATYANTA

Perhaps we do indeed have a misunderstanding. A few questions, if I may, and then I will know if my concerns have been misplaced.

Troi frowns. Picard glances at her.

KATYANTA (CONT'D)

(to Devika)

What assures strictly forward travel?

Devika takes on a rather hostile, lecturing tone.

DEVIKA

There is a general physical principle, that with time entropy -- global disorder -- in the universe always increases . . .

KATYANTA

Yes, yes. You generate an axial-rotation field with a kinetic-energy trigger?

DEVIKA

You have studied my papers? Yes, the kinetic energy of an object entering the field triggers the creation of a tunnel to a point of greater entropy.

KATYANTA

Objects make a single jump?

DEVIKA

No . . . They touch the spacetime world at a number of points, much like a stone skipping over water.

KATYANTA

And in an empty, flat region of space like this -- the field could grow very strong?

DEVIKA

Goodness! Yes, the field strength is bound only by the curvature of the surrounding space.

(to Picard)

I have not yet published these results.

PICARD

Katyanta, I must ask how it is

(MORE)

PICARD (CONT'D)

you know so much regarding these experiments.

KATYANTA

Captain, if I may first communicate with my ship. I now understand the scope of your experiment.

PICARD

Very well.

He opens a channel on the local viewer. A male PRYTERRIAN appears, bearded, his skin, hair and eyes the same dark colors as Katyanta. He looks deadly serious.

PRYTERRIAN

Well?

KATYANTA

As I feared. Proceed.

Troi stares at her in alarm.

TROI

Captain, her intent is hostile!

Suddenly the ship undergoes a strong jolt and the image in the viewer turns to static before snapping off.

Picard, Riker, and Troi quickly rise and head to the exit. Worf snarls, puts a hand around one of Katyanta's arms, and raises her to her feet, forcefully but not violently. Devika looks startled and a bit afraid. She has no idea what's going on.

INT. THE BRIDGE

Data, HELMSMAN, and additional crew are busily studying their readouts.

Picard, Riker, and Troi enter from the observation lounge.

The main viewer is blank.

PICARD

Report.

DATA

We were hit with an intense, broad-spectrum burst, apparently from the vessel's communications gear. It overloaded our sensors.

Picard activates his comlink.

CONTINUED

PICARD

Engineering, damage report.

LAFORGE (O.S.)

Engineering, LaForge here. I don't know what that jolt was, Captain, but I show all systems here functional.

PICARD

A large, broad-spectrum burst. Very well, Lieutenant. Keep me informed.

(to Data)

Prognosis?

DATA

While intense, the burst was brief. Sensors should be back on-line momentarily.

PICARD

Let's not fall prey to another.

DATA

Switching to narrow-band frequencies.

Katyanta enters from the observation lounge with Worf behind her, his hand securely on her upper arm.

PICARD

Your vessel attacked us, at your urging, and we have done nothing to provoke you.

She looks grim, perhaps depressed, but says nothing.

PICARD (CONT'D)

Mr. Worf, have our guest escorted to the brig.

WORF

Aye, sir!

Worf gestures to a security guard who exits with Katyanta via the turbo-lift. Worf mans the security station.

DATA

Sensors restored.

The viewer comes back. We see only stars, no ship, no temporator.

RIKER

They're gone.

CONTINUED

DATA

I have a fix on them.

PICARD

On screen.

The viewer scene shifts and the Pryterrian ship appears in the distance, the temporator in tow.

WORF

The ship is accelerating rapidly.

PICARD

Helm, pursue, maximum warp.

HELMSMAN

Answering maximum warp.

RIKER

Red alert.

Red alert begins sounding.

WORF

Recommend arming photon torpedoes.

RIKER

A ship that small, we should be able to close and hold them fast with the tractor.

PICARD

Yes, but who knows what other surprises they have for us. Arm photon torpedoes. Hold fire on my order. Let's try to catch them.

HELMSMAN

Warp 2 . . . Warp 3.1 . . . Warp 4.4.

WORF

Alien vessel approaching warp 4 . . . We are closing. Intercept in 32 seconds.

RIKER

Ready tractor beam.

WORF

Tractor beam ready.

DATA

Captain, I am detecting a sensor side-band probe. They may have locked on . . .

CONTINUED

Another strong jolt racks the ship. The main viewer fills with static and then blanks.

DATA (CONT'D)

Sensors off-line again. We are flying blind.

PICARD

Do we pursue blind or break off?

WORF

If they slow, we may collide.

RIKER

If that ship's faster, pause now and we'll never catch them.

Picard thinks briefly.

PICARD

Continue pursuit. Commander Data, I want those sensors back now.

DATA

Reinitializing sensors. Recommend programming sensors for random frequency shifts. It will reduce their resolution but should render further jamming impossible.

PICARD

Make it so.

DATA

Sensors coming back on line.

PICARD

Viewer on.

The viewer snaps back on. Dead ahead lies a deep-blue glowing sphere, almost filling the view.

WORF

They have activated the temporator!

PICARD

Hard starboard, emergency full!

DATA

Field entry imminent.

PICARD

All hands, brace for . . .

The entire bridge is flooded with a deep blue glow. There is a flash and then the bridge appears to stretch till it is twice, then three times as long as wide.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise and the temporator are engulfed by a glowing blue sphere. The sphere abruptly shrinks until it just fits around the two objects and the space between them.

The Enterprise stretches longer and longer. The surrounding stars streak and then compress around the ship, till the streaks form a narrow band of light surrounding the ship, and all else is black.

INT. THE BRIDGE AGAIN

Picard, Riker, Data, Worf, Troi, and additional crew. There is a crashing jolt and a flash of blinding white. Data turns to address Picard; his body and particularly his arms stretch out on his console, hideously long. Another flash of white. Another. They come faster now, forming a strobe effect. Another and another and another.

Suddenly the spatial distortion snaps back, with a whiplash effect throwing the crew forward in their chairs, returning to their normal dimensions. The blue glow dissipates. The viewer is black.

PICARD

Viewer on.

DATA

It is on.

PICARD

Then where are the stars??

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise; ahead of it lies the temporator. The rest of the view is completely black; no stars, no light.

The camera pulls back, and back, and back, and all is black, there is nothing but the ship and the device. Further and further back, till the Enterprise dwindles to a small point and then disappears, fading to black.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. THE BRIDGE AGAIN

Picard, Riker, Data, Worf, Troi, and additional crew.

PICARD

Sensor malfunction, Mr. Data?

DATA

Negative. Sensors functioning within operational parameters. Switching to broadband . . . still nothing.

PICARD

Position?

DATA

Negative; unable to obtain a navigational fix. Inertial tracking . . . inconsistent readings.

PICARD

Lt. Worf, damage report.

WORF

No structural damage . . .
No systems damage . . . All
decks reporting in: no serious
casualties.

The observation lounge door opens. Devika stands in the doorway. She is very calm, almost still, detached but thinking very rapidly.

PICARD

Doctor, we entered the temporator field, at high warp.

DEVIKA

Yes, I know.

PICARD

Where has it taken us?

DEVIKA

Into the future, Captain.

PICARD

This is not the future! There are
(MORE)

CONTINUED

PICARD (CONT'D)

no stars, no traces of even remote galaxies.

DEVIKA

The far future, Captain.

PICARD

Explain.

DEVIKA

I think we first need to make some measurements of the surrounding space.

PICARD

Very well. Mr. Data, you and Commander LaForge assist. Report in one hour. I want to know where we are and how we got here.

DATA

Understood, sir.

Data stands, leaves his post, and with Devika enters the turbo-lift.

EXT. SPACE

We see the Enterprise with the temporator in front of it.

The view pulls slowly back, and as it does so begins to rotate about the ship. We see utter blackness in every direction.

INT. OBSERVATION LOUNGE

Picard, Riker, Crusher, Troi, Worf.

Data, Devika, and LaForge enter and seat themselves. Devika appears surprisingly serene.

PICARD

Report.

DATA

The Enterprise was traveling warp 6.2 when it entered the temporator field. That corresponds to a net kinetic energy of approximately 10-to-the-28th joules. The approximations used to obtain solutions to Dr. Sahgaram's theory break down in this regime. We are presently unable to provide exact values for how far in time we have
(MORE)

CONTINUED

DATA (CONT'D)

traveled.

RIKER

But we have traveled forward in time?

DATA

Yes.

PICARD

Roughly how far?

DATA

Measurements of the surrounding space are consistent with a forward jump of between 600 to 800 billion years.

There follows a short, dazed silence.

RIKER

Billion?

DATA

That is correct, Commander.

PICARD

And the stars?

DEVIKA

Burned out long ago, and died.

RIKER

Our sensors don't even show stellar relics.

DEVIKA

Throughout the galactic ages, Commander, matter and energy are always gradually losing structure, losing form, losing order. The universe becomes more chaotic; higher energies give way to lower ones; light devolves into heat, and heat surrenders its warmth to black holes. This loss is entropy. It is the fundamental way of the universe.

TROI

You're saying that time has . . .
worn away . . . everything?
Energy, matter, all gone?

CONTINUED

DEVIKA

Yes! Yes! The process was no doubt hastened by life-forms, hungry for energy.

PICARD

Life-forms? Might they still exist, even now?

DEVIKA

Very unlikely, Captain. There simply is no longer enough useful energy.

There is a lengthy silence.

PICARD

How do we get home? Doctor, you assured me earlier that the temporator can only travel forward in time -- is that correct?

DEVIKA

Yes, Captain. It uses the energy of whatever object enters the field -- this ship, in our case -- to open a tunnel to a region of greater entropy. The only places of higher entropy lie in the further future. There is no going back.

CRUSHER

But the ship had enough energy to take us here.

DEVIKA

No, Doctor. The ship simply supplied the trigger. It is like a rock perched at the top of a cliff, kept from rolling off by a log fallen before it. Supply just the push to roll the rock over the log, and it plunges the length of the cliff, too. But try then to return it to the top of the cliff -- that is immeasurably more difficult.

Crusher looks angry at hearing this speech presented so calmly.

PICARD

I do not accept that we are stuck here. There must be options.

A brief silence.

CONTINUED

LAFORGE

I'm afraid I have to agree with Devika, Captain. Traveling back in time takes tremendous energy. Based on our measurements, even if we gathered up all the useful energy left in the world -- so to speak -- it wouldn't be even close to enough to get us home. We have come much, much too far.

Data hesitates for a moment, then joins in.

DATA

I too must agree. We are confronted with basic laws of physics, which state quite clearly that return is impossible.

RIKER

Well, I've got options. Two of them. One: We're not actually where we think we are, so getting home is a different problem than we think it is. Or two: the universe here isn't as dead as we think, and contains something -- or someone -- that'll help us get home.

PICARD

Well done, Number One. Very well, how do we pursue these options?

DATA

To compute the length of the jump, we compared the surrounding microwave background radiation with temperatures predicted by the standard cosmological models. There are other ways, though, of determining the age of the universe: traces of proton decay in the little matter still present in space; or measuring the large-scale curvature of space. Both methods require comparing measurements made far apart, so they will take quite a bit of time.

PICARD

Time, Mr. Data, is one thing of which we have plenty. And option two? That there is something out there?

CONTINUED

LAFORGE

The space around us appears completely isotropic -- it looks the same no matter where you look -- and it's totally empty. So I can rig the sensor array to scan for any slight matter/energy variations. Should give us a lot more range than doing detailed sweeps. Once we've done that, then we just pick a direction, head out along it at maximum warp, and scan as much space as possible. That would also fit in with taking Data's measurements far apart.

PICARD

Uh-huh. Very well. We will remain here long enough for Data's initial measurements and then embark. Mr. Worf, have the temporator stowed on board in preparation.

WORF

Aye, sir.

PICARD

(to everyone)

Dismissed.

They stand and begin to leave.

PICARD (CONT'D)

(to Riker and Worf)

Number One, Mr. Worf. I think it's time to pay our prisoner a visit.

Riker nods. Worf's lips turn down in distaste.

Picard, Riker, and Worf exit together.

INT. THE BRIG

Katyanta sits alone in her cell, dejected.

Picard, Riker, and Worf enter. Katyanta sees them but her expression does not change. Picard motions to Worf, who releases the cell's forcefield. The three of them enter the cell and remain standing.

PICARD

I believe you owe us some explanations, Katyanta, and I want them now.

CONTINUED

KATYANTA

Yes . . . I am sorry for what we did to your ship and your crew. But it was necessary.

PICARD

Why?

Katyanta is silent for a moment. The others wait expectantly, Worf frowning.

KATYANTA

Not too many years ago -- well, not too many years before the time we've now left -- our people stood on the brink where your Federation would now be standing. Our scientists had developed the temporator, and our people began exploring its uses. It soon became clear it is a terrible weapon of war. Terrible . . .

She shakes her head in painful memory.

WORF

You use it to send a starship into the far future, effectively destroying it.

KATYANTA

Exactly. Coupled with cloaking devices to hide the field, they are simply devastating. We are -- were -- not a warlike people, Captain, no more than you humans. But ask your physicist -- once the principles are known, temporators are very easy to make. With us, soon every petty tyrant, every renegade commander, every fanatic fringe group -- they all armed themselves with a weapon against which there is no defense. Conflict spread like contagion. Whole fleets disappeared, in battle.

PICARD

Surely such carnage must have led to calls for peace?

KATYANTA

It didn't matter. It was always too easy for one small player to

(MORE)

CONTINUED

KATYANTA (CONT'D)
break any ceasefire. So on the wars went. Spaceflight became too risky. Planet after planet, system and system, became isolated. Vital trade links, severed. Whole planets . . . starved. Perished. Died. Nine billion dead, Captain. Nine billion. Our civilization died.

A long silence.

KATYANTA (CONT'D)
Those of us who survived, we destroyed the remaining devices and forswore their use. And we swore never again to allow this to happen. When we found out about your experiments, we knew we had to act, to contain it immediately, or the demon would return. And containing it meant destroying the device, and all knowledge of its workings -- Dr. Sahgaram, your vessel's records . . . you.

PICARD
And so you did, employing the very weapon you hate, which you swore never to use.

KATYANTA
It was the only way.

PICARD
The ends justify the means, was that your people's way?

KATYANTA
I dare say, Captain, that you have never seen your entire world destroyed.

RIKER
You could have come talk to us, warned us of the dangers.

KATYANTA
To what end? You cannot contain power such as this. It would escape. It would destroy you. Your federation -- your world.

CONTINUED

PICARD

Some four hundred years ago, our scientists discovered an analogous power -- nuclear weapons -- and, while these weapons were used, with horrifying consequences, our societies did learn to cope with them, and matured to the point of being able to forswear their use.

KATYANTA

Yes, I know the history. And what if, four hundred years ago, not only did large governments have those weapons, but so did the small, unstable ones? The private armies? Terrorists? What if any determined person could have fabricated such a weapon in a few days? What then would've been the cost to your societies? How many billion dead? Would anything be left?

PICARD

Agreed. But we are a different people now. We have learned the responsibilities that come with wielding formidable powers.

KATYANTA

I am not willing to risk the future of the galaxy on your generous assessment of human maturity.

PICARD

You are no different than the petty tyrants you speak of. You see the world through your own paranoia, and to feed your fears cannot resist abusing the very power that destroyed your people . . .

Picard's communicator chirps.

LAFORGE (O.S.)

Captain, Data's made his initial measurements and I've completed the sensor conversion. We're ready to get underway.

PICARD

Very well. Helm, set a course, any heading, warp 8.

CONTINUED

HELM (O.S.)

Course ready.

PICARD

Engage.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise enters warp. In this empty space the vertical column of light emitted during the transition to warp dissipates much more slowly, leaving a ripple that gradually fades.

INT. THE BRIG AGAIN

Picard, Riker, Worf standing, Katyaanta sitting.

PICARD

Well, Katyaanta, let me tell you this. We will return to our proper time, and when we do we will decide for ourselves how to deal with this technology.

KATYANTA

You will not return, Captain.

RIKER

You sound awfully sure.

KATYANTA

During our wars, Commander, some six thousand Pryterrian vessels disappeared into temporator fields. Six thousand. And of those six thousand -- of all those vessels, all those people -- none -- not a one -- ever returned.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. SPACE

We see the Enterprise at great distance. It is little more than a glowing blue dot against pitch-black, empty space. It slowly moves across our field of vision.

PICARD (V.O.)

Captain's log, supplemental. The Enterprise has now been traveling at high warp for some 54 hours without our sensors detecting anything to break the relentless emptiness of this space; and morale has begun to suffer, in light of our apparently remote prospects for returning home. Commander Data has drawn my attention to one particular personnel problem, which I must now attend to.

INT. CORRIDOR

Picard walks down the corridor, looking stern. He stops outside a cabin and activates the door chime.

DEVIKA (O.S.)

Enter.

The door slides open and he enters.

INT. DEVIKA'S QUARTERS

Devika's quarters are softly lit. One wall has a large computer screen covered with equations and 3-D wireframe images illustrating different space-time topologies. In an opposite corner of the cabin lies a large, dark blue mat on the floor; a red pedestal between the mat and the wall, with wisps of fine gold lace hanging over its sides; and on top of the pedestal a shrine, also decorated on the outside with gold lace. At the base of the shrine burn two white candles. Within the shrine stand two stylized figures, each about a foot high, one a half-woman half-elephant, the other a fierce, eight-armed man, his arms all raised to different heights and bent at the elbow to different angles, forming a circle around his head. Devika sits on the mat in contemplation.

As Picard enters she turns to face him and stands.

CONTINUED

PICARD

Doctor, Commander Data tells me that you have ceased efforts to modify your theory in order to predict how far we jumped.

DEVIKA

Yes, correct.

PICARD

You find the problem intractable?

DEVIKA

No. Possibly. But not of great interest.

PICARD

Indeed? To know what has happened to us?

DEVIKA

It is clear where we are. The exact details are unimportant.

PICARD

Perhaps you are wrong. Perhaps you might learn how we may return.

DEVIKA

This is the end of time, Captain. There can be no return.

Picard considers her for a moment.

PICARD

Doctor, are you familiar with the line from Hamlet? "There are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in your philosophy?"

DEVIKA

What do you know of my philosophy?

PICARD

Hindus have long realized, even before the era of science, the vastness of time.

DEVIKA

Very good. And the wheel of life? Karma?

PICARD

Rebirth. The struggle to purify oneself?

CONTINUED

DEVIKA

Ah! When you look out that viewport, what do you see? Go ahead, tell me.

Picard briefly considers the utterly black view.

PICARD

Nothing.

DEVIKA

What I see, is the trillion-year wheel of life. All those countless stars that we knew and traveled among, they all died, billions of years ago. And from their ashes arose another generation of stars, and they too died, billions of years ago. And again, another generation, and another, on and on down the eons. But now, now they are all gone. Their ashes scattered among the heavens, their indomitable force of life, finally quenched. Magnificent!

PICARD

You find joy in this?

DEVIKA

Oh, yes. We are not separate, Captain, you and I. We are all simply different faces of the single life force that is this universe. And the cycle of life and death continues and continues until our sole goal is achieved: we come into full harmony with what we are, with what life is. Look out the viewport, and what you see is . . . nothing. The endless cycle has ended. The universe has fulfilled its purpose. We have fulfilled our eternal dream. And now, finally, we rest. Is that not cause for joy?

Picard is taken aback and for a moment does not speak.

PICARD

You believe, then, that we will find nothing else out there?

DEVIKA

I am certain of it. Nothing substantial. No life.

CONTINUED

PICARD

But our presence means that life
yet continues, even here.

DEVIKA

We are nothing, Captain. Here only
by anomaly. And in a blink of time
-- what, ten years, a hundred, a
thousand? -- we, too, will be no
more.

PICARD

And you will not return to your
physics? On the chance . . .

DEVIKA

Have you not been listening? This
is the end. Of everything! The
grandest moment of creation! What
do I care about equations, here,
now?

PICARD

Those equations have been your
life's work.

DEVIKA

Yes -- always I studied, to
understand the nature of time.
To understand its end. Now, I
experience it.

PICARD

You confound me, Doctor. And we
do need you. But you give me no
choice. I will leave you to your
contemplations.

He begins to leave.

DEVIKA

Captain -- I know this is difficult
for you.

PICARD

Do you?

He leaves.

INT. CORRIDOR

Picard enters the corridor from Devika's cabin. He frowns,
feeling upset, depressed, trying to understand why. Looking
grim he begins walking down the corridor.

INT. TEN-FORWARD

Riker, numerous others. There's a fair crowd but the atmosphere is subdued; no loud talk. Riker sits alone by a viewport. The view is completely black. He has a computer pad before him and is doing some work with it at a relaxed pace. A glass half full of a red liquid lies by his hand.

Troi enters, looking tired and vulnerable. She spots Riker, but first goes to the bar, gets a drink, and then works her way over to his table.

Riker looks up at her and smiles.

TROI
May I join you?

RIKER
By all means.

She sits and sips her drink for a moment, staring out at the empty view.

RIKER (CONT'D)
What's on your mind, Deanna?

TROI
Don't you find the view . . .
oppressive? It's so dead.

Riker considers the view briefly.

RIKER
Mmmm. Well, I certainly find it
bland. And it's getting a little
old . . . Is the view troubling
you?

TROI
It's troubling the whole crew.
Can't you tell? It's so quiet
here, quiet in the whole ship.

RIKER
Well, I have noticed morale's down
a little . . .

TROI
I saw the Captain in the corridor
just now. Even he looked glum.
It's very hard to take . . . How
far from home we are. That we may
be trapped here for . . . for the
rest of our lives?

CONTINUED

RIKER

Is that what the crew thinks? Is that what you think, Deanna?

TROI

I know we have traveled much, much . . . much further ahead in time than anyone ever has. That the basic laws of physics say we can never return, even if we could harness all the useful energy left in this dead place. Will, tell me truthfully -- what hope do we really have of going home?

RIKER

Well, like I said at the meeting. Option one: We're not where we think we are . . .

TROI

But everything we can see seems to say we are.

RIKER

We need to wait for Data's measurements.

TROI

Do you really think they'll show we're somewhere else?

RIKER

They might.

TROI

Will . . .

RIKER

They might. There's a chance. And option two: there's something out there that can help us, and we just have to find it.

TROI

There's nothing out there, Will.

RIKER

Well, we're still scanning.

TROI

Nothing alive.

RIKER

How're you so sure?

CONTINUED

TROI

Until these last few days, I never realized it. But -- back home -- wherever we traveled, even in the deepest space, when I looked out the viewport, I always felt a presence. I felt the presence of a living universe, one full of living beings. This universe is dead, Will. The presence is gone. We are it. There is nothing else alive out there, nothing for as far as we want to go. We can run at maximum warp till the engines burn out -- no life.

She bows her head and closes her eyes. Riker takes her hand. After a moment she opens her eyes again.

TROI (CONT'D)

Will, what will we do? Trapped here? Completely alone? Till we die?

Riker thinks for a moment.

RIKER

You know how when you're growing up, you dream sometimes of being marooned on a deserted planet? I sure did. Some place where life is much simpler, and you can do what you want, and -- in my case -- where Dad wasn't. And if I had my planet, maybe some days I'd take off and go exploring. And other days I'd head down to a nice cold lake for a dip, maybe go fishing. And others I'd play mindless computer games, dawn to dusk. And others I'd lie in a hammock and read a book till I fell asleep in the sun.

Troi smiles a bit at the thought.

RIKER (CONT'D)

Just really loaf, and enjoy myself. Live at my own pace. Did you ever have that sort of daydream? Whole planet to yourself?

Troi looks a little embarrassed.

TROI

I'd play music. I'd garden. And
(MORE)

TROI (CONT'D)

eat hot fudge sundaes . . .

RIKER

Well, let me tell you, Deanna.
If I were trapped on my deserted
planet -- if I were stuck there
for the rest of my life, no hope
of return -- and of all the people
I've ever known, I could pick only
one friend to have with me: it
would be you.

TROI

Oh, Will . . .

RIKER

And I'll tell you one more thing.
Even here, at the end of time, they
still have hot fudge sundaes. How
about we get one?

Troi smiles, and is about to respond when Riker's
communicator chirps.

RIKER (CONT'D)

Riker here, go ahead.

LAFORGE (O.S.)

We need you on the bridge,
Commander.

RIKER

What's up, Geordi?

LAFORGE (O.S.)

Looks like our sensors have picked
up something.

Troi and Riker exchange surprised looks.

RIKER

Well, what do you know?
(to LaForge)
On my way.

TROI

I'll join you.

RIKER

You bet.

They stand and head for the exit.

INT. THE BRIDGE

LaForge, Picard, Worf, Data, Helmsman, plus additional crew.

The turbo-lift doors open and in walk Riker and Troi. They go to their usual stations.

RIKER

What sort of readings, Geordi?

LAFORGE

Well, as yet we're too far away for anything more than a low resolution image, which I should have . . .
 Yep, got it.

PICARD

On screen, full magnification.

The viewscreen fills with a grid of orange lines against a black background.

PICARD (CONT'D)

I don't see anything.

Data points to the upper right corner of the screen.

DATA

There.

Sure enough, there's a slight irregularity in the grid there. The lines are not absolutely straight, but curve gently.

PICARD

Helm, engage an intercept course.

HELMSMAN

Aye, sir.

The grid starts moving toward the center of the viewscreen, and the distortion slowly grows in size.

LAFORGE

Should be able to increase resolution momentarily . . . There.

The grid lines become finer and the distortion is now more clearly evident, outlining an oblong shape.

PICARD

How soon to a full visual image?

LAFORGE

Any minute now . . .

CONTINUED

All eyes watch the viewscreen with intent.

LAFORGE (CONT'D)

Full visual.

The image resolves itself. It's a Pryterrian ship, similar to Katyanta's, but what were sharp angles on her ship are rounded here. The ship's markings are blurred, indistinct.

DATA

A Pryterrian vessel, Captain.

PICARD

Hail it, Mr. Worf.

WORF

No response.

DATA

No life signs detected. No apparent energy sources.

PICARD

Helm, take us to within 5,000 meters. Commander LaForge, ready a tractor beam to bring the vessel into Shuttle Bay 2. Mr. Worf, escort our prisoner to the Shuttle Bay. She may prove helpful.

Worf, LaForge, and Helmsman acknowledge. Worf exits via the turbo-lift.

INT. THE BRIG

Katyanta sits alone in her cell.

Worf enters, disables the forcefield.

WORF

The Captain has instructed me to escort you to view an object we just encountered. One of your vessels . . .

She nods emotionlessly, stands, and together they exit.

INT. CORRIDOR

Worf and Katyanta walk down the corridor, in silence for a moment.

KATYANTA

Tell me, Klingon. What would your race do, armed with temporators?

CONTINUED

WORF

It is the weapon of a coward. A Klingon would not stoop to using one.

KATYANTA

Ah, yes. The famous Klingon obsession with honor and glory.

WORF

I would not expect you to understand honor.

They enter a turbo-lift.

INT. TURBO-LIFT

Worf and Katyanta.

WORF

(to turbo-lift)

Shuttle Bay 2.

KATYANTA

How can it matter, the details of how you kill, and how you die?

WORF

These things separate the warrior's heart from the coward's. The coward is no more than -- a hungry animal. The warrior, by facing death, defeats this nature, becomes fully alive. That is our glory.

KATYANTA

Then tell me, Klingon, where about us, in this dead space, lies the glory of the Klingon empire now?

Worf points to his heart.

WORF

Here. It lives here.

The turbo-lift doors open and they exit.

INT. CORRIDOR

Worf and Katyanta walking towards the shuttle bay.

KATYANTA

And when you die a meaningless death, out here in this emptiness, then what will have been the point of all the Klingon glory?

WORF

The point will have been that we lived with honor, and died with pride, even in the face of ultimate defeat.

KATYANTA

You are such a fool!

They have reached the shuttle bay and the door opens. Worf's eyes narrow in contempt.

WORF

Though the remainder of my life will be a waste, if I'm forced to spend it listening to you.

Worf gestures to Katyanta to enter. She does, and when she can no longer see him he frowns unhappily.

INT. SHUTTLE BAY

Picard, LaForge, Riker, Crusher, and Troi.

The Pryterrian vessel is gliding through the bay doors, suspended on a tractor beam.

Katyanta enters, and then Worf.

The vessel comes to a rest and LaForge switches off the beam. Troi begins shaking her head negatively. Crusher and Data consult their tricorders.

CRUSHER

Still no life signs. I'm not even picking up microbes.

DATA

The interior is very cold -- essentially the temperature of open space. No active systems whatsoever.

PICARD

(to Katyanta)

Recognize it?

KATYANTA

Pryterrian. A model from the later part of the wars.

Picard nods to LaForge, who activates a device that sends a golden beam about two inches in diameter to the ship.

LAFORGE

Basic power restored.

CONTINUED

DATA

Reading major system damage.

PICARD

Let's see what's inside.

LaForge goes to the hatch and works a control. The hatch creaks open part way and jams. A cloud of vapor pours out, ice crystals forming as it dissipates.

Worf goes to the hatch and forces it open with a heavy pull. Fine dust dribbles out the bottom.

Worf enters the vessel briefly and returns, nodding to Crusher. She enters. Picard follows, motioning to Katyaanta to join him.

INT. PRYTERRIAN VESSEL

Worf, Crusher, Picard, and Crusher. The vessel interior is very narrow, lit only with emergency lighting, most of which does not function. The cabin shows signs of great wear: metal edges eaten away, glass panels pockmarked with smooth holes, strips of dust where there once were plastic seals, paint faded and blistered, peeling away at the lightest touch. It is still cold enough to frost everyone's breath.

The four of them crowd forward and then stop.

Stretched out on the deck before them is a figure in an extremely tattered uniform. But the figure is not a body, just a mound of dust in the shape of a skeleton.

Katyaanta suppresses a gasp. Worf looks grim.

They then see another pile of dust and a crumpled uniform in one of the command chairs, and in front of the chair a pair of boots, each half-buried in a mound of dust. Crusher works her tricorder.

Picard turns to Katyaanta. She has tears in her eyes.

PICARD

Did you know them?

KATYANTA

No. No, I did not.

PICARD

(to Crusher)

Doctor, what has happened here?

CRUSHER

Jean-Luc . . . They have been
dead . . . for millions of years.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. SPACE

We see the Enterprise from a considerable distance, a glowing blue dot, heading straight towards us. The ship grows larger and larger as it approaches, finally dropping out of warp in front of us.

PICARD (V.O.)

Captain's log, supplemental. We are now entering our 16th day of travel in this empty space. Since our initial encounter we have found two more Pryterrian vessels, each as ancient and lifeless as the first. We are now ending our high-warp journey so that Commander Data can complete measurements telling us precisely how far into the future we have come. I remain unsure, however, what solace the more exact figure shall provide the crew.

INT. ENGINEERING

Data and LaForge are seated at a computer console.

LAFORGE

Okay, that ought to do it. Time to roll up our sleeves and start analyzing the data.

Data begins meticulously rolling up his right sleeve.

LAFORGE (CONT'D)

Uh, Data?

Data stops, thinks for a moment.

DATA

A colloquialism?

LAFORGE

Yeah.

Data meticulously unrolls his sleeve.

They turn to another computer console, but Data pauses.

CONTINUED

DATA

Geordi. I have something on my mind.

LAFORGE

You do?

DATA

Something I would like to discuss with you.

LAFORGE

Okay. What?

Data looks a bit hesitant.

DATA

Energy.

LAFORGE

Energy?

DATA

I have computed how long the Enterprise can remain functional before exhausting all available useful energy sources.

LAFORGE

And? How long?

DATA

Assuming the warp engines are not used, and procreation remains at its historical rate, and replicator use is restricted to high protein food sources . . .

LAFORGE

Yeah, yeah, there are a lot of parameters. What's the bottom line?

DATA

The "bottom line" lies between 56 and 72 years.

LAFORGE

And then what?

DATA

Then -- life support failure.

LAFORGE

Oh . . . And that upsets you?

CONTINUED

DATA

Everyone aboard will be dead within
72 years.

LAFORGE

Well, that's quite a while.

DATA

Everyone, that is, except me.

LAFORGE

Oh. You'll be alone, then.

DATA

Yes.

LAFORGE

That is an unpleasant thought.

They sit in glum silence for a moment.

LAFORGE (CONT'D)

Data, how much longer, after that,
will you live?

DATA

This, too, I have calculated. If
I cease all mechanical motion,
and reduce thought activity to
the minimum necessary to support
consciousness, then I have enough
internal energy for 480 more years
of life.

LAFORGE

Mmmm. That's a while.

DATA

Yes. But after that, I will die.

LAFORGE

I see. Not a pretty picture, the
long-term view, is it?

DATA

What I find intriguing, though, is
that I never pursued this line of
reasoning before.

LAFORGE

How do you mean?

DATA

Previously, I thought there was
a possibility I would never die.

(MORE)

CONTINUED

DATA (CONT'D)

And yet, I knew even then that the cosmological fate of the universe was to bring it to a state such as this. Therefore I should have realized long ago that ultimately, even if very long-lived, eventually I would die. Why did I not realize this before?

LAFORGE

Hey, mortality is one tough reality to face. It's human not to dwell on it -- it can be pretty upsetting.

DATA

Does it upset you, Geordi?

LaForge shrugs.

LAFORGE

Sometimes. Most of the time, I'm too busy being alive.

DATA

An interesting juxtaposition: the act of living can preclude the worry of not living.

LAFORGE

Yep, that's how it often works. So how about you stop brooding and start analyzing this data?

DATA

Yes! . . . Geordi, I -- I will miss our friendship. When you are dead.

LAFORGE

You're brooding! But okay, listen, we'll try to make the most of the next 72 years, all right?

Data nods seriously, Yes. LaForge laughs, shaking his head in mock dismay, completely baffling Data. They turn to the computer console.

INT. PICARD'S QUARTERS

Picard is lying on his bed, in uniform, trying to read a book. He makes a little progress, sighs, puts it aside, and closes his eyes. His lips curl down in fatigue and melancholy.

The door chime sounds.

CONTINUED

PICARD

Come.

Crusher enters, concerned but trying to mask it somewhat.
Picard sits up on his bed.

CRUSHER

Am I disturbing you?

Picard thinks a moment.

PICARD

No. Come in, have a seat.

CRUSHER

I -- I've noticed you seem rather
depressed of late.

PICARD

Is that so?

CRUSHER

Actually, for quite a while.

PICARD

If you are here in an official
capacity, wouldn't Counsellor Troi
be more appropriate?

CRUSHER

I'm here as a friend, Jean-Luc.

He considers this for a moment.

PICARD

I appreciate your concern.
I . . . have been feeling somewhat
depressed for a while.

CRUSHER

It is hard, being trapped here, so
far from home.

PICARD

Yes. But while that concerns me a
great deal . . . that's not what's
bothering me.

CRUSHER

Well, what then?

He looks off into the distance a moment, marshaling his
thoughts.

CONTINUED

PICARD

You know, Beverly, we live our entire lives under a shadow, knowing that one day we will die. And the one true solace we have, is how life always continues about us, and will continue after we are gone. An unbroken chain. As we explore space, we learn more and more how rich and full of possibilities our universe is, how -- eternal. And yet, now, here, we are at the end of time. Life is no more. The chain is broken. When we are gone, life will be gone, forever . . . To what end, this creation?

He looks downward, depressed. Crusher gets up from her chair and sits on the bed besides him. She takes his hand.

CRUSHER

I've been in this place before, Jean-Luc. Where life ends, and all that's left is emptiness. When Jack died. I was all alone, the chain of my life broken. It took a long, long time to overcome my grief -- or most of it, anyway. But as I did, I realized something. That life is not about continuity, connections to yesterday and tomorrow. It's about today. About being with those we love, sharing our lives together, today.

PICARD

I do have fond memories, of some of those todays we shared.

CRUSHER

You have always been a great and wonderful friend.

They look into each other's eyes and a tension becomes palpable between them.

Then Crusher breaks off her glance.

CRUSHER (CONT'D)

I must ask you something. And I need an honest answer.

PICARD

Yes?

CONTINUED

CRUSHER

Do you think we will return home?

PICARD

I don't honestly see how.

Crusher looks at the floor.

CRUSHER

I was afraid you'd say that. What about -- well, I had a crazy thought a few nights ago. What about Q? Surely, if he's still around, he has the power to return us?

PICARD

I thought about Q some nights ago, too. And discussed the matter with Data.

CRUSHER

And?

PICARD

Data tells me that even the apparently all-powerful Q uses energy to work his wonders. A great deal of energy. If Q still exists, even he is now powerless. As good as dead.

CRUSHER

What if Data's wrong? What if Q doesn't require energy?

PICARD

Well, in any case, we haven't heard from him.

CRUSHER

Then we should try something, try to contact him.

PICARD

Beverly, we are stuck here. This is our today, and our tomorrow. This is our reality.

Her face falls and she works at holding back tears.

CRUSHER

When Jack died -- I remember that first, terrible night. Just holding Wesley, crying, aching

(MORE)

CONTINUED

CRUSHER (CONT'D)
so much inside . . . I hurt so
much . . . I was so alone. I
promised, that I would not lose
Wesley too. I would never leave
him, and I would never lose him.

Picard puts his arm around her.

CRUSHER (CONT'D)
That was what kept me . . . going.
My promise, to my son. And now
I've lost him. He died, six
hundred billion years ago, gone
forever.

She begins to cry.

CRUSHER (CONT'D)
And I just can't bear it, I've lost
my son. He's gone, no matter what
I promised, I can't bring him back.
They're both gone . . . Oh, God,
what I would give, to have them
back . . .

She continues crying for a moment while Picard holds her,
and brushes away her tears.

With time, she stops.

CRUSHER (CONT'D)
I'd better go.

She wipes her eyes and stands. She goes to the door, but
instead of leaving, lingers.

They look at each other, a little bit too long, Picard
acutely aware of her pain.

She leaves.

Picard falls back on the bed, staring at the ceiling,
depressed further still.

He then forces himself to his feet and goes over to the
empty viewport. He looks out it for a while.

PICARD
Q? . . . Are you out there? Are
you watching us, even now, enjoying
our despair? Are you still there,
with your flash, and your smirk,
and your powers? Do you hear me,
Q? Tell me what you would have me
do. What must I do? . . . Q! Name
(MORE)

PICARD (CONT'D)
your price! Make your demand,
I will meet it! Only answer me.
Answer me, Q! Are you out there?

Silence. Picard waits. The silence grows.

His communicator chirps.

DATA (O.S.)
Data to Captain Picard.

PICARD
Yes?

DATA (O.S.)
The measurements are complete.

PICARD
And?

DATA (O.S.)
This is not our universe.

Picard is stunned.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. OBSERVATION LOUNGE

Picard, Data, Devika, Riker, Crusher, LaForge, Troi, Worf.

PICARD

Now, Data, explain what you mean by saying this is not our universe.

Devika frowns.

DATA

The original intent of my measurements was to provide a better estimate of our position in time. But the results I obtained for these two new measurements -- the space-time curvature, and proton decay signatures -- are inconsistent, both with my original measurements and with each other.

DEVIKA

You made an error.

DATA

I do not believe so, Doctor. I checked all my calculations and lines of reasoning.

PICARD

Then where are we?

DATA

There is a cosmological theory that when the universe finally comes to its end -- all matter and energy vanishing into a vast, central black hole -- then a new Big Bang occurs, giving birth to another universe.

PICARD

Another?

DATA

Yes, beginning the cycle anew.

Picard is greatly intrigued.

CONTINUED

PICARD

And that universe . . . gives rise to yet another?

DATA

That is the theory.

DEVIKA

These theories have been discredited.

DATA

Not entirely. In searching the cosmology archives I found an unorthodox work done by the physicist Mburu in the mid-22nd century. It includes predictions for the phenomena I measured. All three of my measurements are consistent with the predictions: we have traveled so far forward in time that our old universe is gone. This is a later one.

CRUSHER

And an empty one?

DATA

No more than ours. We traveled to a high entropy region in this universe, very late in its lifetime.

CRUSHER

You mean we came here by tunneling through the end of one universe and the beginning of another?

DATA

I believe that is correct.

CRUSHER

Wow.

RIKER

Well, this is all very interesting, but what does it mean?

Data does not have an answer. After a pause, Devika replies, in a surprisingly calm tone.

DEVIKA

It means, Commander, that if Mr. Data's premise is correct, there may be a way to return home.

CONTINUED

This startles everyone.

PICARD

Explain.

DEVIKA

If you assume that there is not just one universe, but a succession, then it follows that there may well have been a universe which preceded ours.

PICARD

Yes . . .

DEVIKA

That universe will have had an era of extremely high entropy, just before its end; even higher than the entropy here.

LAFORGE

So the temporator may be able to jump from here, back in time, to there.

DEVIKA

Perhaps.

RIKER

It can go back in time after all?

DEVIKA

Its physics constrain it to always seek higher entropy. When dealing with only one universe, that forces it forward. But if more than one, who knows?

TROI

Even if what you say is correct, what good is tunneling from here to an even more dead place?

DEVIKA

The trick is not to make the entire journey.

PICARD

How can that be?

DEVIKA

While the temporator must make the entire journey, the Enterprise need not.

CONTINUED

RIKER

It's possible to leave the tunnel
in the middle of the trip?

DEVIKA

As objects travel through the
field, they periodically touch
ordinary spacetime. Do you recall
the white flashes when we made
our jump? Those were the instants
during which we did so. Apply
the engines at precisely such an
instant, and I believe you can
leave the field.

WORF

But how do we know which instant to
pick?

DEVIKA

Ah. That is difficult. If we
knew how many flashes occurred last
time, it would again be after that
many.

Data reviews his memory for a moment.

DATA

68. There were 68 flashes.

DEVIKA

Indeed?

Data nods.

PICARD

If we enter the field again, how do
we know it will take us into the
past, and not the future?

DEVIKA

Our recent arrival created a small,
local decrease in entropy. The
time just before we arrived has
greater entropy. With luck, that
will be enough to bias the tunnel
towards the past.

Picard is not entirely happy with this.

PICARD

I see. There are quite a number
of assumptions here. Doctor, what
will happen if we attempt this and
Data is wrong, this really is our
universe, and there are no others.

CONTINUED

Devika smiles to herself.

DEVIKA

We will travel much further still into the universe's future. As the universe ages now, space itself contracts, leaving more and more of the universe dominated by black holes.

DATA

Indeed, if I am wrong then we may well materialize near a black hole and be destroyed. This could even happen if I am correct, and we go the wrong direction.

The previous enthusiasm wanes.

CRUSHER

Wonderful.

PICARD

Mmmm. Yet even in light of these risks, it appears we must try. Is that agreed?

The officers nod in unhappy consensus.

PICARD (CONT'D)

Very well. Commander LaForge, see that the temporator is launched and ready for activation. Data, prepare the helm for our entrance into the field and subsequent exit therefrom.

DATA

Yes, sir.

PICARD

I will inform the crew of what we are about to undertake.

He looks to see if there are any further comments. There aren't.

PICARD (CONT'D)

Dismissed.

They begin to leave.

PICARD (CONT'D)

(to Devika)

Doctor . . . a word if I may.

He waits until the others have left.

PICARD (CONT'D)

In light of our earlier discussion, I realize it must have been difficult for you to, well, accept the premise that we are in a different universe than you imagine. I wanted to say, I greatly appreciate your contributions.

DEVIKA

I do not accept the premise.

PICARD

Oh?

DEVIKA

No. I believe Mr. Data is wrong.

PICARD

You do . . .

DEVIKA

If he is right, then time goes on forever. And there is no purpose to life. The wheel spins and spins. Never do we attain release.

PICARD

This upsets you.

DEVIKA

Greatly. If it were true, then life is meaningless.

PICARD

Then I am puzzled as to how you were able to accept Data's premise, and present us with a way home.

DEVIKA

As I said, I do not accept the premise. But being a scientist, I cannot simply deny it. Instead, I have devised a way to test it. Either Data is right, we succeed in returning home, and life is meaningless; or he is wrong, we fail . . . and life has meaning.

PICARD

Quite an experiment.

She nods.

CONTINUED

DEVIKA

Now I will inform Mr. Data as to what calculations he must make to correctly enter the field. Then, I shall wish to be alone. To pray.

She heads for the door.

PICARD

Doctor? What shall you pray?

DEVIKA

That we fail, of course.

She exits, leaving Picard uneasy and reflective.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise, at rest in empty space. A shuttlecraft emerges, towing the temporator behind it. It makes its way a distance behind the ship and releases the device. The shuttlecraft then makes a broad turn and heads back to the shuttle bay.

INT. THE BRIG

Katyanta sits in her cell, lost in memories.

Picard enters and walks to just outside the forcefield. Katyanta's reverie breaks.

KATYANTA

To what do I owe the pleasure?

PICARD

We believe we know a way to return home. We will try it shortly. If we fail, we may instead be destroyed. I wanted you to now this.

KATYANTA

You will fail.

PICARD

I do not understand your insistence.

KATYANTA

During our wars, I became separated from my family. My mate. Our daughters. They were cut off, stranded on a starving planet. A ship risked the run, brought them a message. From me. Telling them to board the ship, risk the flight,

(MORE)

KATYANTA (CONT'D)
and we would be reunited.

Picard knows what's coming, speaks reluctantly.

PICARD

And?

KATYANTA

Disappeared. Into the future.
Into this future. Somewhere out
there is their vessel. Three
uniforms, filled with dust. And
you think they could have returned,
had they put their minds to it.

Picard stands silently for a moment. Then he deactivates
the forcefield.

PICARD

You're free to go. If we succeed,
then the temporator is no longer
the unstoppable weapon you fear,
and you may return to your ship.
If we fail . . .

KATYANTA

Then I join the dust of my family,
and rest. And we were right, to
have attacked you.

Picard does not care for this last comment.

His communicator chirps.

LAFORGE (O.S.)

LaForge to Captain Picard.

PICARD

Go ahead.

LAFORGE (O.S.)

We're ready.

PICARD

On my way.
(to Katyanta)
Join me on the bridge. If you
wish.

KATYANTA

Thank you, Captain.

They exit together.

INT. THE BRIDGE

Riker, Troi, Data, Worf, and additional crew are at their stations.

Picard and Katyanta enter from the turbo-lift. Worf stares for a moment at Katyanta but says nothing. Picard heads for his chair. Katyanta stands at the railing behind him.

PICARD

Report.

DATA

We are positioned so that with normal acceleration we will arrive at the temporator at warp 6.683.

PICARD

On screen.

The viewer shows the temporator in the distance.

PICARD (CONT'D)

Activate temporator.

DATA

Activating.

A deep blue glow begins radiating from the temporator.

PICARD

Ready helm.

DATA

Helm ready.

PICARD

Engage.

EXT. SPACE

We look from behind the Enterprise, the temporator field glowing ahead in the distance.

The Enterprise begins to accelerate, enters warp, again with a lingering warp-flash, and continues toward the field.

INT. THE BRIDGE AGAIN

DATA

Warp 4. 4.8. 5.3.

The crew brace themselves, Katyanta leaning on a handrail.

DATA (CONT'D)

Warp 5.9. 6.2. Entering
(MORE)

CONTINUED

DATA (CONT'D)
field . . . exactly now.

The entire bridge is flooded with a deep blue glow and then appears to stretch longer and longer.

INT. SICK BAY

Crusher sits alone at her desk, looking both afraid and hopeful.

The field envelops her.

INT. DEVIKA'S QUARTERS

Devika is seated before her shrine in prayer.

The field envelops her.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise, awash in blue light, suddenly elongates.

INT. THE BRIDGE AGAIN

Everything is heavily distorted, greatly stretched out. Flashes of brilliant white light form an eerie strobe effect.

The flashes come more quickly. A terrible screech fills our ears, possibly a cry, impossible to tell from where.

Data attempts to speak but his words are garbled, a jumbled, unintelligible growl. His monstrously long finger is poised over a button.

He suddenly pushes the button.

A fraction of a second later, the flashes cease, the field breaks off. The elongations contract, and the bridge returns to normal. Everyone attempts to find their bearings.

The viewer is black.

Katyanta flashes with elation.

And then the blackness melts into stars. The temporator is gone. A wave of relief passes through the bridge crew. Katyanta's elation begins to crumble.

PICARD
Position?

DATA
Roughly a quarter light year from
(MORE)

CONTINUED

DATA (CONT'D)
 where we left.

KATYANTA
 No . . .

PICARD
 Time?

DATA
 A moment . . . Six hours, 22
 minutes before we left. Hmmmm. I
 appear to have erred slightly.

PICARD
 Well done, Mr. Data. Very well
 done.

Katyanta begins to quietly weep.

Picard activates his intercom.

PICARD (CONT'D)
 Attention, all hands . . .

INT. SICK BAY

Crusher sits with her head on her desk.

PICARD (O.S.)
 . . . We have successfully exited
 the temporator field in the midst
 of its tunneling . . .

She sits up, looking hopeful, listening intently.

INT. DEVIKA'S QUARTERS

Devika is still seated at her shrine, but her eyes are fixed
 on the stars glowing outside her viewport.

PICARD (O.S.)
 . . . We have returned to our
 proper time and position . . .

Devika looks confused, depressed, overwhelmed, thoughts
 racing through her head.

PICARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 . . . We are home . . .

She looks back at her shrine, grabs the hair on top of her
 head, and pulls, hard, a wail building in her throat.

INT. THE READY ROOM

Picard sits at his desk, nominally doing work but still preoccupied with memories.

The door chimes.

PICARD

Come.

Crusher enters, smiling.

PICARD (CONT'D)

Well, I guess I was wrong, telling you we were stuck there.

CRUSHER

It's the sort of mistake I can live with, Jean-Luc.

PICARD

As can we all. What a fantastic experience . . . to have journeyed to the end of time. And beyond. To think that billions and billions of years from now, you and I and this ship will suddenly materialize in a long dead universe; a universe born out of this universe's death.

CRUSHER

And that, even when that universe dies, another will begin.

Picard shakes his head in amazement.

PICARD

How life goes on.

CRUSHER

Indeed. How did Katyanta take it?

PICARD

Overwhelmed. How could she not be? To escape the fate that destroyed her world . . . everything . . . To realize that her world's end need never have happened . . .

CRUSHER

I can't help but wonder: Katyanta's people, the Pryterrians. They lost many, many ships to that same future. Yet none of those ships ever discovered how to return home. Why not?

CONTINUED

PICARD

I've wondered that myself. Perhaps they lacked the instruments to detect they were in another universe. Or the rather obscure physics, to make sense of such measurements, and realize that return was possible.

He thinks for a moment.

PICARD (CONT'D)

Or perhaps the frame of mind that readily accepts war, cannot also accept a world full of other possibilities, never before imagined.

He frowns.

PICARD (CONT'D)

What a loss . . . What terrible things this world has seen . . .

He looks out the viewport.

PICARD (CONT'D)

And what wonders . . .

EXT. SPACE

We see a distant view of the Enterprise, slowly moving across a sky crowded with stars.

THE END