

Star Trek: The Next Generation Episode: N

(an Untethered Tale)

by

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Additional stories are available on my [personal website](#).

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N paused to examine the starship, Enterprise. N was not here to interfere, but to observe. Even though he was just meters outside of the starship's force field, he remained unobserved and unobservable. The captain, Jon Luc Picard, was a serious fellow. N wondered why Q found him so fascinating that he made repeated visits. To find out, he decided to make himself known and see how the captain and his crew reacted to his presence. First, he replicated guard drones. Ordering three to be visible, he hailed the captain, "Captain Picard, this is N. May I come aboard?"

The captain was in his ready room, alone, when he heard the call. He looked up and said aloud, "Who is N?" N replied, "Just a traveler who has been alone too long. I seek only some company and perhaps some new friends." Looking around, Captain Picard, seeing no sign of any entity, asked, "Where are you?" N replied, "Just outside your force field directly outside your window. If you can not see me, I can illuminate my ship." Captain Picard looked out the porthole and saw a light flashing. He asked, "How large is your ship? It must be very small to be as close as you said." N replied, "It is two metres in diameter." Captain Picard thought for a minute then said, "You may park in our shuttle bay. Give me a few moments to inform the crew." N replied, "Speak and I will hear you. When I speak all in the room with you will be able to hear me unless you wish it otherwise." The captain replied, "That is fine."

The captain turned on his heel and strode to the door. When it opened he was greeted by the klaxons and flashing red lights of 'red alert'. He bellowed, "NUMBER ONE, REPORT!" Number one, Lieutenant Commander William Thomas Riker, pushed a button on the captain's control panel and the klaxon was silenced and he replied, "Sir, a flashing object about two metres in diameter suddenly appeared just outside our shields." The captain said, "Thank you, Number One. Please cancel red alert, notify the shuttle bay that we are receiving a guest, and lower the force field long enough for our guest to enter. He is to have guest quarters made available to him. I am going to the shuttle bay to greet our guest. You may join us when all the arrangements have been made." Riker replied, "Yes, Sir." The captain then said, "Whorf, with me." The captain then walked to the turbolift closely followed by the Klingon. Riker announced, "Captain leaving the bridge," just as the turbolift doors closed.

The flashing two metre sphere was just passing through the shuttle bay's atmospheric force field as the captain entered. The captain stopped in amazement as the craft seemed to just disappear when the light winked off. The captain said, "N, I hope you leave the light on so nobody will be injured by running into your ship." The light stopped flashing and parted to reveal a middle aged man sitting on an upholstered chair with three small spheres revolving over his head. N said, "I can do better than that." That said, he got up, took a few steps clear of his ship, and said, "Chandelier." The ship closed up, rose to the overhead, and became as reflective as a spherical mirror. N said, "If that is not convenient, we can try something else, Captain." The Captain replied, "It is visible and out of the way. Thank you, N." N replied, "You are a gracious host."

Leading the way, the captain asked, "What are those spheres orbiting above you?" N answered, "Those are my guards. Here, let me show you. One, obey Captain Jon Luc Picard." As N pointed his index finger upward, one of the spheres came to rest on the tip of his finger. N instructed the captain, "Touch the sphere and it will obey every command preceded by its designation. I must warn you that I am entrusting you, my

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host, with a powerful tool, but only for as long as I am your guest.”

The captain did as instructed and felt a tingle that permeated his entire being. Concentrating, he heard a voice that seemed to be inside his head saying, “I am ‘one’ and I am yours to command as long as N wishes it to be so. You may command me to do anything with three exceptions. I will not self destruct. I will not kill any intelligent creature. I will not depart from you as my primary function is to protect you.” N interposed and said, “Freeze.” Instantly the turbolift stopped but without any change in the momentum of its occupants. The light became what can only be described as ‘fuzzy’. N continued, “Take all the time you need to become familiar with ‘one’. It is command driven, but it also has a menu of basic commands which should be a good starting point. Just say ‘one, menu’ for the display. Prefix the command with ‘explain’ to get an explanation of the command. You do not need to speak it aloud as ‘one’ is now telepathically linked to you and you alone. It is programmed to return when I enter my ship so no recall command is needed. I had ‘two’ freeze time so no time is passing for us outside of these walls. Since I am no longer needed in this process, I will rejoin the time stream. When you are ready, simply command ‘one, unfreeze’ to rejoin me.” He then turned towards the wall and grabbed the hand rail with both hands and seemed to freeze in place.

The captain said aloud, “One, menu.” Instantly, in his mind’s eye, a large spreadsheet appeared. Thus, while the rest of the universe waited, the captain spent a long time, subjectively, learning the command set and capabilities of ‘one’.

“One, unfreeze.” Instantly the light hardened and the turbolift continued its motion. N turned to face the door as it opened to the smiling face of Commander William Riker who, upon seeing the captain, startled, exclaimed, “Captain, what happened?” The first officer saw the captain with a long salt and pepper beard and a fringe of long white hair. The captain said, “One, mirror.” A two meter high and one meter wide mirror appeared off to the captain’s right and the captain examined himself carefully. As Commander Riker gawked, the captain said, “One, appearance.” The mirror, beard, and hair vanished and the captain appeared as he was when he entered the turbolift with N. The captain said, “Number One, for over a year, subjectively I have been studying the command set of this guard drone that N has lent me for the duration of his stay. It really is a marvelous device. One, guest quarters.” Reality seemed to dissolve and resolve itself again as the three appeared in the middle of the living room in the guest quarters.

“Living a year in solitary confinement has made me forget my manners”, said the captain, holding his hand out to point towards N, “N,” turning towards the commander, “this is my first officer, Commander William Thomas Riker. N is a being from the N continuum and has come to visit.”

There was a flash immediately followed by the appearance of Q who said, “And a very unwelcome visitor indeed. Do you know how dangerous he is?” To which the captain replied, “At least he is polite about it. A more courteous guest than most others.” Commander Riker chimed in with, “And more welcome than you.” Q said, “N, what brings you to this mundane universe? Every time you appear, Chaos reigns.” N replied, “You wound me, Q, as you know those that I effect have always come out ahead.” Q replied, “Even if it takes them centuries of war and terror to achieve it?” N

replied, "Q, you know the best achievements have always been built upon the foundations of strife. My guidance has always shortened the interval and lead to satisfactory results. Enough of this! I came to have a pleasant visit after exploring what you call the 'Dead Zone'." Q interrupts with a sneer saying, "There is nothing of interest there." N replies, "Not so. Five, fetch relic 534." Just about a second after he gave the instruction, a one metre cube appeared, hovering about a half meter from the deck. N said, "Open." The top of the cube disappeared and N took out what looked like a child's water pistol. It appeared to be made of a cheap opaque plastic with a small hole in the front and a plastic guard around the rod with a crescent shaped cap that was the trigger. N said, "This device survived almost a billion years and it is still effective." With no apparent effort, N moved the box to the bulkhead, open end toward Riker, handing the pistol to Commander Riker, N said, "The box will stop the charge. Put anything you like in front of the box, push this slide forward to energize, and aim carefully. The box is a safe target."

The captain said, "I have a suggestion for a target." He taps his communicator and says, "Weapons officer, set up a half metre cube of neutronium shielding. We will be right down to test a weapon." The weapons officer replied, "Sir, I was going to run a test of my own and there is a metre cube of neutronium shielding already in place. Will that be satisfactory?" The captain replied, "Yes, thank you." Tapping his communicator again, he turned to his guest and said, "Shall we go?"

Instantly N transported everyone, including Q, to the target range where a long bench was set up. Down range a large cube, one corner pointing towards the bench, was perched on a square support. The range officer, startled, turned. Relief showed on his face as he recognized the captain. He pointed to a phaser rifle and said, "Sir, I was just about to test this in a new configuration." Looking at Riker, he continued, "Is that the weapon? What does it do?" Riker looked at N who said, "It projects a narrow cutting beam the size of the hole in the barrel." The captain said, "Proceed with your test, lieutenant."

The weapons officer hefted a phaser rifle, flipped the safety off, and fired at the cube with no discernible effect. The computer announced, "Zero point zero one percent energy absorbed. Ninety nine point nine nine percent energy reflected. No damage to the target."

After engaging the safety, with one eyebrow raised, the weapons officer looked at the captain who said, "Dismissed." With a disappointed look on his face, the weapons officer left with his weapon.

Riker walked to the bench, looked at the captain, who nodded, energized the weapon, and fired it at the cube. Instantly the klaxons blared and the computer announced, "Hull breach, force fields in place." The captain looked towards N and saw him disappear with his box. A few seconds later, after the klaxons were silenced, N reappeared and announced, "I caught the beam before it could do any damage. I suggest we place this box behind your target before you fire again. It is designed to contain the energy emitted by that pistol."

The captain said, "Computer, report." The computer replied, "Energy absorbed by target, one point seven nine terrawatts. Energy reflected, not detected. Energy

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required to breach force field, one hundred gigajoules. The target has a one millimetre diameter hole one point four metres deep. Duration of energy discharge, one attosecond.” Q chimes in with, “That is why the Q put a force field around the Dead Zone. This weapon negates space-time which is why any matter in its path is converted into energy. The inventor knew its range was limitless, but released it for production anyway. They did not care what happened outside their domain so we made sure they could not do any damage beyond the force field.” N said, “What Q is not telling you is that their force field reflects the beam. The next time the weapon was fired, the beam kept bouncing back and forth until I caught it in this box. This weapon and a few other relics were all that survived in the entire cluster.”

After a very brief pause, a big pulsing red sign appeared on the screen, proclaiming a “Mortgage Alert”.

“Damn!” exclaimed Herman. “I seen that commercial at least a hunerd times!”

He stretched for the remote, where Ramona had left it by her chair, and pushed the mute button.

“Damn ditech anyhow. Don’t care bout no damn mortgage nohow. Come to think of it, I seen that N episode about as many times as I seen the damn ditech commercial. Think I’ll just go out fer a while.”

Herman left the TV on, to annoy Ramona, and carefully laid the remote on the far edge of the lamp stand, on the other side of his chair from where Ramona sat, so she’d have to get up to reach it. “That ought ta steam her clams. Teach her to put it back where it belongs.”

He walked through the kitchen, picking up Ramona’s binoculars out of the tool box on the way by. Outside, it was a fresh, cool evening. Herman headed through the broken place in the fence into the junk yard, shied a stray hub cap at the junk yard dog, and then made his way along the back row of wrecks to the creek. Dry, as usual.

Herman sat on the old bucket seat from a Mustang that Joe kept out there for God only knows what purpose, and looked out across the bare field.

“By golly!” he muttered. “They’s su’em over yonder!”

He brought Ramona’s binoculars up to his eyes and adjusted the focus.

Just as he got the binoculars into focus, he exclaimed, aloud, “Damn, another ditech commercial.” He was staring at a new outdoor display. “Ya can’t get away from ‘em.” He turned on his pocket radio receiver, leaned back, propped up the binoculars, and got comfortable, murmuring, “Well, there t’ain’t nuting else on, anyway.” When the commercial ended, the Star Trek episode continued with:

In the control room, Jon Luc Picard said, “Helm, resume previous course.”

“Damn,” muttered Herman, “wonder what I missed. Been time fer at least another piece o’ tha show and then another damn commercial. Seen one damn ditech

commercial ya seen' em all."

"Ahh, I wouldn't advise that," warned Q.

"Why not?" asked Jon Luc.

"Yeah, why not?" muttered Herman.

"Because, one of the several lies that N is telling you is that nothing survived the disaster. Indeed, everything survived the disaster, because there was no disaster."

"Oh, really!" sneered N.

"No disaster?" asked Jon Luc.

"No disaster?" asked Herman.

"Well, think about it," prompted Q. "After all, we're talking about a star cluster a few billion light-years across. We're talking about a tiny beam, of about a millimeter in diameter and of such short duration as to be almost imaginary, and it travels at the paltry speed of light. Really, N! Do you think Jon Luc is utterly credulous? Such a beam could bounce back and forth across such a large volume of space for eternity, and never even be detected. Destroyed everything indeed! I'm surprised that you'd even dream up such a fanciful yarn!"

"Then why did you create the force field?", asked N.

"Ahh, but I didn't," replied Q. "You did."

"Oh, really!" exclaimed N with growing agitation. "And why would I do that?"

"I really don't know," replied Q. "My personal opinion is that you're simply unhinged."

"How dare you make such a preposterous accusation! Stand back everybody!" yelled N, brandishing the weapon, "I have the weapon! Stand back!"

"Oh, shit!" muttered Herman.

"Intolerable," muttered Jon Luc.

"Captain," commented Q, "I suggest that you change course by two degrees to starboard, and reduce speed by .05 per cent."

"Do it, do it!" yelled Herman, beating a fist on his knees.

"Helm —" began Jon Luc.

"No! Stand back!" yelled N, brandishing his weapon.

"Which brings us," Q continued calmly, holding the box between himself and N, "to another of the things about which N is lying."

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“Shut up!” screamed N, with his eyes beginning to bulge and saliva starting to accumulate on his chin.

“Dude’s had it,” exclaimed Herman in a loud voice.

“Security team to the bridge,” ordered Jon Luc.

“The first time you fired the weapon,” continued Q calmly, “you didn’t know what you had. You followed the beam for what amounted to millions of years, objective time, although it was no time at all, to you, traveling at lightspeed. Then you designed your box to go with your gun. Now, you’re here to catch that first beam that you released because you know exactly where it’s headed!”

“You’re lying,” screamed N.

“So, why haven’t you told them where the beam is headed?” asked Q.

“They’ll find out soon enough,” screamed N. He suddenly dropped the weapon and grabbed the box from Q. In a flash, he transformed himself into a smaller size, jumped into the box, and closed the lid. It latched with a snap.

“I’m sorry to say,” whispered Q, “that it’s too late now to avoid it.”

Jon Luc looked nervously over his shoulder and then hunkered down behind the box.

Herman looked nervously over his shoulder and then hunkered down behind the mustang seat.

Suddenly, a one millimeter diameter hole appeared in the —

“What the HELL!!!” Exclaimed Herman as his binoculars and radio were grabbed from him. As his eyes focused on the ‘NICE YOUNG MEN IN CLEAN WHITE SUITS’. Before he could react, Herman was neatly wrapped up in a straight jacket. He asked, “What the HELL is going ON?” There being no reply and it being too late to struggle, he looked around and saw the owner of the junkyard grinning at him. “Oh, now I get it”, said Herman as they started dragging him away. He noted that two of the men were holding him while one man was leading the way to the white ambulance. There was a short delay while the man in the lead opened the back doors and took out the gurney. The wide web belts flopped over the edge. “Oh, SHIT!”, he exclaimed, “Why can’t I ride sitting up like a man?” He received no reply. He was picked up by the two holding him and the until now unseen man that was following behind the group then grabbed his legs and aligned him on the gurney. The first man fastened the straps uncomfortably tight, boy was he strong. No wiggle room. He could not even turn his head. He was trussed up tight and his nose started to itch. He could see, by their expressions, that they were aware of and amused by his distress, so he did not bother to ask for assistance. Accumulated sweat was getting into his eyes, causing irritation, so he screwed them shut tight to try to minimize the burning sensation.

It seemed like hours before reaching their destination. The ride was uneventful,

smooth, and almost silent. If it were not for his itchy nose and burning eyes, he may have had an opportunity for some sleep.

There was a loud bang that brought his attention back to reality. He found that he was fantasizing about the poorly written script of the movie he was watching when he was captured. After he was unloaded from the ambulance, a man from the hospital applied a damp towel to Herman's face. The itch was relieved and the discomfort in his eyes was relieved enough to attempt opening them. As he opened his eyes, Herman expressed relief by saying, "Thanks." The orderly said, in a quiet voice, "No problem. I know how these jokers work. Just be glad you did not give them an excuse to use the chemical spray on you." The orderly then took the gurney with Herman and entered the hospital. On the way, Herman said, "I didn't know they were there until they pounced upon me." Once inside, the straps released, the orderly assisted Herman into a sitting position and asked, "Do you think you can walk?" Herman said, "Yes." The orderly assisted Herman to his feet and he immediately started to crumple. The orderly expertly levered Herman into a waiting wheel chair, saying, "They always over tighten the straps. Give me a few minutes then I will take you to your room." The orderly then went outside, taking the now empty gurney with him.

When the orderly returned, Herman asked, "Do you know why I am here?" The orderly replied, "No, I am never told, but the ambulance driver did say you were sitting in a field shouting and talking to yourself when they arrived on the scene of the complaint." Herman replied, "I was just watching TV. I was really into the movie. Who complained? My neighbor?" "No," mused the orderly, "Not even the driver would know that. Now be quiet as we are almost to your room."

As they rounded the next corner, there were three other orderlies standing around an open door. One said, loudly, "It sure took you long enough. Let's get started." Without another word being spoken, two of the orderlies grabbed Herman and hustled him into the room and started to strip him. Soon, Herman was naked in a padded room, no furniture, with four orderlies staring at him. After about a minute, a technician with a fluoroscope type of device entered the room and ordered Herman to stand on the platform of the device. One orderly asked, "What's that?" The technician quipped, "This your first time?" "Yeah," replied the orderly. The technician smiled and said, "Well, that flare is the transponder that everyone has implanted at birth." "Oh!", exclaimed the orderly, "I had forgotten about that." "Most everyone does," replied the technician. The technician then ordered Herman off of the platform and wheeled the equipment out of the room. The orderlies trooped after the technician, the last one backing out of the room, closing the door behind him. Herman, standing in the middle of the room, looked around at the pads on the walls and floor. Even the door was not visible. The only feature visible were the camera lenses in each corner of the ceiling. He stood in the center of the room, slowly turning, until he noticed the impression the tires had made in the mat. He sat down against the now invisible door between the tire tracks. He figured that anyone opening the door would awaken him. He soon fell asleep. There was nothing else he could do.

Herman was awakened by the need to urinate. He stood up and announced that fact aloud, "I need to pee!" He was about to repeat himself when he heard a loud click and a door stood ajar. He went in and found a small restroom with a shower. After he was

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done, he also took a shower. The water was not hot enough to suit, but there seemed to be plenty of it. There were no towels, but he figured that he would drip dry soon enough. When he was in the padded room, he saw the restroom door close with a whoosh and heard another loud click from behind him. He turned to see a panel swing open to reveal shelves with an inmate uniform. No words were spoken, but he put on the uniform and slippers. After a few minutes, he heard a snick as the panel closed then another loud click as the panel in the wall across from the door opened and a shelf extended into the room with a tray of food upon it. A complete meal including a beverage and desert. Well, he thought, he could eat.

After about three days of this, Herman was lonely, but physically comfortable. The padding on the sleeping shelf that extended from the wall was as soft as his bed at home, but there were no blankets or pillows. There was no TV or muzak, but Herman got used to that as well. After all, it was watching TV on that billboard that got him into this trouble in the first place. Although he was bored and lonely, he figured he could survive this way indefinitely.

On the morning of the fourth day, about a half hour after breakfast, a female orderly entered the room and told him, "The doctor is ready to see you now. Come this way." He meekly followed despite other urges. He figured that perhaps the doctor would tell him what was going on.

Upon entering the doctor's office, the doctor told him, "Sit down and do not speak." The doctor then busied himself with some papers on his desk. After a few minutes, he gathered up the papers on his desk and sorted them into a file folder, put it in a basket, and grabbed another file folder from another basket. He started flipping through the pages. He then started reading from one of the pages, "A call was received about a man yelling and talking to himself in a neighbor's back yard. When the response team arrived, the man was observed yelling and talking to himself. It was ascertained that he was trespassing as the owner of the property was present to verify this fact. It was determined that the best approach would be to take him in for evaluation. As he did not seem to notice our presence, we subdued him quickly and took him directly to admitting."

The doctor looked up and Herman said, "I was just..." the doctor interrupted, "Do not speak now, you will get a chance later. I will not tell you this again." Herman shut up.

The doctor resumed going through the file and started reading from another sheet, "Patient arrived in good condition, no bruises, contusions, or other marks of violence. There were red areas, but that was determined to be from the gurney straps. The scan indicated nothing unusual and there were no untoward incidents so the patient was left in the observation room."

Herman was inhaling as if he were about to speak, but the doctor wiggled his right index finger horizontally, so Herman did not utter a word. The doctor resumed going through the file and pulled out yet another paper and started to read, "When left alone, the patient went to sleep, leaning against the door. This is typical of a person caught dead to rights. When he awoke, he announced his needs and we gave him access to the facilities. After relieving himself, he took a shower. When he seemed

ready, we gave him access to clothes and food. He remained quiet for the next three days. The conclusion is that he is probably not violent as he did no damage. No other relevant events occurred.”

The doctor looked directly at Herman and said, “The orderly that brought you here indicated that you were compliant which is why I decided to leave you without restraints. I know you probably have many questions. You may speak now.” The doctor leaned back into his chair and waited.

Herman, his mind in a turmoil, **pointed to the TV in one corner of the doctor’s waiting room.**

“Can we watch a little TV?”

“What would you like to see?” asked the doctor suspiciously.

“I love Star Trek,” replied Herman.

“No foolin’!” exclaimed the doctor, all suspicion forgotten. “So do I! What the hell are those nuts doin’ pickin’ up a Trekie?!”

“That’s what I was watchin’, when they nabbed me!” said Herman.

“You’re kiddin’!” exclaimed the doctor.

“No!” said Herman. “That’s why I was yellin’. It was ta the excitin’ part.”

“Well,” said the doctor, “then there isn’t any reason to keep you. Any reasonable person would yell at the exciting part of a Star Trek show!”

The doctor shuffled through his papers and muttered, “Where’s tha damned release....”

“Nurse! I need a release form!”

A nurse bustled through a door that Herman hadn’t noticed before, handed the doctor a form, and stood waiting. After he entered some information onto the form in a couple of places, he signed it.

“Here” he said, handing the form to the nurse.

She glanced at it and said, “Another Trekie, huh?”

“Yup.” said the doctor. “The nitwits just won’t leave us alone. Don’t they know we’re a breed apart?”

“I guess not,” said the nurse. “I’ll take care of it. He can leave whenever he wants.”

“Uh,” said the doctor. “Hold all my calls for a couple of hours and, uh, cancel my appointments.”

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“A Trek Attack?” the nurse asked.

“Yup.”

She shook her head knowingly and went out, closing the door behind her. The doctor went to the bookcase on his back wall, pulled a certain book out a fraction of an inch and stepped on a certain place on the floor. The entire bookcase rotated 180° and Herman jumped out of his chair.

“Geeeeeehosafat!” he shouted.

There, on the back side of the medical bookcase was the most complete collection of Star Trek videocassettes that Herman had ever seen.

“Take your pick,” said the doctor proudly, waving his arm grandly at the collection, “we’ll watch whatever you want.”

“Do you have that Next Generation episode where N goes crazy?”

“Sure, said the doctor. Is that what you were watching when the dummies nabbed you?”

“Yup,” said Herman.

“Well heck,” replied the doctor, grabbing a videocassette from the shelf and handing it to Herman. “Just wind it forward to where you were and we’ll start there. I’ve seen it all anyway.”

It was quickly done, and they settled back to watch.

“They’ll find out soon enough,” screamed N. He suddenly dropped the weapon and grabbed the box from Q. In a flash, he transformed himself into a smaller size, jumped into the box, and closed the lid. It latched with a snap.

“I’m sorry to say,” whispered Q, “that it’s too late now to avoid it.”

Jon Luc looked nervously over his shoulder and then hunkered down behind the box.

Herman looked nervously over his shoulder and then hunkered down more comfortably in the doctor’s padded office chair.

Suddenly, a one millimeter diameter hole appeared in the side of the box. Q’s force field flashed into existence just long enough to capture and neutralize the beam. “Can’t let that keep going,” said Q, “Too bad about N. Only the bottom of the box was treated. Since N is never going back to his ship, that drone of his is now yours.” Q vanished in a flash leaving the drone, the gun, and the box (now N’s casket) behind. “Q!!!”, shouted the Captain, “You forgot something!!!” In a flash, the gun and box disappear and the Captain grins.

The credits start to roll and the shrink says, “We have time for another, how about

the sequel episode?”

“What?” exclaimed Herman. “You mean they was a sequel? I ain’t never seen it!”

“Yes,” replied the doctor, looking smug and mysterious. He put the videocassette that they’d already watched back on the shelf and took down the next one in line, which he inserted into the player. He pressed “Play”.

“Captain,” said Data.

“Yes, Data.”

“I have another question.”

“Go ahead, Data,” said Jon Luc tiredly.

“Why does everyone call me Data? That **is** a plural noun. There **is** only one of me. Why isn’t my name Datum?”

“I don’t know, Data. Maybe we should ask Starfleets.” The little joke was lost on Data.

“Couldn’t you just call me Datum, Sir?”

“Make it so,” muttered Jon Luc to the others in the Bridge. They all nodded tiredly.

“Captain,” said Datum.

“Yes Data, uh Datum,” replied Jon Luc with resignation, “another question, I presume.”

“Not at all, Sir,” corrected Datum primly, pleased with his new name. “A ship of unknown configuration has just appeared. It seems to have come through some sort of a portal. One moment it wasn’t there and the next moment it was.”

“And not a moment too soon,” muttered Jon Luc under his breath. “Computer, report!” he ordered authoritatively, happy for the interruption of a rather tedious, if not mechanical, conversation.

“Computer reporting. The ship is a scale model, one inch per foot, manufactured originally for the first Star Wars movie by Industrial Light and M —”

“No, no, no!” interrupted Jon Luc in disgust. “Not that report! The one from the script!”

“Oh, excuse me, Sir. The ship is of an unknown configuration. It is operating with a type of energy field never seen before.”

“Very informative,” muttered Jon Luc. “Scan!” he continued.

“Sir,” reported Datum, “Our scans indicate that they are energizing weapons.”

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“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” muttered Jon Luc. “Shields!” he continued.

“Sir,” reported Riker, “the shields are inoperative. So are the warp engines, the impulse drive, the life support systems, the vending machines in the cafeteria, and my electric toothbrush. I’ve tried to contact Johnson & Johnson, but —”

“Hey!” objected Herman. “They don’t say no stuff like that on no Star Trek episode, an’ they don’t got no vending machines in no cafeteria, neither!”

The doctor smiled and looked smug.

“Evasive maneuvers!” commanded Jon Luc. “No, belay that order!” He raised his arms as if in supplication to an angry God and muttered, “What would we be evasive with, a jib and mainsail? Oars? Crap!”

“I’ll be in my Ready Room,” Jon Luc announced, and headed for the door.

“Sir!” exclaimed Whorf, while unwrapping a Payday candy bar, “They’re locking on weapons.”

“Hey!” yelled Riker, pointing at the candy bar, “Where the Hell did you get a candy bar if the vending machines are broken?!?”

“What the Hell?” muttered Herman.

“Wait,” smirked the doctor, “the best part is coming.”

Just then, a tremendous blast rocked the Starship Enterprise, and the doctor clasped his hands and beamed in satisfaction. Sparks and flames jumped out of the computers and the Bridge began to fill with smoke. Everyone was thrown about. Suddenly, N appeared.

“Damn!” yelled Herman, “I thought he was dead!”

“Well, Captain,” simpered N with a little flirt of his shoulders, “this looks like a positively wonderful time for you to use that cute little drone that I gave you.”

“Uuug!” complained Herman, wrinkling his nose and wiggling his wrist limply, “Is he, you know?”

The doctor shrugged indicating innocent ignorance.

“N!” exclaimed the captain, “We thought you were dead!”

“Ahh,” replied N with a negligent toss of his head, “Q never was very thorough about verifying things. Pesky little beam just winged me, was all.”

Again, the Starship shook, this time jolting a secret panel on Whorf’s console, which fell open releasing a veritable avalanche of candy bars in an amazing variety of brands and flavors.

“Hey!” yelled Riker, pointing at the candy bars.

“Hey!” yelled Herman. “This ain’t no Star Trek episode!”

“Exactly,” agreed the doctor with a broad grin as he pressed the “Pause” button. “It’s my very own creation. All done with computer simulations.”

“How?” asked Herman in a faint voice, amazed.

“Easy. I just sample a large number of scenes of all of the characters and sets. My computer synthesizes everything from that. All I do is feed in the script. Amazing, what computers can do nowadays. Shall we get back to the episode?”

“OK,” said Herman faintly. “Hey! Ya got any snacks?”

The doctor pressed a certain spot on his wall and a secret panel popped open, revealing a large number of candy bars, in an amazing variety of brands and flavors.

“Take whatever you want,” offered the doctor expansively.

Herman cautiously plucked a Payday candy bar from the pile. The doctor released the “Pause” button and the episode resumed.

Riker was trying to stuff candy bars into his pockets while Whorf pulled a large, ugly, curved and many pointed blade from the scabbard on his pants leg. “This calls for jabbarahadghed!” he yelled in a guttural voice.

“Hey, cool it man, I just want some candy!” whined Riker.

“Will everybody just please focus?” begged Jon Luc as the starship lurched again.

“I do believe,” ventured Datum, “that the smoke which I see curling about the Bridge smells distinctly of barbecue. Please correct me if I am wrong. I have been having some problems with my olfactory circuitry lately. Intel has been slow to respond to my requests for replacement parts.” Datum twitched ominously.

“Captain?” reminded N coyly. “The drone?”

“Ah, of course!” yelled Jon Luc. “The Drone! One! Destroy! Make it so!”

The pile of candy bars disappeared.

“Awwwwww!” yelled Whorf and Riker in unison.

“No, dammit! Not the candy bars! That damned ship out there that’s blasting us!”

The candy bars reappeared —

“Yeeeeaaaaa!” yelled Whorf and Riker in unison. Datum twitched again.

— and the starship of unknown configuration vanished in a shower of sponge rubber,

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crepe paper, and rubber bands.

Datum reported, "Captain, the impulse drive is restarting. Life support is operational. The vending machines are working again, —"

Whorf and Riker trampled everybody in their paths as each tried to be the first to the turbolift. "Cafeteria!" they both yelled in unison as the turbolift door closed behind them.

"— the warp engines are coming back on line, and the time clock indicates the end of my shift. Crusher, take over." Datum popped his time card into the time clock, put the card in the rack, and left the Bridge, walking with a distinct limp. Smoke curled from one ear.

"Well done, Captain!" cheered N, delicately munching a Hershey's bar, with his pinkie extended.

Jon Luc took a Snicker's bar from the pile, unwrapped it with a far-away look in his eyes, and contemplatively began to nibble on it. "Helm?" he inquired.

"Ready to resume previous course, Sir."

"Make it slow."

The doctor ejected the tape and made a production of putting it back into its sleeve and putting it back in its place on the shelf. Pointing to a clock on the wall, which displayed, "TIME TO GET BACK TO WORK" in red, and said, "Time to get back to work." He pushed a button and his assistant walks in with a sheaf of papers and starts pointing to the places where the doctor was to sign. After a few minutes of this, she straightens up, grabbing one of the sheets, hands it to Herman, saying, "This will get you out of the building. The guard outside is going to escort you to your room where you will gather any belongings then to the office where they will sign you out. You will get a bus pass if you ask for it, so you should not have any problem in getting home. Good luck." She then grabs the papers from the doctor's desk and leaves.

The Doctor said, "Efficient." He gets up, pumps Herman's hand while guiding him towards the door, saying, "Sorry about the bum's rush, but I have a quota and this did put me way behind. It was fun." By now they were in the hallway facing the guard. The doctor disappears behind the sound of a door slamming and the guard says, "Walk this way" and starts limping down the hallway. Herman, still in a good mood despite the abrupt exit, starts limping down the hallway.

The End