STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

"The Last Outpost"
#40271-107

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REVISED FINAL DRAFT

AUGUST 7, 1987
CAST

PICARD
RIKER
DATA
TROI
BEVERLY
TASHA
WORF
GEORDI

DAIMON TAAR (FERENGI)
TWO TEEN BOYS
MATTHEWS
POLA
TRANSPORTER CHIEF
TASHA
FERENGI
LETEK (LEADER)
MORDOC
KAYRON
PORTAL
STAR TREK: "The Last Outpost" - 8/7/87 - SETS

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION
"The Last Outpost"

SETS

INTERIORS                      EXTERIORS

ENTERPRISE                     USS ENTERPRISE
Main Bridge
Conference Room                FERENGI VESSEL
Briefing Room
(re-dress of Ready Room)        PLANET SURFACE (GAMMA TAURI IV)
Transporter Room
FADE IN:

1 EXT. SPACE - STARSHIP (OPTICAL)

A DOT OF LIGHT becomes a starship, as the USS Enterprise rockets directly TOWARD CAMERA, driving hard at warp speed... in chase.

PICARD (V.O.)
Captain's log, stardate 41194.6. We are in pursuit of a starship of Ferengi design. Our mission is...

2 INT. ENTERPRISE - MAIN BRIDGE

At their regular stations, intent upon the chase, are PICARD, RIKER, TROI, DATA, GEORDI, TASHA and WORF.

PICARD (V.O.)
(continuing)
... to intercept and recover a T-9 energy converter which the Ferengi stole from an unmanned monitor post on Gamma Tauri IV -- a theft which automatic scanners recorded, providing us...

3 ANGLE ON VIEWSCREEN (OPTICAL)

Part of the vast galaxy STARFIELD, streaking by as the Enterprise plummets through in high warp. A computer targeting CIRCLE silently searches the screen.

PICARD (V.O.)
(continuing)
... with the long awaited opportunity to make close contact with a Ferengi vessel. If we succeed in this chase, it will be Starfleet's first look at a life form... which discounting rumor, we know almost nothing about.
3 CONTINUED:

The circle stops, brightens, BEEPS -- a signal "on target."

4 EMPHASIZING PICARD

RIKER
There she is!

PICARD
Enlarge.

5 ANGLE INCLUDING MAIN VIEWER (OPTICAL)

The circle becomes a magnifier, homing in on a non-moving PINPOINT OF LIGHT, as the outside scene continues to streak.

PICARD
What is their course?

6 INTERCUT PRINCIPALS AND VIEWER (OPTICAL)

All eyes are intent on the viewscreen. Considerable excitement on the bridge in anticipation of seeing the Ferengi vessel. Suddenly the growing pinpoint veers sharply left.

GEORDI
They are now angling through that solar system, Captain.

PICARD
Identify.

DATA
Listed as Delphi Ardu, sir.
Eleven planets, unexplored.

RIKER
Stay with them, La Forge.

The Enterprise readjusts, and the starfield shifts to the right, placing its target back "on center." Another BEEP as that occurs.

TASHA
Sensors read a power surge on their last maneuver, Captain.
CONTINUED:

GEORDI
They are dropping to sub-warp speed...!

PICARD
(quickly)
Reduce to impulse power...!

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)
showing WARP TO SUBWARP EFFECT.

INT. MAIN BRIDGE - INTERCUT PRINCIPALS AND VIEWER (OPTICAL)
The Ferengi vessel becoming LARGER, but its shape and
details still undefined.

TASHA
Sensor fluctuations in the energy readings from it, Captain.

DATA
Possibility: a malfunction in their engines, sir.

GEORDI
Breaks my heart.

WORF
In visual range, Captain.

PICARD
Fully enlarge!

On screen APPEARS the FERENGI STARSHIP: a strange horseshoe crab-like design, a bit smaller than the Enterprise. The alien vessel is now passing near a CLOUDED PLANET.

GEORDI
Hello, stranger!

PICARD
Very impressive design.

From their reaction, the Bridge Crew realize this is an historic moment.
CONTINUED:

RIKER
Anything on that design, Data?

DATA
Nothing specific, sir. As you know, Ferengi technology is estimated to be generally equal to our own...

PICARD
Which does not mean identical, however...

DATA
Correct, sir. We are no doubt advanced in some areas, they in others...

GEORDI
(interrupts)
They show another power surge, sir.

Then from the Ferengi starcraft, an electric-wave ARC RIPPLES out and back from the trailing sides. It is something like a spacebourne stingray.

WORF
They are firing on us!

The viewscreen abruptly FLARES as the neon-bright arc hits the Enterprise's forward quarter! (OPTICAL) All the Bridge lights dim and come back up from the crackling pulse attack!

PICARD
Damage report!

TASHA
Shields holding!

DATA
Mostly electromagnetic, sir. Fusion generator and batteries down by...

GEORDI
(interrupts)
Our impulse engines are surging!

WORF
They're firing again.

And then ANOTHER ARC hits! A second FLARE! (OPTICAL)
CONTINUED: (2)

TASHA
Deflector shield power weakening, Captain.
    (looks up)
Phasers ready, sir. Photon torpedoes ready...

RIKER
Shall we return their fire, sir...?

PICARD
Negative, Number One. They are reacting to close pursuit.
    (to Geordi)
Fall back a bit but stay with them.

On the viewer, the Ferengi starship now swivels toward the Enterprise, pointing a snakehead-like prow in our direction.

DATA
They are slowing too, sir.

TASHA
They may be turning to fight!

PICARD
Open hailing freq...
    (to Geordi)
Why are we gaining on them? Don't anticipate...

GEORDI
I'm not, sir! Something's wrong...

DATA
Sir, something is dragging us forward.

PICARD
Yes, I read it, too. Lieutenant Yar, what do your sensors show?

TASHA
Not certain, sir. I'm getting very confusing readings.

EXT. SPACE - ENTERPRISE AND FERENGI STARSHIP
(OPTICAL)

Both spacecraft are moving toward adjacent orbits of the clouded planet.
10 INT. MAIN BRIDGE - INTERCUTTING MAIN VIEWER
(OPTICAL)

On the viewscreen, the planet plus the Ferengi vessel
even closer now.

DATA
Captain, this shouldn't be. Our
ship's power systems are failing!

TASHA
Deflector shields failing, phasers
going inoperative, sir...

GEORDI
Something is completely
immobilizing us, Captain!

WORF
Immobilized by the damn Ferengi?!

PICARD
I need more information! Identify
what they are using!

11 EXT. SPACE - ENTERPRISE AND FERENGI VESSEL (OPTICAL)

in orbit of the planet, now locked together by that
"something."

12 INT. MAIN BRIDGE - EMPHASIZING PICARD (OPTICAL)

all his bridge crew intently seeking an answer.

RIKER
Obviously we've underestimated
their technology, Captain...

PICARD
(nods, rises;
alarmed)
Considerably. It appears the
Ferengi have us right where they
want us -- in their sights.

CAMERA TIGHTENS PAST our troubled command team to the
Main Viewscreen, on which the mysterious Ferengi
starship challenges the Enterprise, floating under the
murky globe above, as we:

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER
FADE IN:

13 EXT. SPACE - ENTERPRISE AND FERENGI STARSHIP
(OPTICAL)

Locked in adjacent orbit of the nearby clouded planet.

14 INT. ENTERPRISE - MAIN BRIDGE

as the professionals go about their business. Picard turns to Tasha:

PICARD
Are we searching all frequencies?
Any sign of any kind of message?

TASHA
Negative, sir.

PICARD
Weapon report, Lieutenant Worf.

WORF
I have phasers and torpedoes armed, but I show insufficient power to fire them.

PICARD
Engineering, give me status on power recovery.
(waits; no answer)
Engineering, come in.
(beat)
Why aren't they answering?
(waits; turns to Geordi)
Go below, Lieutenant. Get me a full report from Engineering.

GEORDI
Aye, sir.

Geordi EXITS to the turbolift, as Riker studies the viewer.
CONTINUED:

RIKER
(to Picard)
It seems impossible they could be draining all power from all systems.

Troi is still facing the viewer, her face a picture of concentration, of mental penetration.

PICARD
Counselor?

TROI
I'm sensing nothing from them Captain. Which could mean they can shield their thoughts and emotions from others.

PICARD
Which still makes it our move.

TROI
Sir, they may know as little about us as we do about them.

RIKER
Except that they know they've got us in deep trouble.

PICARD
If so, the question becomes how will they use that knowledge?
(to Data)
Is there any hard information on them in any file, Data?

DATA
None, sir. Only hearsay and thirdhand reports, most of which conflict.

RIKER
Which rumors do not conflict?

DATA
That the Ferengi are... well, the best description may be "traders."

PICARD
What kind of "traders"?
DATA
A more accurate comparison modern scholars have drawn from Earth history cites the ocean-going "Yankee Traders" of eighteenth and nineteenth century America, sir.

RIKER
From the history of my forebears? "Yankee Traders?"

DATA
(nods)
Who sail, in this case the galaxy, in search of mercantile and territorial opportunity.

RIKER
And are those scholars saying the Ferengi may not be too different from us?

DATA
Hardly, sir. I believe this analogy refers to the nefarious capitalist manner in which the Ferengi are known to conduct their affairs of commerce.
(thought)
"Never give a sucker an even break."

Picard and Riker exchange puzzled looks.

PICARD
And what does that mean, Data?

DATA
I'm not sure, sir. That entry was only identified as "slang", terms or expressions which typify everyday language of...

PICARD
I know what slang is, Data. I just haven't heard of that particular saying.

RIKER
But "Yankee Traders"...
(smile)
I like the sound of that. Has a nice historical ring to it.
PICARD
(impatient)
Engineering?
(no answer; to Riker)
Join La Forge "down below", Number
One. Without our warp capacity,
we're just one big floating
target.

RIKER
Aye, sir.

Riker's OFF to the turbolift, as Picard studies the
viewer.

PICARD
(to Data)
What other pertinent meaning do
you draw from this analogy,
"Yankee Traders?"

DATA
Well, I doubt if they wear red,
white and blue, sir. Or look
anything like Uncle Sam.

Except for Picard, Data meets uncomprehending stares.
(That allusion dates too far back from the twenty-fourth
century.)

WORF
Uncle who?

TASHA
What have bright, primal colors
got to do with it?

PICARD
Yes, I understand the allusion.
(nods)
Colors that once identified
nations during the time when they
competed against each other. Red,
white and blue for the United
States...
(muses)
Whereas the French oddly used the
same colors in the order of blue,
white, and red...

DATA
... and the German nation black,
red and gold; the Italians green,
white and red; the British...
PICARD
(annoyed)
Enough, Data!

DATA
Sir, it was you who...

PICARD
(snaps)
We're discussing the Ferengi, Data!
(slow burn)
Mon Dieu, I wish I knew what they will do next...

DATA
Given what is occurring to our vessel, Captain, their weapons could be vastly superior to ours.

Picard has to fight off irritation again.

PICARD
Yes, Data. That seems a reasonable assumption.
(louder)
Engineering?!

But Picard is still without an answer.

14A INT. ENTERPRISE - ENGINE ROOM

Riker, Geordi and TWO ENGINEERS anguish over the control board.

RIKER
Bottom line, La Forge.

GEORDI
Not good, sir. The Ferengi forcefield that holds this ship compensates...
(taps board)
Almost as fast as we increase power.

RIKER
Almost?

Using his hands as a demonstration, Geordi tries to explain the "isometric" problem of the forcefield.
GEORDI
There's a point-three-hundred, seventy-two millisecond delay between use of our power and the neutralizing counter-force of the Ferengi...
(stumped)
We push and they push back in equal force, sir.

RIKER
(idea)
And what is our acceleration delay between slow-reverse impulse and top warp speed?

GEORDI
Point-three-hundred millisecond.
(big smile)
I know what you're thinking. Shift down and then blow hard into warp nine, yes? Come back fighting, whooey!

RIKER
Can we do it, Geordi?

GEORDI
Ask me after it's done, sir.
(to Engineers)
I want a slow reverse-power drop-off over five minutes...
(to Riker)
We'll show them what this baby can do, sir.

RIKER
Give me everything you've got.

GEORDI
Aye, aye, sir.

At that, Riker EXITS, as CAMERA TIGHTENS on Geordi.

14B INT. ENTERPRISE MAIN BRIDGE

Picard studies the Ferengi vessel, as Riker details the plan.
RIKER
... and with a sudden, abrupt power surge to high warp speed, Captain, I believe we can break loose from the Ferengi forcefield.

PICARD
I wish I knew how they are doing this to us.

RIKER
I wonder what they're thinking over there.

PICARD
That's easy. They're wondering what we are thinking... and what we might do next.

WORF
I say fight, sir. There is nothing shameful in falling before a superior enemy.

Geordi ENTERS the Bridge from the turbolift.

PICARD
(thin smile at Worf)
And nothing shameful about a strategic retreat, either.

GEORDI
All systems ready, Captain. And communication's restored to Engineering.

PICARD
Excellent, La Forge.
(to Riker)
Let's throw them off guard.
(turning)
Lieutenant Yar. Open hailing frequencies.

TASHA
Hailing frequencies open, sir.

PICARD
At least, I won't begin with weakness.

(MORE)
PICARD (Cont'd)
(looking up; voice AMPLIFIED)
Attention Ferengi starship! This is Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the USS Enterprise. In the name of the United Federation of Planets, I demand you return the T-9 energy converter you removed from Gamma Tauri IV.

(to Tasha; normal voice)
Send in all language forms.

TASHA
All language forms, sir.

PICARD
Sometimes, Riker, the best way to win a fight is not to be there.

RIKER
Yes, sir. "He will triumph who knows when to fight and when not to fight."

PICARD
Glad the Academy still teaches the strategy of Sun Tzu...
(to Geordi)
Let's hope that delay proves out, La Forge.

GEORDI
(nods)
Point-three-hundred milliseconds, sir.

PICARD
We'll blast full power into warp nine. Ready?

GEORDI
All systems ready, Captain.

PICARD
Countdown to three. Stand by on phasers.
(firm)
One. Set warp to nine.
(everyone tenses)
Two. Divert shield power to main engines...
(they brace)
Three!
With the massive jolt of power let go from the combined forcefield energy-synergy of the Enterprise, all the bridge lights FLARE wildly! But other than a momentary tremble, Starfleet's finest remains in place... the Ferengi vessel still on the viewer, the planet above.

PICARD
(softly)
Merde.
(troubled)
Shields up.

For a defeated beat, the crew resume their vigil.

All the computers go crazy, violently ALIVE in a flood of flashing information "read!"

DATA
Captain? I think you better see this...

PICARD
(moving to Data)
What's wrong?

DATA
In my opinion, someone is reading every file, every "bit" of information stored in the Enterprise memory banks...

GEORDI
(impressed)
They can do that?

DATA
And more, perhaps.

A pall of defeat darkens the room.

PICARD
(into Com)
Doctor Crusher to the bridge.
(to entire bridge)
Conference evaluation.

Picard stands and the Main Bridge crew begins to MOVE OFF.
14D CONTINUED:

TROI
If I may recommend something, Captain, with our attention on the Ferengi vessel, we have ignored the planet.

15 ANGLE INCLUDING VIEWER (OPTICAL)

Picard CROSSING Bridge, checks the Main Viewer on which the cloud shrouded planet is prominent, although not particularly unusual from this perspective. Picard glances there, then:

PICARD
Consult the charts on this planet, Data. See what we have on it in the library.

Picard leads the way OFF to the Conference Room.

16 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

as Picard faces Riker, Beverly, Troi, Geordi, Tasha and Worf.

BEVERLY
No response on hailing frequencies?

PICARD
We had no response.
(including the others)
So, while we still have some power left, it is time for difficult decisions.
(thin smile)
While we cannot have a democracy aboard, I value your considered opinions.

Tasha is the first to look up.

TASHA
I say put all available power into a full-out combined phaser and photon torpedo salvo. Destroy their ability to sustain this forcefield, sir.

WORF
Yes! Hit them hard and hit them fast.
PICARD
Impractical and provocative. Assuming even that we have the power to support that tactic.

TASHA
But Captain, firing on us was not an act of war?

TROI
The facts are that the Ferengi did fire at us, but we were chasing them. Since then, they've only searched our computers, trying to learn who and what we are.

PICARD
Your point, Counselor?

TROI
Let's talk to them.

PICARD
That has been tried; no response.

TROI
But did we tell them anything they wanted to hear?

There's not a person present who doesn't know the implication of that statement.

PICARD
Any other observations?

Picard waits; there are none.

PICARD
(continuing)
Thank you all for your advice and counsel. Now if you will excuse me, I'd like to be left alone with Commander Riker.

All his Officers EXIT the Conference Room, except Riker.

PICARD
As my first officer, I assume you fully realize our situation. Although the final decision must be mine, this is your opportunity to speak your mind.
16 CONTINUED: (2)

RIKER
I believe we have covered all available alternatives, Captain, but...
(supportive)
Are there any other options you wish to analyze?

PICARD
The only one left needs no conversation, Number One. And it is the only one we must avoid.

RIKER
Sir?

PICARD
Total annihilation.

And Riker nods understandingly, EXITS, leaving Picard with the most difficult decision of his Starfleet career, perhaps his last....

17 INT. MAIN BRIDGE

All crew are at their stations, expectant -- the Ferengi menace still commanding the viewscreen. A beat, then Picard ENTERS, going to his chair.

PICARD
Open hailing frequencies.

DATA
Open, Captain.

PICARD
(a pregnant beat)
Attention, Ferengi starship! This is Captain Picard. It is obvious we have a situation here that needs resolving... And we are willing to do whatever is reasonable and necessary. I would like... I would appreciate... your presenting your terms to us.
CONTINUED:

The unspeakable spoken, as CAMERA TIGHTENS on Picard's grim visage... the return sub-space channel empty save for static, as we:

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE
FADE IN:

18 EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)

still locked together with the silent Ferengi starship, near the mysterious murky globe.

PICARD (V.O.)
Captain's log, stardate 41194.8. It is with a heavy heart that I have offered to meet...

19 EXT. SPACE - CLOSE ON FERENGI STARSHIP (OPTICAL)

enigmatic, baffling and also immobile.

PICARD (V.O.)
(continuing)
... whatever reasonable and necessary terms are demanded by the Ferengi. I fear for my people and my vessel in the event the unknown Ferengi ask the unreasonable. How...

20 INT. ENTERPRISE - MAIN BRIDGE

all waiting to hear from the unknown Ferengi.

PICARD (V.O.)
(continuing)
... can I oppose even unreasonable demands?

RIKER
It's moving, sir.

21 ANGLE ON MAIN VIEWER - FERENGI STARSHIP (OPTICAL)

The snakehead-like prow's pushing out from the ship body.

WORF (V.O.)
We ask to surrender and now they fire on us?
as our Bridge Crew react.

TASHA
Ready torpedoes, sir? There's enough power for a couple of them.

PICARD
Ready. But hold at ready, Lieutenant.
(to Data)
Open hailing frequencies.

DATA
Hailing frequencies open, sir.

The Ferengi ship now extends gun-like arms from either side of the prow...

PICARD
Ferengi vessel, we are awaiting your response.

They await an answer, get none.

TASHA
Suggest first strike, sir. Our shields now only have sixty-three seconds of power available before lowering.

WORF
If the Ferengi ship's sensors can read us, sir, they will be waiting until we are most vulnerable...

RIKER
Captain, I'm afraid I agree. Since they haven't bothered to answer us...

PICARD
(interrupting; quiet voiced)
I'll wait a bit more, Number One.

Picard is like an old war dog at work for peace. The suspense on the bridge is electric...

TASHA
Fifty seconds...
CONTINUED:

PICARD
Patience. Patience...

At that moment, the sub-space channel CRACKLES loudly, the Ferengi accent alien, clipped, arrogant.

TAAR'S COM VOICE
The quicker we can come to terms, the better, NCC 1701-D.

There's no visual sent, but Picard is relieved.

PICARD
Who is speaking?

TAAR'S COM VOICE
I am Taar. DaiMon of the Ferengi. You wished to discuss surrender, Captain Picard?

PICARD
What I actually said, DaiMon, is...

TAAR'S COM VOICE (interrupting)
UNCONDITIONAL...

The Bridge reverberates with Taar's booming voice, shattering every last hope.

TAAR'S COM VOICE (continuing; a difficult beat)
... Surrender, I warn you, is...
(emphatic)
Totally unacceptable!!
(desperate but proud)
We will die to the last one of us before such dishonor!

Nobody can believe their ears! Picard shares a look with Riker and Troi, understanding now the incredible thing that has happened. Picard turns quickly to Tasha, makes a hand/Slash signal. In response, Tasha touches her panel.

TASHA
Hailing frequency off, sir.

Now WE SEE Picard at his command best as he gives a series of orders.
PICARD
(to Riker)
Something has seized their ship too. They're in the same predicament as us.
(to Geordi)
Launch a sensor probe. Set it to search for the source of this "something" that's holding us both.
(to Tasha)
Back to hailing frequencies, fast.
(Com technique)
... and so I regret DaiMon Taar that I can no longer negotiate unless it is conducted visually.

TAAR'S COM VOICE
(beat; concerned)
Your complete message not received, Enterprise. But visual communication is against our custom.

PICARD
(into Com)
And it is against Starfleet orders to accept a surrender otherwise. Do you withdraw your surrender offer?

A long delay -- enough time for the Enterprise Crew to become nervous. Then:

TAAR'S COM VOICE
You give us no choice, Enterprise. May we have a visual on you too?

23 EMPHASIZING MAIN VIEWER (OPTICAL)

as Picard answers on Com, signaling Troi to set the viewscreen accordingly.

PICARD
(into Com)
Agreed, DaiMon Taar. You should be able to view us now.
(waits)
Do you have us on your screen?

TAAR'S COM VOICE
We... are now viewing you.
CLOSE ON MAIN VIEWER

The MAIN VIEWER FLICKERS and AN IMAGE OF DAIMON TAAR'S FERENGI FACE comes into sight -- large, menacing, lens-twisted and very brightly lit.

WIDER ANGLE ON MAIN BRIDGE

giving reactions of our principals.

   TAAR'S COM VOICE
   I do not know how your twisted alien culture has paralyzed our vessel but I concede your 'Enterprise' is superior.
   (snaps)
   We will return your worthless T-9 device and we offer the life of our second officers as required by the Ferengi code.

The Enterprise crew does not give themselves away with cheers, but the relief is evident.

   DATA
   I am relieved we have no such code involving our second officers.

   TAAR (V.O.)
   Is this to your satisfaction, Picard Captain?

   PICARD
   Your offer may be inadequate, but I will discuss it with my staff. Stand by for further communications.

The CRACKLE ends, the Ferengi transmission complete.

INT. OBSERVATION LOUNGE

It is a place dominated by a viewing screen which is flanked by computer panels. TWO TEEN BOYS are inspecting the starship reliefs. They see Picard coming, make their hasty EXIT as the bridge personnel ENTER... leaving a plaything near the viewscreen, a Chinese finger PUZZLE.
CONTINUED:

RIKER
(to the Teens on ENTERING)
Matthews! Pola! You know this area is off-limits.
(as Boys LEAVE)
Boys will be boys, Captain.

Picard gives Riker a withering look at this statement.
Data and Geordi also ENTER.

PICARD
(to Geordi)
Have you launched the probe?

GEORDI
Yes, sir. We'll get readings soon.

PICARD
(to Geordi)
If we're not holding the Ferengi and they're not holding us... then who the hell is?
(to Data)
Next, you wanted to show us something?

DATA
As requested, Captain, library-computer information on this planet.

AnGLE EMPHASIZING DATA AND VIEWSCREEN (OPTICAL)

Data has picked up the finger-puzzle game, plays with it abstractly, as:

DATA
It has been charted only, from long range scans. It is Class M, but with no indications of life forms, sentient or otherwise. However, you may find this of interest...

Data touches a panel and on the screen APPEARS AN IMAGE OF A HOLOGRAPHIC STAR MAP with a huge ball of artificial connecting lines. An INCOMPREHENSIBLE ALIEN LEGEND APPEARS TOO.
Continued:

DATA
(continuing)
Resolving it into our language...

Data touches a control and an unusual symbol appears, together, with the words "TKON EMPIRE."

PICARD
A space federation of some sort.
But I've never heard the word "Tkon."

DATA
(distracted by stuck finger)
Understandable. It has been extinct six hundred thousand of... of our years.
(back to viewer; back to finger problem)
According to... legend, these planets... were outposts... of that empire...

Data has put his opposing finger from his other hand into the open puzzle end... and pulls it tight, trapping himself. Another snap or two finds him quite ensnared.

PICARD
Data. What are you doing?

DATA
Apologies, Captain. I seem to have reached an odd functional impass.
I am, ah...
(futile tug)
Stuck.

PICARD
Then get unstuck and continue your briefing.

DATA
Yes, sir. That is what I am trying to do...
(no go again)
But the solution eludes me.

GEORDI
(laughs)
My hero.

Picard reaches over, grabs Data's hands in his own and pushes in... releasing Data's trapped fingers.
PICARD
Continue, Commander. Now!

DATA
(eyeing the puzzle)
Intriguing.
(then quickly indicating viewscreen)
Again, only legend, but it describes the Empire as impossibly huge and powerful.

RIKER
(eyeing viewscreen)
Surrounded by stars whose planets formed its defensive system?

DATA
Correct, sir. Outposts. And the planet below was possibly one of them...

Interrupted by the Bos'n SIGNAL, followed by:

TASHA'S COM VOICE
Excuse the interruption, Captain, but this may be worth it. We're now receiving a signal from the probe.

PICARD
We'll take it here, please.

The VIEWSCREEN FLICKERS, BECOMES AN IMAGE SHOWING PLANET, FERENGI VESSEL, AND THE ENTERPRISE. WAVY, PULSATING, EERIE-GREEN CURVILINEAR LINES reach up mushroom-like from a point on the planet surface -- up and around the two space vessels.

GEORDI
Incredible!

RIKER
That's our mysterious "something," Captain. It is a forcefield of some kind...

PICARD
Reaching up from the planet surface. What enormous power!
(to Data)
How does the legend describe the end of the Tkon Empire?
CONTINUED: (3)

DATA
By their Sun going supernova, sir.

PICARD
Could this planet have escaped that?

ANOTHER ANGLE

Data touches the panel and VIEWER IMAGE CHANGES BACK TO THE TKON EMPIRE CHART. He indicates a distant one of the surrounding stars.

DATA
This planet, Gamma Tauri IV, could have been the most distant outpost, sir, in theory. But since it shows no life form readings...

PICARD
(to Riker)
We'll have to look it over, Number One. Stand by with an away team.

RIKER
(stands)
And if the Ferengi also realize the forcefield emanates from the planet, sir?

PICARD
(considers it)
That's a complication. We may have to ask them to join us in this.

GEORDI
(surprised)
Team up with the Ferengi, sir?

PICARD
We were ordered to learn what we can about them. Do you know of a better way than that?

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO
FADE IN:

29 EXT. SPACE - ENTERPRISE AND FERENGI VESSEL (OPTICAL)

PICARD (V.O.)
Captain's log, supplemental. In orbit of the mysterious planet Gamma Tauri IV in the Delphi Ardu star system, whose unexplained forcefield has seized us with a power almost beyond imagination. If...

30 INT. ENTERPRISE MAIN BRIDGE - WIDE ANGLE INCLUDING VIEWER (OPTICAL)

The viewer carries an IMAGE of the planet. The bridge crew is tense, awaiting communications with the Ferengi.

PICARD (V.O.)
(continuing)
... there is a solution to this, it almost certainly will involve cooperation from the Ferengi... a life form which seems as unknown and mysterious as the planet we orbit.

31 ANGLE INCLUDING TASHA

as she looks from the panel to the Captain.

TASHA
Ship's power drain is critical, Captain. I must now shut down our shields to maintain life support systems.

PICARD
Understood, Lieutenant. Open hailing frequencies.

TASHA
(touching controls)
Hailing frequencies open, sir.

PICARD
Ferengi vessel from Enterprise, this is Captain Picard. Come in.
as Main Viewer ripples into IMAGE OF THE FACE OF DAIMON
TAAR again -- and it is still lens-twisted, appearing as
large and foreboding as before. He looks up at the
screen and then:

TAAR
Your alien images again shock us.

PICARD
DaiMon Tarr, regarding your
surrender to us, the facts are
somewhat different...

TAAR
(interrupting; angrily)
Our own probe has already shown
us your trickery, hu-man.
(emphatic)
We withdraw our surrender.

Picard has exchanged a look with Riker. He nods toward
the viewer:

PICARD
Agreed, DaiMon. May this may be
a far more productive
relationship.

TAAR
I prefer a profitable one, hu-man.

DATA
(quietly, toward Picard)
"Yankee Traders."

TAAR
(bristling)
Explain. What means this
"yangeetraters"?

GEORDI
He heard that?

Picard gives Data an irritated look, searches for an
answer.

PICARD
It... acknowledges your interest
in profit, DaiMon Taar. Is that
an incorrect assumption?

TAAR
We seek only what is equitable.
(angrily)
What do you seek? Why did you
begin by attacking us?
CONTINUED:

PICARD
We did not attack. We gave chase in order to recover a Federation-owned energy device which...

TAAR
(interrupting)
... which we know is ours. Your barbarous Federation chose to place it on one of our planets!

PICARD
On the contrary, Gamma Tauri IV is recognized by all civilized members of...

TAAR
(outraged)
The Ferengi are not uncivilized, hu-man! Is that what you suggest?!

Picard takes a breath, this is not going well.

PICARD
All I am trying to say is you have taken a device clearly not your own from...

TAAR
(incredulous)
Are you now calling us thieves?!

Picard shifts to a different tack, to let off Ferengi steam.

PICARD
Certainly not. And I have no wish to argue issues of territory or property, when our mutual problem remains. Like it or not...
(firm)
We are both trapped by the power draining forcefield of this planet.

TAAR
(lets up)
On that matter, there can be no argument.

PICARD
Might I propose a swap?
CONTINUED: (2)

Taar's face grimaces at the foul-sounding new word.

TAAR
And... what is a "szwop"?

PICARD
An exchange, a trade...

TAAR
Yes, trade, hu-man. What is your offer?

Picard's getting somewhere, and Troi acknowledges the progress with a smile to her captain.

PICARD
We will give you what we know about the planet, and in trade, you will give us your information.

TAAR
Ridiculous. How will we know you have not cheated us?

PICARD
We must trust each other, Taar.

Tarr responds with a grating laugh at this idea.

TAAR
Amusing, hu-man. But impractical.

PICARD
Then may I propose we both cooperate in a joint examination of the planet surface?

TAAR
And what profit is in this, Picard Captain?

PICARD
The profit, DaiMon Tarr, lies in saving all our lives.

Taar considers a beat, then answers, a deal being done.

TAAR
We will agree to this. But I warn you now, any further trickery on your part will be met with no mercy. Understood?
PICARD
Understood.
(onward)
If you care to join us, we have a well-proven transporter device which...

TAAR
We have a matter-energy device of our own. We will beam a science team of three to whatever coordinates you propose.

PICARD
Excellent. We will transmit that information shortly. Enterprise out.

Picard nods at Tasha.

TASHA
Hailing frequencies off.

The Main Viewer has returned to an image of the Ferengi vessel and the planet.

PICARD
I'll log that as "promising," at least.

RIKER
I wonder, Captain. Ordinarily, I don't believe in distrust at first sight... but this may be an exception.

DATA
Especially in view of the fact the image he transmitted was likely distorted somehow, sir.

TROI
I felt the same thing, Captain. He was hiding something.

RIKER
(stands)
With this power drain I see no reason to delay, sir.
(looks around)
I'd like some additional help on this. Can you spare Worf?
CONTINUED: (4)

PICARD
(nods)
Take him. And be careful, Number One.

Riker CROSSES toward the turbolift, FOLLOWED by Data, Geordi, Tasha and Worf. Their Bridge positions are immediately filled.

INT. TRANSPORTER ROOM

A strong away team of five: Riker, Data, Tasha, Geordi and Worf. All are armed with phasers, including a couple of large ones, plus a couple of tricorders. They step onto the "pads."

TRANSPORTER CHIEF
With this power drain, we may have trouble communicating with you, sir.

RIKER
Understood. Anything else?

TRANSPORTER CHIEF
(reluctant)
Due to this forcefield, there is presently no way... to beam you back, sir.

GEORDI
You had to ask.

RIKER
Understood. (checking the others, then)
Energize!

WE SEE the TRANSPORTER EFFECT.

EXT. CLOUDED PLANET - SURFACE

Dimly lit, a twilight world of overcast, turbulent skies hanging heavily over a strange landscape of coral-like "trees." LIGHTNING explodes above, as a dull THUNDER echoes through this eerie labyrinth.

In a relatively clear area, Riker suddenly materializes... alone! He's woozy, but in one piece. He looks around, perplexed, worried.
CONTINUED:

RIKER
Tasha? Data? Geordi? Worf?!

No answer. Riker scrambles toward a nearby rise, through the "forest," and up the incline... reaching the top.

CLOSE - RIKER

He surveys the surrounding area, with no luck.

RIKER'S POV - PLANET SURFACE

Landscape. No sign of anything lifelike.

BACK TO SCENE

More THUNDER O.S.

RIKER
Anybody?!

DATA
Very intriguing, sir.

WIDER ANGLE - TO INCLUDE DATA

atop one of the coral "trees," as the curious android examines it.

RIKER
What are you doing up there?

DATA
(climbs down)
I assume a problem of program coordinates due to the energy field around the ship, sir.
(glances around)
Are we alone?

RIKER
Unfortunately.
(indicates trees)
What do you make of these?

DATA
Crystalline, quite inert.
"Nothing to write home about."
CONTINUED:

RIKER
(delayed take)
Excuse me?

DATA
That is slang, sir.
(concern)
I did use it correctly, did I not?

RIKER
(why me?)
Let's find the others...

And they MOVE OFF.

EXT. MORE PLANET SURFACE

A tangled mass of interlocking "limbs," shimmering in the cloudy light. WE HEAR our people before we see them.

RIKER (V.O)
... they can't be too far.

DATA (V.O.)
Actually, the forces responsible for this effect would create a random...

As CAMERA ANGLES DOWN, WE SEE Riker crawling under a limb, and Data in glimpses just behind him.

DATA
(continuing)
... transporter distribution inversely proportional to the density of...

RIKER
Who's that?

DATA
What?

Riker squats, peering through the forest ahead.

RIKER
That!

Data crawls forward to get a look where Riker is pointing.
DATA'S AND RIKER'S POV

It's Geordi! But he's inverted, limply hanging upside down from a higher limb, one foot firmly lodged in a crook... and not moving.

RIKER/DATA (V.O)
Geordi!

BACK TO SCENE

With difficulty, Riker and Data make their way to their hapless crewmember. Geordi is motionless, maybe dead. Riker reaches through the tangle.

RIKER
Geordi?! Are you conscious?

A beat, then Geordi smiles. Data runs a tricorder nearby.

GEORDI
Do I look conscious?

RIKER
No. What are you doing?

GEORDI
Trying to relax, sir. My foot's caught...
(points up)
Up there. I materialized upside down about ten meters above the surface.

DATA
Tricorder is useless here, sir. Communications are gone, too.

Riker and Data are now in a position to attempt rescue, as they brace Geordi up. THUNDER AND LIGHTNING AGAIN O.S.

DATA
(continuing; to Geordi)
It is fortunate you did not break anyth...

GEORDI
Who's that?!

At that, both Riker and Data turn to see:
POV (OPTICAL)

Backlit by LIGHTNING, THREE SMALL, HAIRLESS HUMANIDS with protruding cupped ears, dressed in strange clothing. They are armed with odd whip-like weapons.

RIKER (V.O.)
Who are you?

At that, the Leader snaps his whip toward them, unleashing a rippling electra-plasmic WAVE that races TOWARD CAMERA (OPTICAL).

CLOSE - OUR TEAM

Riker, Data and lucky-day Geordi are whacked with the WAVE all together... putting Geordi back to sleep. Data falls unconscious, too. Riker fights it but is hit again, and falls, unconscious.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE
FADE IN:

44 EXT. SPACE - ENTERPRISE AND FERENGI STARSHIP (OPTICAL)

United in orbit by the force which still holds them helpless.

PICARD (V.O.)
Captain's log, supplemental. It is now six hours since our away team beamed down to the planet surface. On the Enterprise...

45 EXT. SPACE - CLOSE ON ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)

showing its LIGHTS DIMMING as unnecessary power is conserved.

PICARD (V.O.)
(continuing)
... our condition is rapidly worsening. Ordinarily, with reserve power alone, we could maintain life support for several months. But the force holding us...

46 INT. ENTERPRISE - MONTAGE

Various SHOTS REVEAL the exhausted and weakening crew still at their stations... Beverly is struggling to aid the stricken. She passes Picard who is doing the same.

PICARD (V.O.)
(continuing)
... has closed down all engines and is draining our reserve power too... Equally impossible, our oxygen level is also dropping.

47 ANGLE ON TROI

bringing an armload of silvery thermal blankets onto the bridge, distributing. She passes the captain.

TROI
It's getting much...
(stops; out of breath)
... much colder, sir.
CONTINUED:

Beverly ENTERS SHOT.

PICARD
How far down is it likely to go?

BEVERLY
A lot. Even in orbital space it
gets past minus two hundred
degrees.

TROI
We won't have to worry past...
(tries to smile)
... minus seventy or so.

PICARD
(shivers)
Feels like that right now.

EXT. PLANET SURFACE - CLOSE ON RIKER

As he begins groggily coming back to consciousness, a
small grown HAND WITH BLUE COLORED NAILS roughly rips
Riker's Starfleet communicator symbol from his uniform.

RIKER AND CAPTOR

Sitting opposite Riker on a crystalline rock is a little
Ferengi humanoid, LETEK, leader of this group. His eyes
"dart" around birdlike as he studies the Starfleet
insignia just taken from Riker. He is fine-boned, small
-- looking far different and less menacing than the
image transmitted to the Enterprise Main Viewer.

WIDER ANGLE

Two other Ferengi MOVE INTO SCENE, puffing as they drag
the heavy weight of Worf into the clearing to be laid
out alongside Geordi and Data. They are KAYRON and
MORDOC. At this time, Riker becomes sufficiently
conscious to groan.

LETEK
If he moves, kill him.

MORDOC
Letek, has what we've done broken
our agreement with their captain?

LETEK
We will accuse the hu-mans of
preparing to ambush us. It will
be our word against theirs and
who is more trustworthy, Mordoc?
CLOSE ON LETEK

Beady-eyed and marginally blind, this dominant Ferengi male examines his booty... holding it close-up because of Ferengi weak eyesight.

LETEK  
(to himself)  
Hmmm. Looks like gold...  
(gives it a lick)  
... tastes like gold.

RIKER (V.O.)  
It is gold!

The alien leaps back from the unexpected sound, his whip immediately in the air, poised to attack! Nearby, useless to our crewmembers, are their phasers, insignias and tricorders.

BACK TO SCENE

Riker's not going anywhere, having had a taste of the Ferengi electronic whip. The alien over Riker, whip ready... just as another clap of far-off THUNDER causes it to howl and cover its ears in pain, as do the others!

LETEK  
(soft, low voice)  
Accursed planet! What pandemonium!

RIKER  
Nothing compared to what my captain will do...  
(sees he's causing pain; speaks softly)  
... when he learns you've broken our landing party agreement.

LETEK  
What part of the agreement?

At that, Riker eases himself up, but the alien gestures him back down, the "whip" its "suggestion"...

LETEK  
(continuing)  
You appeared and attacked us.  
Are you one of their assassins?
CONTINUED:

RIKER

I am Commander Riker, first officer of the USS Enterprise.
Stop now unless you want our vessel to retaliate...

Upon which, Worf rolls to his feet with a LOUD and frightening KLINGON GROWL. The Ferengi immediately clap their hands to their ears and Worf goes for the one called Mordoc nearest him. But Worf finds he has a wildcat on his hands.

ANOTHER ANGLE (SPECIAL EFFECT)

The Ferengi called Kayron moves to aid Worf's opponent, lifting his whip to strike, but Data "leaps" from his prone position, moving with android speed and ease, grabbing him by the wrist and pulling him at arm's length off the ground. We HEAR THUNDER again, LOUDER.

ANOTHER ANGLE - EMPHASIZING RIKER

as the Ferengi leader, Letek, makes a move.

RIKER

I've got this one!

DATA

Careful, Commander, they're much stronger than...

Riker finds out how much stronger -- Letek smashes Riker with a savage right-cross which rolls him over twice and leaves him completely unconscious.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Data and Worf have their hands full.

WORF

(loudly)

PYGMY CRETINS...!

Although with hands over his ears, protecting his hearing, one of the Ferengi rolls, clamps his legs around the huge Klingon and brings him to the ground, hard.
ANOTHER ANGLE (OPTICAL)

The remaining two Ferengi go after Data, one hitting him hard and high, the other equally hard and low -- bringing Data to the ground. Letek scoops up his "whip."

LETEK
Kill them.

It sounds no less lethal that the Ferengi says it quietly. As the other two scramble for their whips:

MORDOC
(hissing quietly)
Hideous monsters!

Kayron and Mordoc raise their "whips" to do the job, when:

TASHA (V. O.)
NOOO-O-O!!

All three Ferengi wheel around, as:

ANGLE WIDENS TO INCLUDE TASHA

training a major phaser at the hapless Ferengi. The small men let their "whips" drop, at Tasha's gesture.

TASHA
That's much better, now over there...

Letek and his "men" back off, incredulous, as Mordoc points to Tasha.

MORDOC
Is this a female?

KYRON
A hu-man... female, Letek?

The Ferengi are handling this with all the astonishment of seeing man-eating tigers. The Ferengi squint leeringly at Tasha.

LETEK
(to Riker)
Then it is true. You work with females, arm them, and force them to wear clothing?

MORDOC
How sickening.
EXT. ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)

Nearly dark, as the lights weakly radiate. Beyond, the Ferengi vessel is slightly better lit.

INT. ENTERPRISE - MAIN BRIDGE

Picard comforts a crewmember, then CROSSES to Beverly. They're both very cold and weak, GASP OUT their words.

BEVERLY
I should visit... the family decks...again...

PICARD
(shakes head)
I've diverted... all reserve... power there. They'll... last longest.
(looks around)
Is there anything else we can do, Doctor?

Beverly shakes her head. Then Picard remembers something.

PICARD
(continuing)
Where is... your son Wesley?

BEVERLY
(beat)
I gave him... something. He'll have a... terrible headache if we live.

PICARD
You shouldn't have.

BEVERLY
Shouldn't have?
(weak but outraged)
He's my son. I love him...

PICARD
He has the... right to meet... death awake.
CONTINUED:

Beverly eyes Picard for a long moment before she answers with a nod.

BEVERLY
That is... a male perspective!

From deep in his thermal blankets, Picard makes a MUFFLED SOUND.

BEVERLY
(continuing)
What?
(beat; louder)
What did you say, Jean-Luc?

PICARD
I said... rubbish!

EXT. PLANET SURFACE

The Ferengi are clearly unafraid of the larger humans and Tasha has had to be alert with her phaser to keep them in place. But now the Ferengi have evolved a plan. It begins with Letek seeming asleep -- the other two suddenly striding OFF. Tasha brings her phaser up:

TASHA
Stop! Hold it right there!

ANOTHER ANGLE (OPTICAL)

The two Ferengi are ignoring Tasha. (We're also now HEARING the mysterious THUNDER SOUND nearer and LOUDER.)

RIKER
Set for stun!

TASHA
(nods)
Already set.

In b.g. WE SEE Letek suddenly moving for his "whip" device as a baffled Tasha sends out a PHASER EFFECT which heads straight for the Ferengi but then ARCS IN A CURVE AND ENCIRCLES THE LARGEST NEARBY CORAL TREE.

TASHA
What is going on?!
With the attention of the human on the phaser, Letek snatches up his "whip" device and SNAPS it toward the humans. They turn in time to the WHIP EFFECT HEADED IN THEIR DIRECTION -- BUT LIKE THE PHASER EFFECT IT CURVES TOWARD THE "CORAL" TREE AND DISSIPATES THERE.

LETEK
What is this?!

Neither side is certain what to do next.

DATA
How intriguing.
(to Humans and Ferengi)
I believe we can deduce these crystalline tree-shapes to be energy collectors.

RIKER
(nods)
Along the same principle that is draining energy from our ships.

GEORDI
But the Ferengi weapons were working when we arrived here...

TASHA
Which means something new has happened...

Interrupted by a BLAST OF THUNDER. Then more of the strange THUNDER, CLOSER, STILL LOUDER. Pressing hands over ears, the Ferengi are in agony. Geordi reacts at something o.s., points.

GEORDI
Commander!

A SPINNING, CLEAR CRYSTALLINE SHAPE, GIVING OFF RAINBOW HUES as it MOVES INTO SCENE with the Humans and the Ferengi, stopping there. Then, HALF-VOICE AND HALF-THUNDER RUMBLE:
PORTAL FIGURE
BE YOU BARBARIANS?! SPEAK!

But its defiant inquiry is met by silence from all, as we:

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR
FADE IN:

65 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - ANGLE ON PORTAL EFFECT (OPTICAL)

continuing from ACT FOUR FADE OUT. Both humans and Ferengi astonished at the SPINNING, CLEAR CRYSTALLINE SHAPE WHICH GIVES OFF RAINBOW HUES AND THE SOUND OF THUNDER RUMBLING.

PORTAL
WHO MEETS THE CHALLENGE?

66 ANGLE ON GEORDI AND RIKER

Geordi concentrating on the spinning SHAPE, then turning quickly to Riker.

GEORDI
I'm beginning to understand what...
(touches VISOR)
... these "eyes" have been showing me. Patterns of force everywhere. This entire planet has been made into... well, a power accumulator.

RIKER
(indicating crystalline shape)
And that?

GEORDI
... is the whole point of this place. I can "see" the planet's power emanating from...

67 WIDER ANGLE - INCLUDING SPINNING SHAPE (OPTICAL)

as again they HEAR the HALF-VOICE, HALF-THUNDER SOUND:

PORTAL
WHO WILL IT BE?

Nobody's volunteering. Letek looks to Riker, then to his Ferengi cohorts. A beat, then Letek takes the plunge...

LETEK
Riker.
PORTAL
(to Riker)
YOU HAVE AWAKENED PORTAL SIX-THREE. DO YOU PETITION TO ENTER THE EMPIRE?

The Ferengi are still protecting their ears. Riker decides to answer.

RIKER
Who asks the question?

PORTAL
(echo effect)
I AM THE PORTAL, GUARDIAN OF THE TKON EMPIRE.

reacting, taking their hands from their ears as the SOUND FADES away.

reaction.

RIKER
Why should we petition for entry to an empire that no longer exists?

The Portal Figure examines the others, then looks down at itself. It speaks now in a NORMAL VOICE but with a slight ECHO-CHAMBER holdover.

PORTAL
Biped...extraordinary.
(looks up)
Why do you attempt deception? The empire is forever.
CONTINUED:

RIKER
Your empire fell prey to a supernova...

At that, the Portal Figure scans the cloudy sky above, concerned but wary of trickery.

PORTAL
Nonsense!

RIKER
Data. Please repeat the file...

DATA
It is a matter of record, Portal, in the Age of Makto, the central star of the Tkon Empire destabilized and...

PORTAL
(interrupts)
But the Age of Makto is an eon in the future to come...

DATA
(interrupts back)
In fact, there have been many ages which have come and passed since Makto...

PORTAL
(and back again)
This is the Age of Bastu!

DATA
(relentless)
I am afraid not, as by the Tkon use of galactic motionary startime charts, after Bastu, there has been Cimi, Xora, Makto, Ozari, Fendor...

PORTAL
(enraged)
ENOUGH!

(Thunder clam)
This is absurd! That is over seven baktun of time! How can this be?
CONTINUED: (2)

RIKER
You must have been asleep, Portal, for hundreds of thousands of our years...

Letek steps forward, acting polite and humble. He indicates Riker and the other humans.

LETEK
Deception is the way of these hu-mans. We Ferengi will gladly make a petition.

The away team members react, but Riker motions them into silence.

RIKER
(to Portal)
We invite their petition.

Both Geordi and Data smile at what they perceive is Riker's tactic.

DATA
Excellent idea, sir.

GEORDI
I can't wait to hear it...

The Portal Figure makes a strange gesture to the humans, in deep concentration, then turns to Letek.

PORTAL
Speak.

Letek thinks fast; this has happened almost too rapidly.

LETEK
We... our petition is that we be allowed to... serve the Tkon Empire...
(decides to add)
... at no profit! Return control of our starship to us and we will happily destroy both the hu-man criminals and their vessel which attacked us without provocation.
(too eager)
They came to loot your empire, but we intercepted them!
The away team is desperate for Riker to make an answer to this but he remains silent, awaiting the Portal Figure's answer. Again the Portal gestures, but this time to the Ferengi, then he turns back to Riker.

**PORTAL**
You have attempted deceit. Next you cannot answer these accusations. Do you give yourself up for judgment?

**RIKER**
(beat; considering this)
Yes. If you believe those accusations, you should act on them.

The other away team members are shocked at Riker's answer. Before the Portal can answer, Letek decides to go for the "kill."

**LETEK**
And there is even more! We can prove the hu-mans are destroyers of legal commerce ... also that they selfishly withhold vital technology from backward worlds...

**MORDOC**
(jumping in)
... and necessary defensive weapons, too. We Ferengi are now challenge this hu-man madness...

**RIKER**
I admit we restrict advanced technology to all...

**KAYRON**
(in chorus)
You see! They are demented; their values are insane. You cannot believe the business opportunities they destroy...
(exhibiting the Starfleet insignias taken) Proof of their barbarism -- they adorn themselves with gold, a despicable use of rare metal... (indicates Tasha) And they shamelessly clothe their females...

(MORDOC) (leering at Tasha) Inviting others to unclothe them... the very depth of perversion...

Mordoc reaches for a pawhold on Tasha's uniform in disgust. But Tasha angles and parries his thrust, at the ready.

TASHA
Paws off, Ferengi.

MORDOC
No female, hu-man or Ferengi, can order Mordoc around! Submit!

TASHA
(moves toward Mordoc; deadly) Just try it, shorty.

RIKER
(warning) At ease, Lieutenant!

GEORDI
(to Ferengi) I wouldn't mess with Lieutenant Yar if I were you...
(to Riker) But maybe they'd like to find out the hard way, eh, Number One?

RIKER
Seems their style. (to Portal) Would you like to hear more?

PORTAL
If you desire.

Riker gestures to Data, who willingly obliges.
DATA
(nods)
Theyshould also add that
Starfleet has refused to prevent
several civilizations from
falling; we have sometimes let
the violent and strong overcome
the weak...

LETEK
(to Portal)
They admit their crimes! Hear
them; they admit the evil which
they...!

Interrupted by a ROLLING THUNDER SOUND.

ANGLE ON PORTAL FIGURE (OPTICAL)
as the Figure seems a bit younger, better muscled, the
robe shorter and more practical, with a large, lethal
appearing scimitar-like weapon in hand. It turns to
Riker, its voice now carrying a hint of ROLLING THUNDER
again.

PORTAL
BARBARIAN!

LETEK
Yes, you show wisdom...

PORTAL
(interrupting; indicates
the Ferengi, too)
BARBARIANS, ALL!
(indicates Riker with
sword)
But this one first. In the
fashion the Empire has always
challenged savages...

EMPHASIZING WORF AND TASHA (OPTICAL)

jumping forward.

WORF
No! For battle, come to me...

A flash of BLUE LIGHT with LIGHTNING BOLT SOUND hurls
Worf violently back, rolling to a stop unconscious.
Tasha wisely stops, then goes to Worf's assistance.
EMPHASIZING RIKER AND PORTAL FIGURE

as the Figure takes a fighting stance.

PORTAL
(mixed-THUNDER)
You have a single chance for life.
One only. What is the answer to my challenge?

RIKER
(facing Portal Figure, unmoving)
There is more! Self-determination of all peoples...

Again, the Portal makes a strange gesture to Riker, in deep concentration.

PORTAL
(interrupting)
You are being tested, Riker! WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

Riker looks up sharply, puzzled at this.

RIKER
How do you know my name?

The Portal Figure suddenly rushes at Riker, scimitar held high... an earth-shattering SHRIEK. Riker stands fast as:

Portal cuts through the air in an unstoppable overhead sweep... Then, the ugly looking weapon stops a couple millimeters from Riker's head! Riker remains motionless, even calm, serene...

PORTAL
Ahhh. You are of immovable mind, Riker. One totally committed to facing any fate with composure...
(sword still up)
But what is the answer to my challenge?

All the away team members hold their breath. Riker remains quietly at ease. Is he taking too long?
CONTINUED:

RIKER
Fear is the true enemy, the only enemy.

Portal tosses his weapon aside.

PORTAL
You are a noble being. And unlike these little ones who close their minds, your mind holds interesting thoughts.

(quoting)
"Know your enemy and know yourself, and victory will always be yours." Why that thought? And who is this "Sun Tzu" you revere?

RIKER
An old Chinese philosopher from ancient Earth history...

PORTAL
You must tell me more of this wisdom so much like our own.

RIKER
Gladly. First, our starship. Can you release it?

PORTAL
(nods)
It is released.

(looks upward, nods)
All power is restored.

EXT. SPACE - THE ENTERPRISE (OPTICAL)

suddenly freed, the LIGHTS back up to full strength!

INT. MAIN BRIDGE

as all power is restored, the bridge lights and a/c return to norm, not a lot too late. The crew begin to stir. Picard gets to his feet fast, but weakly.
78 CLOSE ON PICARD

opens his eyes, taking in a deep, fresh breath. He looks around. Beverly ENTERS SHOT.

BEVERLY
Not a hell of a lot too soon, Jean...Captain.

79 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - VARIOUS ANGLES

with the Ferengi showing concerned expressions.

PORTAL
(to Riker)
I admit I had my doubts as your ships battled each other...

LETEK
They tried to kill us!

PORTAL
(ignores him)
In overt acts of belligerance. Normally, I would have destroyed all of you and your ships, but something confused me.

RIKER
Which was?

PORTAL
First you wanted to murder each other, then you were willing to help each other.

Letek's not one to be ignored, roughly forcing himself in front of Riker, his cohorts nearby.

LETEK
What of our vessel? We knew the same answer...

MORDOC
The truth is I gave those words to this hu-man.
PORTAL
(to Riker)
What of them? Shall I destroy them?

RIKER
Then they would learn nothing.

PORTAL
Admirable conclusion. But what makes you think they will ever learn, Riker?

RIKER
(beat)
Is this a test also?

The Ferengi start to intrude again, but the Portal quickly silences them with a deadly wave of his hand.

PORTAL
In life, one is always tested.

RIKER
I find them very much as we were a few hundred years ago... but with the technology we have now. They're very dangerous...

KAYRON
(can't help the lie)
Untrue! We seek friendship with you...

RIKER
(unhearing; to Portal)
But we can hardly hate what we once were. They may grow and learn...

PORTAL
... And learn ways of destroying you.

RIKER
Our values require us to face that possibility. What of you? With your empire gone... ?

PORTAL
Even without the empire, the uncivilized must be tested. (sadly)
I shall sleep... until needed again.
EXT. SPACE - ENTERPRISE AND FERENGI SHIP

Both vessels with power up.

INT. ENTERPRISE MAIN BRIDGE - EMPHASIZING GEORDI AND DATA

ENTERING from the turbolift. Troi, CROSSING in from the Ready Room, intercepts them.

TROI
What happened?

DATA
Something to write home about.

GEORDI
"Something to write home about?"
Data, that's very human.

Data is very pleased at that. Meanwhile, Riker has ARRIVED, CROSSES to the Command Area.

EMPHASIZING PICARD

as Riker joins him.

RIKER
The T-9 energy converter was beamed aboard and secured, sir.

PICARD
I commend your performance, Number One.

Data has also returned to his forward "Ops" station, carefully placing his finger puzzle above his console.

RIKER
I do have a request, sir.

CLOSE ON RIKER

A wicked thought.

RIKER
(continuing)
Permission to beam a box of Data's Chinese finger puzzles over to the Ferengi.
(postscript)
A "thank you" for all they tried to do.
CLOSE ON PICARD

PICARD
(smiles)
Make it so.

EXT. ENTERPRISE AND FERENGI STARSHIP (OPTICAL)

as both angle, and in opposite directions, WARP OUT AND AWAY from the mysterious, clouded planet - the "last outpost" of the once-mighty Empire of Tkon, as CAMERA MOVES IN on our starship, which QUICKLY RECEDES FROM CAMERA into a DOT OF LIGHT as we:

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE
THE END