

= The Neutral Zone ( Star Trek : The Next Generation ) =

" The Neutral Zone " is the 26th episode of the first season of the American science fiction television series Star Trek : The Next Generation , originally aired within the United States on May 16 , 1988 , in broadcast syndication . The episode originated as a piece of fan fiction by Deborah McIntyre and Mona Clee , and was turned into a teleplay by Maurice Hurley . Because of the 1988 Writers Guild of America strike , Hurley created the script in a day and a half , and the timescale forced both the abandonment of the idea of a two @-@ part episode and the first appearance of the Borg which was delayed until the following season episode " Q Who " .

Set in the 24th century , the series follows the adventures of the crew of the Federation starship USS Enterprise @-@ D. In " The Neutral Zone " , the Enterprise is sent to investigate the destruction of Federation outposts near space controlled by the Romulan Star Empire , discovering a derelict Earth satellite with cryonically frozen humans aboard .

This episode saw the introduction of the redesigned Romulans , with prosthetic forehead pieces designed by makeup supervisor Michael Westmore , and the first appearance of the Romulan Warbird which was designer Andrew Probert 's final work for the Star Trek franchise . The episode was mildly received by critics who viewed it after the end of the season , who criticised the two @-@ plot nature of the episode and the general lack of excitement .

= = Plot = =

While Captain Picard ( Patrick Stewart ) is away at an emergency Federation conference , the Enterprise crew discovers an ancient space capsule from Earth . Inside they find three humans in cryonic chambers . Lt. Cdr . Data ( Brent Spiner ) asks to move the chambers to the Enterprise and Commander Riker ( Jonathan Frakes ) agrees . Picard returns and orders the Enterprise to the Neutral Zone , as several Federation outposts nearby have not responded to communications . He explains that the conference was about the potential threat of the Romulans , who have not been seen for the last several decades . As Data and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Crusher ( Gates McFadden ) work to thaw the cryonically preserved humans , Picard admonishes Data for bringing them aboard during a crucial time , and puts Riker in charge of looking after them .

The survivors ? Claire Raymond ( Gracie Harrison ) , a housewife ; Ralph Offenhouse ( Peter Mark Richman ) , a financier ; and L. Q. " Sonny " Clemmons ( Leon Rippy ) , a musician ? are from the late 20th Century . All died of incurable illnesses and were placed in cryogenic suspension after their deaths in the hope that cures might be found in the future . Dr. Crusher , in reviving them , successfully cures them of their illnesses . They deal with the culture shock of awakening in a distant future , while Counselor Troi ( Marina Sirtis ) searches for the living descendants of Claire . Of the three , Clemmons seems to fare the best at adapting to life in the future and befriends Data . Raymond is distraught at the thought of losing everyone she ever knew , particularly her children . Offenhouse is irritated by the loss of his wealth , and lack of access to news or other information . Picard assures him that all questions will be answered , but that their current situation with the Romulans requires Picard 's full attention .

The Enterprise reaches the Neutral Zone and confirms that the outposts have been destroyed . They are soon met by a Romulan Warbird and Commander Tebok ( Marc Alaimo ) questions why the Enterprise has approached the zone . As Picard tries to explain his actions , Offenhouse arrives on the bridge and threatens to disrupt the tense situation , though he correctly ascertains that the Romulans are also seeking answers . Picard and the Romulans agree to pool their resources to discover the culprit . Picard later comments that while the encounter went favorably , the Romulans may be a significant threat in future engagements . Picard arranges to transport the 20th @-@ Century humans to Earth , where one of Raymond 's descendants lives . Clemmons expresses enthusiasm for the future , and Picard sets Offenhouse the challenge of improving himself .

= = Production = =

== Writing and casting ==

Due to the impending Writers Guild of America strike , writer and co @-@ executive producer Maurice Hurley developed the teleplay in a day and a half from fan fiction written by Deborah McIntyre and Mona Clee . Due to the strike , certain story ideas were removed from the plot including the planned first appearance of the Borg which was subsequently delayed until the second season episode " Q Who " . This was because " The Neutral Zone " was originally intended to be the first of a two @-@ part episode , but due to the strike there wasn 't enough time to write the second part and so the story was shortened . The second episode would have seen the Enterprise and the Romulans team up against the Borg . The script that was shot was a first draft , and due to the writer 's strike in place , no amendments were subsequently made . Director James L. Conway later explained , " If there hadn 't been a strike , I think it would have been a better script . " It was the second episode of The Next Generation directed by Conway , the first being " Justice " earlier in the first season . He didn 't direct another episode until " Frame of Mind " during season six .

In the writers and directors ' guide for the series , written by the show 's creator Gene Roddenberry prior to the first season , Romulans were covered by one of the main writing rules which stated " No stories about warfare with Klingons and Romulans and no stories with Vulcans . We are determined not to copy ourselves and believe there must be other interesting aliens in a galaxy filled with billions of stars and planets . " Following the perceived failure of the Ferengi as the main villains of TNG by the production staff , the Romulans became the main villains during the early years of the series . This was in addition to the Borg , who were originally developed as an insectoid race for this episode but became a race of cyborgs by the time they first appeared in " Q Who " . While the Romulans made their first TNG appearance in this episode , they were previously mentioned in " Angel One " and " Heart of Glory " . The episode was the final one of season one to be completed , with production wrapping ten months after it began on " Encounter at Farpoint " .

The episode featured an appearance by Gene Roddenberry 's production assistant Susan Sackett as a Starfleet science officer . Her appearance was the result of winning a bet over her weight loss . She would go on to write two episodes of The Next Generation alongside Fred Bronson , " Ménage à Troi " and " The Game " . Peter Mark Richman appeared as Ralph Offenhouse , and had appeared in a guest star capacity in over 500 roles on television . Leon Rippy appeared as L.Q. " Sonny " Clemonds , having previously appeared alongside Jonathan Frakes in North and South . Marc Alaimo made his second Star Trek appearance in this episode , having appeared in " Lonely Among Us " as the Antican leader , and would go on to appear in season four 's " The Wounded " as Cardassian Gul Macet before being cast once more as a Cardassian in the recurring role of Gul Dukat on Star Trek : Deep Space Nine .

Two of the time @-@ displaced humans returned in Star Trek literature , with Ralph Offenhouse appearing in The Next Generation novel Debtor ? s Planet as the Federation Ambassador to the Ferengi and again in the Star Trek : Destiny trilogy as the Secretary of Commerce for the Federation . Clare Raymond made a further appearance in the Star Trek : Department of Temporal Investigations novel Watching the Clock as a counsellor for time @-@ displaced people . Offenhouse , Raymond and " Sonny " Clemmons also appeared in the two @-@ part Star Trek : The Eugenetic Wars by Greg Cox which was set prior to their appearance in this episode .

== Make @-@ up and design ==

Michael Westmore developed a new appearance for the Romulans in this episode , being required to take into account the concepts introduced for them in the original series episodes " Balance of Terror " and " The Enterprise Incident " . There was also a desire to ensure that they appeared different to the Vulcans , with default appearance of the Romulans to look more aggressive and warlike . Westmore developed prosthetic forehead pieces , taking careful steps to ensure that they don 't look like Neanderthals . Rather than create individual designs for each forehead as he did with the Klingons , a number of standard designs were created .

The Romulan Warbird made its first appearance in this episode , with it being the final design of Andrew Probert for the Star Trek franchise , having previously designed both the Enterprise in Star Trek : The Motion Picture and the Enterprise @-@ D for The Next Generation . The double hulled nature of the starship originated in early designs , however the wings were originally vertical rather than horizontal , with the size of the ship made to be deliberately larger than that of the Enterprise .

= = Reception and home media release = =

" The Neutral Zone " aired in broadcast syndication during the week commencing May 20 , 1988 . It received Nielsen ratings of 10 @. @ 2 , reflecting the percentage of all households watching the episode during its timeslot . This was the highest ratings received by the series since " Symbiosis " four episodes earlier .

Several reviewers re @-@ watched Star Trek : The Next Generation after the end of the series . Keith DeCandido on Tor.com felt that the episode did not really work , saying that the " smug moralizing with regard to the three 20th century refugees is laid on a bit too thick " , and that the appearance of the Romulans tried too hard to be reminiscent of their first appearance in " Balance of Terror " . Overall he said that the " first season ends , not with a bang , but with a whimper " . Zack Handlen of the A.V. Club felt that the previous episode , " Conspiracy " , would have served better as an end to the first season as " The Neutral Zone " wasn 't the worst so far , " but it may possibly be the most frustrating , because it has two storylines " . He felt that the Romulan plot would have been sufficient alone and described the storyline featuring the cryogenic survivors as " extremely painful comic relief " . He gave the episode a grade of C- .

The first home media release of " The Neutral Zone " was on VHS cassette was on May 26 , 1993 in the United States and Canada . The episode was later included on the Star Trek : The Next Generation season one DVD box set , released in March 2002 , and was released as part of the season one Blu @-@ ray set on July 24 , 2012 .