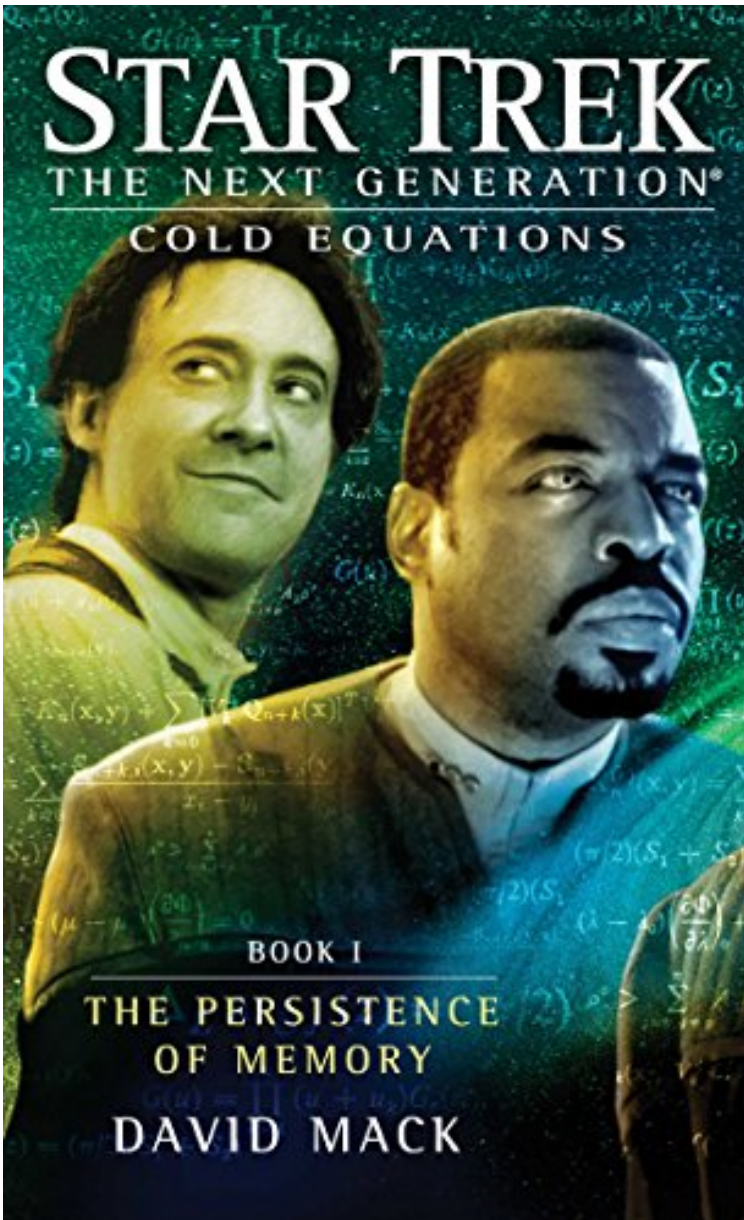


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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBook One in the New York Times bestselling Cold Equations trilogy set in the expanded universe of Star Trek: The Next Generation!A BRAZEN HEIST Captain Jean-Luc Picard and the Enterprise crew race to find out who has stolen Datas android brother B-4and for what sinister purpose. A BROKEN PROMISE One desperate father risks all for the son he abandoned forty years ago

to pay the price for redemption? A DARING MISSION Against overwhelming odds, and with time running out, Commander Worf has only one chance to avert a disaster. But how high a price will he pay for victory? Extrait Star Trek: The Next Generation: Cold Equations: The Persistence of Memory 1 With a sonorous hum and a luminous flare, the transporter beam faded and Commander Geordi La Forge found himself alone in the dark, staring down the barrel of a phaser rifle. The hard-eyed Tellarite security officer behind the weapon lurched forward, tensed for confrontation as he challenged La Forge in a harsh voice. Identify yourself! Hands raised and palms open, the veteran Starfleet engineer recoiled, only to freeze in place as he noticed on the edges of his vision more rifles being brought to bear against him. La Forge, Enterprise. Whats going on? The Tellarite glared down his snout at La Forge, his bearing laced with suspicion and hostility. Well ask the questions. He nodded at someone behind La Forge. Search him. Singsong tones from a tricorder broke the eerie silence as La Forge was scanned, then rough hands patted him down, stripped his field tricorder from his hip pocket, and plucked the padd from his left hand. A burly Denobulan with sinister-looking ocular ridges stepped into his line of sight and showed the confiscated devices to the Tellarite. These are all he had on him, sir. Somewhere in the distance, sirens wailed in the night, their cries faint but drawing closer. Despite his subordinates assurances, the Tellarite lieutenant commander kept his rifle aimed squarely at La Forges face. What are you doing here? I was invited, La Forge said. Im a guest of Captain Bruce Maddox. He contacted me via subspace two days ago and asked me to come here in person. He said it was urgent. A Trill woman with a crew cut that matched her severe features edged into view on La Forges left. Sir, I just confirmed the Enterprise is in orbit. He is who he says he is. The news seemed to disappoint the Tellarite, who scowled as he lowered his weapon. All right, stand down. He stepped forward and offered his three-fingered hand to La Forge. Lieutenant Commander Teg. No hard feelings, Commander. Well see about that. La Forge stepped around Teg and got his first good look at the exterior of the Starfleet Annex of the Daystrom Institute. It had been nearly a decade since the Enterprises last visit to the facility; not much seemed to have changed. The five-story building was bland and utilitarian, and its surrounding lawn, which sloped gently downhill to a dense sprawl of old-growth forest, was impeccably manicured. He looked back at the dour Tellarite, who continued to watch him with wary, flat-black eyes. Wheres Captain Maddox? Teg beckoned La Forge with a tilt of his head. Follow me. Rifle slung at his side, he led La Forge inside the Annex through its open main entrance. Stealing looks around the wide-open ground floor, La Forge noted that the facilitys interior was far more spartan than he had remembered. If not for the armed Starfleet security personnel milling about, he might have thought the Annex deserted. Force field-partitioned work spaces that once had been crowded with fabrication equipment and computers now stood empty. What had been an office was now a stack of crates. It looked more like an academic laboratory than an active research environment at one of the Federations preeminent scientific institutions. At the far end of the floor, Teg ushered him inside an elevator and pressed the button for the recently added sublevel, where Captain Maddoxs new lab was situated. Ten years earlier, Maddox had conducted his studies in the spacious main laboratory on the ground floor. With its state-of-the-art accoutrements and commanding view of the Annexs wooded environs, it had seemed like an ideal working environment until its overall exposure had left it vulnerable to a devastating sneak attack that had nearly cost Maddox his life. Since then, Maddox had erred on the side of safety, eschewing the luxuries of sunlight and scenery for the practical benefits of privacy and security. The elevator doors parted, and bitter smoke rolled in over La Forges head. Teg led him out into the sublevel and down the hallway toward Maddoxs lab. Walking slowly, La Forge squinted through the smoke at the numerous scorch marks dotting the corridor. Then he saw that the airlock-style double doors to the lab were open, and through the doorway flowed a steady haze tinged with the acrid stench of burnt metal and melted circuitry. He dodged a departing firefighter as they both stepped through the doorway. Once inside, La Forges worst fears were confirmed: the high-tech cybernetics lab had been demolished. Standing in the middle of the wreckage was Bruce Maddox, one of the Federations leading experts on cybernetics and artificial intelligence. He was in his mid-sixties but still retained the trim physique of his youth; only his salt-and-pepper hair betrayed his years. Dark circles of fatigue ringed his eyes, and his disheveled uniform suggested to La Forge that the man had been involved in whatever crisis had just unfolded. Maddoxs first brush with the Enterprise crew, nearly twenty-five years earlier, had been adversarial; he had tried to have Data declared the property of Starfleet so he could disassemble the android to further his own research. That legal battle had been decided in Datas favor, setting the first precedent that eventually led the Federation to recognize the legal personhood of artificially sentient beings an argument that Maddox himself had made before the Federations highest civilian court, in

defense of Datas older brother, B-4. In the fifteen years between those two legal milestones, Maddox and Data had developed a mutual if guarded professional respect. It still amazed La Forge that Data had never borne a grudge against Maddox, not even after he had acquired his emotion chip. Inspired by Datas example, La Forge had put aside his own anger at Maddox long ago and since then had come to respect and admire the mans work. If pressed, La Forge would have had to admit that Maddox was likely the only person alive who knew more than he did about Soong-type androids. They met in the middle of the lab and clasped hands. Maddox looked exhausted and desperate. Geordi! Thank God youre here. Please tell me the Enterprise is with you. Yes, it is. He put a hand to Maddoxs shoulder in reassurance. Bruce, calm down. Tell me what happened. Maddox pressed his dirty palms over his eyes, then pulled down, stretching his face into something that looked like it belonged in a funhouse mirror. It happened so fast. One minute I was upstairs in my office, preparing for our meeting. The next, alarms started going off. I raced down here, and when I stepped out of the elevator, they started shooting. Who did? I dont know who they were. I couldnt get a good look at them. He turned and pointed at a wall console that had been blasted to pieces, leaving only an ugly scorch from floor to ceiling. They knocked out the security system, including the scattering field. Then they beamed outI heard the sound of the transporter from the end of the hall. I ran toward the lab, and thats when something exploded. Teg stepped between La Forge and Maddox. Five somethings exploded, actually. He grunted and shook his head. Hell of a way to cover an escape. La Forge surveyed the damage inflicted by the explosives. That wasnt part of their exit strategy. If thats all it was, theyd only have needed onebut they brought five, one for each of the labs computer banks. This was about terminating Captain Maddoxs research. He turned toward Maddox. Bruce, what have you been working on? The cyberneticist looked flummoxed. Nothing except helping B-4. Recoiling from La Forges incredulous glare, he insisted, Im serious, Geordi. I havent done any new work in yearsnot since that fiasco with the Exo III androids. Then what was this break-in about? Maddox flung his arms wide in frustration. I dont know! Start by telling me what secret project was so urgent that you needed to have the Enterprise pulled off-mission to race here at maximum warp. The scientist took a deep breath and regained some of his calm. It wasnt a secret project so much as a personal emergency. Its about B-4. What about him? Its complicated. Maddox walked toward an empty corner of the lab and gestured for La Forge to follow him. Ill have to show you. The mention of the prototype androids name had filled La Forge with worry. An early creation of the late Doctor Noonien Soong, B-4 had been a relative simpleton compared with his younger kin, such as Data, Lore, and the replicant of Juliana Tainer. B-4s positronic brain was far less advanced than the others were, though much of his physical body was comparable to those of his twins. What now made B-4 of keen personal interest to La Forgeas well as the rest of the Enterprise crew, to say nothing of Maddoxwas that Data, less than a day before embarking on a suicide mission to save Captain Picard and destroy the planet-killing weapon of the usurper Praetor Shinzon, had uploaded a complete copy of his memory engrams into B-4 for safekeeping. Because of limitations in B-4s hardware and software, he had never been able to consciously access those memories, but knowing they resided within him, as if he were a living memorial to his lamented sibling, had meant a great deal to those whod known Data. Maddox stopped in the corner of the room and opened a panel to reveal the labs environmental controls. He activated the interface with a single tap of his finger. A few months ago, I noticed that B-4s response time to stimuli was slowing down. He turned toward La Forge. At first, I thought it was a simple biomechanical problem. But then I ran a full diagnostic. Something was going wrong in B-4s positronic matrix. It was breaking down, and it was because of Datas memory engrams. There must have been traces of operational code mixed in with his memories, and when B-4s operating software tried to incorporate the new subroutines, it started a slow-motion cascade failure. You mean like what happened to Datas daughter, Lal? A grimace and a nod. Exactly. He turned and started entering commands into the environmental panel. B-4s mind simply wasnt made to harbor software that advanced. Once the cascade failure began, I did all I could to reverse it, but I failed. Ive managed to slow it down, but unless we find a way to halt the degradation of his matrix, hell suffer a complete cascade failure in less than a week. He finished keying in commands, and with a soft hiss, a large section of the wall began to creep open. The only solution Ive come up with so far has been to purge all of Datas memories from B-4s brain. The mere suggestion horrified La Forge. Bruce, you cant... I dont want to, Geordi. But if B-4s mind fails, itll purge Datas memory engrams as part of the final cascade error. If were doomed to lose him either way, Id prefer to save B-4. The towering, floor-to-ceiling secret door opened wide enough for Maddox to slip past it, into the alcove hidden behind it. He stopped abruptly just a few steps inside, and La Forge nearly stumbled into him. Bruce, whats His question trailed off, forgotten, as he realized that he and Maddox were in a room with

sarcophagus-shaped alcoves for six Soong-type androids. The three on the left side of the room were labeled for Soongs first three unnamed prototypes. The three on the right were labeled for B-4, Lore, and Lal. All six alcoves were empty. Maddox faltered, and La Forge put a hand to his back to steady him. Slackjawed with grief and shock, the cyberneticist muttered, Gone.... Theyre all gone. I think its safe to say we know what the intruders were after. La Forge stepped away and tapped his combadge. La Forge to Enterprise. He was answered by the gruff baritone of Commander Worf. Enterprise. Go ahead. Captain Maddoxs lab has been attacked, and all six of the Soong-type androids in his care are missing and presumed stolen. We need to lock down this whole planet right now. Understood. Stay there. Ill join you shortly. Enterprise out. La Forge returned to Maddoxs side and clasped his shoulder in consolation. Dont worry, Bruce, well find them. Who? The thieves? Or the androids? He regarded the empty alcoves with cold fury. Both. Every word that issued from the mouth of Governor Eloch, the head of the civilian government on Galor IV, seemed calculated to annoy Worf, who stood outside the main entrance of the Starfleet Annex of the Daystrom Institute and listened to the freakishly tall, pot-bellied Kobliad politicians whining. A class-one planetary security alert. Do you have even the slightest idea what such a protocol entails, Commander? Yes. Worf hoped the simplicity of his answer would obviate Elochs impulse to continue. But as he expected, he was disappointed. I dont think you do, Commander. All nonessential, nonemergency communications have been suspended. The planets transporter network is locked down, beyond even my authority to reinstate. Every aircraft, spacecraft, and starship on the planets been grounded; every publicly accessible computer system has been shut down; and every law enforcement and defense agency on my planet is at a state of high alert, awaiting instructions from your vessel. The governor crossed his arms and radiated contempt. A class-one planetary security alert is a very rare thing, Commander. There hasnt been one on Galor IV in ten years. Would you care to guess what that incident and this one have in common? No, I would not. Your ship, thats what! An officer from the Enterprise plunged this world into a state of panic ten years ago, for reasons that were never explained. Now, here we are again, seized in a state of global paralysis on the whims of another Enterprise officer. Trouble seems to follow your ship, Commander. Has it occurred to Starfleet that perhaps the Enterprise is the problem? I do not think it has. Tiring of the one-sided conversation, Worf looked around the grounds for any small objects he might use to commit ritual suicide. The governor gesticulated clumsily at the assorted armed Starfleet security personnel moving about outside the Annex. Are we even going to get an explanation for whats gone wrong this time? Or are we supposed to sit by while Starfleet places us under martial law? With all respect, Governor, your planet has not been placed under martial law. We are enforcing a temporary state of heightened security in response to a direct threat. These measures are as much to ensure your peoples safety as they are to aid our investigation. Eloch appeared unconvinced. Does that mean the perpetrators of whatever crime has been committed here will face justice in our civilian courts under Federation law? It does not. Worf hadnt planned to elaborate, but the sudden reddening of Elochs visage made it seem a prudent course of action. The Daystrom Institute is a civilian research entity, but the Annex remains under Starfleets jurisdiction. As such, the offenses that transpired here will be dealt with by a military tribunal. The middle-aged Kobliad was the very portrait of frustration. Can you even tell me when the lockdown might end? Theres an entire planet full of people out there waiting to get back to their lives and businesses. I cannot. We have just begun our investigation. There is no way to know how long it will take to reach its conclusion. Eloch crossed his arms and raised his chin at a haughty angle. I want to talk to your commanding officer. I will inform him of your desire. Narrowed eyes conveyed Elochs suspicion. He told you to stonewall me. It might be some time before Captain Picard is able to speak with you. Worf motioned for the governor to depart. Perhaps you would be more comfortable waiting in your own home. The governor bristled at the suggestion. You think you can get rid of me that easily? It took all of Worf's willpower not to respond, Actually, I hope you will leave me no choice but to use deadly force. Instead, he marshaled an insincere smile and exorcised any trace of hostility from his voice. I merely suggest, Governor, that it might be some time before the investigation yields results. Until then, the demands of operational security strictly limit the intelligence I can share with you or the planets civilian law-enforcement agencies. Rather than ask you to suffer further inconvenience by waiting here for our next report, I thought you might prefer to return to your residence or office. A most politic suggestion, Mister Worf. Well played. Eloch started to walk away, then stopped and looked back over his shoulder. I still want to talk to your captain. I am sure he will look forward to it, Governor. Good night. Worf delivered the last two words with sufficient gravity that Eloch had no choice but to infer the conversation was over. He stood and watched the governor depart; it was nearly half a minute before the Kobliad stooped through the hatchway of his executive shuttle

and passed from Worf's sight. Several seconds later the small craft made a near-silent vertical ascent until it was well above the highest local buildings, then it accelerated away toward the capital, three hundred kilometers to the north. As the ship vanished into a bank of low atmospheric haze and the hum of its engines faded, Captain Jean-Luc Picard exited the Annex and stopped at Worf's side. You handled that well, Mister Worf. Thank you, sir. The Klingon turned a curious eye toward his captain. Why did you not wish to speak with him? Picard drew a deep breath and adopted a pensive mien. I've been a starship captain for nearly half a century. In that time, I've had countless conversations exactly like the one you just had with Governor Eloch. Learning to placate the egos and tempers of those in power is a skill every starship commander needs to cultivate, sooner or later. Worf was both flattered and discomfited by the implication of Picard's explanation. I was not aware that such a career path remained available to me. Why? Because of your actions on Soukara? The captain spoke as if it was a minor infraction, but Worf's record had been blemished by a formal reprimand after he scuttled a vital mission during the Dominion War in order to save his wife, Jadzia Dax. It had been a grave offense during wartime, but now Picard verbally waved it off. That was ten years ago. Captain Sisko was certain it would bar me from ever attaining my own command. Captain Picard remained upbeat. That was before you served as the Federation's ambassador to QonoS. I know you hold Captain Sisko in high esteem, but he was wrong, Worf. If Starfleet didn't think you were ready for command, they wouldn't have let me appoint you my first officer. Your job isn't merely about being my Number One; it's about acquiring the necessary experience to command a ship of your own. The topic of conversation made Worf distinctly uncomfortable. That may be so. However, I think it is premature to speak of my promotion. Picard's mood turned quite earnest. Far from it. You've been my first officer for more than four years, and during that time your service has been exemplary. I have no doubt that you're more than ready to take on greater responsibilities. Ever since Worf was a child, he had never liked being pushed into decisions. Now, as ever, he could not help but push back, even if only obliquely. If memory serves, you allowed Captain Riker to serve as your executive officer for fifteen years. Well, in my defense, he was a slow learner. With a rakishly arched brow, Picard added, Look how long it took him to marry Counselor Troi. Worf conceded the debate with a frown. Good point. No decisions need to be made in haste, Picard assured him. Just give it some thought. He looked his captain in the eye. I shall. A soft chirp warbled from Worf's combadge, followed by the mellow, feminine voice of the Enterprise's chief of security. Choudhury to Worf. This is Worf. Go ahead. We've finished our sweep of Captain Maddox's lab and I think you and the captain need to see this immediately. Picard hurried back inside the Annex, and Worf followed him. Were on our way. After more than a decade in Starfleet, Lieutenant Jasminder Choudhury had seen her share of crime scenes, and in all that time not one had ever struck her as being the site of a perfect crime but she had to admit, Commander Maddox's ransacked lab came closer than most. The criminal investigation team, a half-dozen experts in various scientific disciplines, had retreated to the room's periphery to pack up their test kits and doff their blue disposable field suits, which both protected the investigators from airborne and contact pathogens and minimized the risk of contaminating the scene with their uniform fibers or traces of their genetic material. Choudhury stood at the door of the lab, waiting for the all-clear signal that would mean she was free to enter and begin her own walk-through of the lab. Pending that clearance, she reviewed the investigators' preliminary findings on her PADD and was dismayed by what she read. Her sensitive ears picked up the low thrumming of the elevator arriving at the end of the hallway. Its doors parted, and Captain Picard was the first person to emerge, followed by Worf. Focusing her thoughts, Choudhury maintained a mask of professional reserve as her ship's two most senior officers approached. As much as she wanted to smile whenever she saw Worf, she knew it would be improper to let their intimate relationship color their behavior toward one another while on duty, either aboard the ship or on away missions. It wasn't that their romance was the least bit secret; most of the ship's senior officers were well aware of it, and as long as they didn't let it interfere with their performance as officers, they had the captain's tacit blessing. She stepped forward and met her CO with a polite nod. Captain. What have you found, Lieutenant? She handed him the PADD. This was a professional job. According to Captain Maddox's statement, there were three intruders. They were well-equipped and knew their way around the Annex. She walked to a door along the main corridor. At 2315, they remotely disabled and hacked a subset of the Annex's sensors just enough to mask their entrance, path to target, and actions inside the building. To the Institute's main security center, nothing seemed to be wrong. They didn't notice when their visual feeds on these areas switched over to looped recordings. She pushed open the door to reveal stairs leading up. One minute later, the intruders breached the building's only entrance by sabotaging the retinal scanner and magnetic locks with a parasitic plasma charge, and they

crossed the first floor to this emergency stairwell. Worf asked, Why didnt they beam directly into the building? Because the Annexs scattering field was still active. It was hard-wired so that it could be controlled only from a panel inside Maddoxs lab. It would have prevented them from using sensors or transporters within ten meters of the Annex. The captain motioned for her to continue. What happened next? Once inside, they reached this sublevel in less than thirty seconds. She closed the door and led Worf and Picard back to the labs open doorway. They gained access to the secured laboratory by force, cutting through the doors locks with high-intensity plasma torches. With the fire sensors offline, they were able to set the torches to maximum power. I believe they breached these doors in under a minute. They followed her inside the lab and stayed close behind her as she walked them through the crime scene. Based on footprint patterns, we think that one of them placed the explosive charges on the computer banks while the other two broke into the androids hidden alcove. They appear to have finessed their way through this doors security systems, because Maddox noticed no sign of damage when he opened it for Commander La Forge an hour ago. The trio stopped amid the six empty sarcophagi. I suspect they placed transport pattern enhancers on all six androids, then exited the chamber. According to Elfikis review of the Institutes security office computers, a Trojan horse program was uploaded from this lab at 2320. It initiated a series of system failures in the Annexs scattering field generators. To the main security office, these would have registered as simple mechanical malfunctions. Thats when the alarm sounded. Picard looked up from the padd, his attention keenly focused. What alarm? The Institutes general security alert. Choudhury pointed at several scorched blocks of sensor hardware mounted high on the walls around the lab. These auxiliary sensors started flashing and wailing and transmitting signals back to the security center. The guards on duty saw only a few seconds of vid before the intruders shot the backup sensors, but it was enough to make the sentries summon reinforcements from the nearby Starfleet barracks. Worf stepped back out into the hallway and cast an inquisitive eye at the blaster damage on the walls. At what time did Captain Maddox reach the sublevel? By his own reckoning, roughly 2321. Thats when the intruders opened fire at him. About ten seconds later, they beamed out and took the androids with them. The captain tapped the padds interactive screen, looked around the lab, then faced Choudhury. Captain Maddox said the charges on the computer banks exploded almost immediately after the intruders beamed out. Were they remotely detonated? No, sir. We found traces of molecular timers. That suggests the intruders had a rigidly planned exit strategy that included blowing up the computers regardless of whether theyd been detected. If the general alert hadnt been sounded and hadnt tripped the auxiliary sensors, the explosion and subsequent fire might have gone undetected long enough to reduce the entire lab to slag. It couldve been days before we confirmed the androids were stolen. Picard furrowed his brow as he reached the end of the notes on the padd. Do we have any leads to the intruders whereabouts? Choudhury shook her head. Not yet, sir. We know they didnt use the planets public transporter network to beam out of the lab, and they didnt beam to a ship in orbit, because we would have detected that on the Enterprise. That suggests they beamed to a smaller vessel made for atmospheric flight, such as a shuttle or a small transport. Given the limitations of transporters as a line-of-sight technology, and the fact that they can beam through only a limited depth of a magnetically active planets surface, we think the escape vessel is still somewhere on the planet. Sensing that Worf was about to tell her to do what shed already done, she added, I have mrhov collating all of the planets air-traffic data from the past hour to see if we can narrow down the list of targets. With the Enterprises computer, it should take under an hour. Worf looked concerned. What if the escape vessel was cloaked? A small starship could operate cloaked inside an atmosphere. Not without kicking up a storm of neutrinos. If there was a cloaked ship in the atmosphere, wed have detected it the minute we made orbit. The first officer seemed irked at being corrected. A ship with a phasing cloak would give off no such emissions. Having neither the time nor the inclination for a debate, Choudhury mustered her most politic tone of voice. Phasing cloaks require a tremendous amount of power to operate, sir. Any vessel large enough to deploy one would be unable to navigate safely inside an atmosphere, and it would be unable to beam up the intruders without disabling the cloak and revealing itself in a very dramatic fashion. With all respect, I think we can rule out cloaked ships as an element of the crime especially since theres a far more pressing question we need to answer. The captain traded a bemused look with Worf, then asked, What question is that? Who triggered the Institutes general alert? I presumed the intruders triggered the alarm when they uploaded the Trojan horse. She shook her head. No, sir. It went undetected. Worf nodded at the environmental controls. Perhaps when they opened the alcove. Again, no. All primary sensors in the lab had been shut down and spoofed, and the auxiliary sensors werent active yet. The mystery sparked a heightened level of interest from Worf. Could the guards in the security center have

tripped it? No, I checked. And it wasn't Captain Maddox. He was upstairs, getting ready to meet with Geordi, when he heard the alarm. There's no record of where the alert originated, but I suspect it was triggered remotely, just like the intruders' hack of the sensors. Picard's focus on the question grew more intense by the moment. Could it have been part of their plan to be detected? I don't see any way in which being detected would have benefited them, she said. Maybe they were betrayed by an accomplice who had second thoughts, Worf said. Choudhury acknowledged the possibility with a measure of doubt. Perhaps. One thing is for certain, Picard said with conviction. Whoever triggered that alert knows more about this situation than we do. Lieutenant, continue the search for the intruders. Number One, do whatever it takes to track down our good Samaritan.

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