

The Bone Yard

An intentionally fake story used as a teaching tool for story structure.

(I patterned this after a specific submission we received this period, but instead of calling out the author, I just copied their mistakes into a story from another genre for illustrative purposes.)

THE BONEYARD

A Complete Teaching Example Story

The three students stood at the edge of the Kepler Station Ship Repository, watching twin suns paint the hulls of decommissioned vessels in shades of copper and gold. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Not the best, but an opening line that orients the reader with sensory detail and clear setting]**

Chen adjusted her protective goggles against the glare. Beside her, Marcus whistled low, his breath fogging in the recycled air of his enviro-suit. Ravi bounced on his toes, barely containing his excitement at finally seeing the legendary boneyard where humanity's first-generation starships finally came to rest. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Good orientation continues - we know WHO (three students), WHERE (ship boneyard), WHEN (implied near future), WHAT (they're exploring).]**

"I can't believe we're actually here," said Ravi, his voice crackling through the comm. "This is where the Prometheus class ships are stored. The first ships to break light speed."

"Technically they didn't break it," Chen said, pushing her dark hair behind her ear in way she always did when correcting someone. "They folded space around—"

"Whatever, Chen. You know what I mean." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Dialogue reveals character personalities naturally.]**

Marcus laughed. "Can we just appreciate that we got approved for this field study? Do you know how many engineering students applied? Two hundred and thirty-seven. And Professor Okonkwo picked us."

They walked forward into the graveyard of ships. Row upon row of vessels stretched toward the horizon, each one a monument to humanity's expansion into the cosmos. Some were massive colony ships, their hulls scarred from micro-meteor impacts. Others were sleek military cruisers, decommissioned after the Centauri Accords. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Good world-building woven naturally into the narrative. Still grounded in the experiential moment.]**

"Look at that one," said Ravi, pointing to a ship that seemed to shimmer in the double sunlight. "That's weird. The hull looks... I don't know. Different?" **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Here's our "something unusual." It could be the inciting incident- but notice it's vague and no one reacts with urgency or treats it as a problem to solve.]**

Chen squinted at it. "Probably just the angle of the light. Or maybe a different alloy mix. Early ships used all kinds of experimental materials."

"Should we check it out?" asked Marcus.

"Sure, why not?" said Chen. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Critical weakness - the characters have no agency here. They're tourists, not problem-solvers. There's no hook that personally engages]**

them. They just shrug and go "why not?" There's no stakes, no urgency, nothing threatening them or requiring them to make a meaningful choice. What would you do to fix it?]

They changed direction, walking toward the shimmering ship. As they got closer, Ravi consulted his datapad.

"According to this, that's the SSV Meridian. One of the early science vessels. Launched in 2187, decommissioned in 2201. Only fourteen years of service."

"That's unusual," said Marcus. "Most of these ships ran for thirty, forty years minimum."

"Maybe it had problems," suggested Chen. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Still no real narrative hook. They're mildly curious but not personally invested. No character has a problem or goal that this situation threatens or advances.]**

[EDITORIAL NOTE: Here's where the story should escalate - they should discover something that creates a problem they MUST solve, or makes them vulnerable, or threatens them. Instead, watch what happens next:]

Chen was the technical expert of the group, everyone knew that. She'd grown up on Mars Colony, where her parents both worked in atmospheric processing. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: RED FLAG - We're dissolving into backstory/exposition instead of action. This is "telling" instead of "showing."]**

She'd always been fascinated by how things worked, taking apart her family's air filtration units and putting them back together, much to her mother's frustration. Her test scores at the Academy were the highest in their year, particularly in advanced propulsion systems. She could calculate fuel efficiency ratios in her head. She was quiet, methodical, and rarely wrong.

Marcus, on the other hand, came from Earth, from a long line of military officers. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: More exposition dump. We've completely left the scene to tell the reader background information.]**

His great-great-grandmother had served on the Defiant during the Belt Wars. He'd initially enrolled in the military academy but transferred to civilian engineering after two years, much to his father's disappointment. He specialized in weapons systems and defensive shields, though he preferred to think of his work as "protective engineering." He was loud, confident, and always the first to volunteer for dangerous assignments. Well, usually. Sometimes. It depended on his mood.

Ravi was the newest to space. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Still more backstory instead of present action.]**

Born in Chennai, he'd spent his whole childhood staring up at the stars from Earth's surface, dreaming of the day he could leave the gravity well. His family ran a restaurant, and they'd

expected him to join the business. Instead, he'd applied to the Academy on a whim, never expecting to get in. He specialized in life support systems and habitat design. He was optimistic to a fault, seeing possibilities where others saw problems. His professors alternated between finding him refreshing and exhausting.

[EDITORIAL NOTE: Notice how we have THREE characters but NO clear protagonist? The story treats them equally, which means the reader doesn't know who to invest in or whose journey to follow. This is a critical structural problem.]

The three of them had met during their first year at the Academy. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: More exposition - we're still not back in the present scene dealing with that shimmering ship.]**

They'd been assigned to the same dormitory pod, three strangers from three different worlds forced to share two hundred square feet of living space. It should have been a disaster. Chen liked things quiet and organized. Marcus liked things loud and chaotic. Ravi just liked people and wanted everyone to be happy.

But somehow it worked. They balanced each other out. Chen kept them focused. Marcus kept them brave. Ravi kept them human. By second semester, they were inseparable. By second year, they were the top engineering team in their class. Professors started pairing them together for group projects because they knew the work would be exceptional.

Now, in their final year, they were here in the boneyard, chosen for this prestigious field study. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: We've spent 300+ words on backstory and haven't advanced the plot at all. The shimmering ship is forgotten. No conflict has developed. The characters haven't made any choices or taken any actions.]**

"You know," said Marcus, as they approached the Meridian, "I read something about this ship once. Something about an experimental drive system that never quite worked."

"What kind of drive system?" asked Chen.

Marcus shrugged. "I don't remember. It was in one of those 'mysterious ships' articles. You know, the kind that talk about ghost ships and weird disappearances."

"Those are all sensationalized garbage," said Chen.

"Usually, yeah. But this one mentioned something about temporal displacement. Like the ship could move through time as well as space."

"That's impossible," said Chen. "The energy requirements alone would—"

"I know, I know. That's why it didn't work, obviously. They mothballed the ship." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: The characters are having an academic discussion instead of actively investigating or solving a problem. They're passive observers of information rather than active problem-solvers.]**

They reached the Meridian. Up close, the shimmer effect was more pronounced. The hull seemed to ripple, like heat waves over a desert highway, except this was in the vacuum of space where heat didn't work that way.

"Okay, that's definitely weird," admitted Chen.

"Should we report it?" asked Ravi.

"Probably," said Marcus.

"Let's get a closer look first," said Chen. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Again, no real hook. They're mildly curious but there's no urgency, no personal stake, nothing that makes THIS moment matter to THEM specifically. They could walk away and nothing would happen.]**

SUMMARY OF PROBLEMS IN FIRST 1000 WORDS:

- No Clear Protagonist - Three equal characters, no single POV or journey to follow
- No Character Agency - They're tourists/observers, not active problem-solvers
- Weak Inciting Incident - Shimmering hull is vague and creates no urgency
- No Narrative Hook - Nothing personally engages or threatens the characters
- Exposition Dumps - Story stops for 300+ words of backstory instead of advancing plot
- No Real Stakes - Nothing threatens them; they could leave anytime
- Passive Responses - "Should we check it out?" "Sure, why not?" No strong choices
- Tell Instead of Show - All character development comes through exposition, not action

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN INSTEAD:

- Pick ONE protagonist (Chen, the technical expert?)
- Give her a specific goal or problem (needs to find something for her thesis? Trying to prove herself?)
- Make the anomaly threaten that goal or reveal a bigger problem
- Force her to make a choice that has consequences
- Show character through action in the present, not backstory dumps
- Create escalating obstacles that require increasingly difficult choices

This opening fails the DreamForge pattern because it has no clear protagonist making choices that drive the plot forward through escalating obstacles. (True, all stories don't have to do that to be good or even great stories, but all stories that do what we see here have a much harder time selling to editors.)

"The Bone Yard" - Middle Section (with Editorial Commentary)

They approached the airlock of the Meridian. To their surprise, it opened automatically.

"That's weird," said Ravi.

"Maybe there's still power," suggested Marcus.

"Should we go in?" asked Chen.

They looked at each other and shrugged. "Why not?" **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Here's the first major failure - the characters make no real choice. There's no weighing of consequences, no conflict between safety and curiosity, no stakes. They shrug and proceed.]**

They stepped through the airlock. The interior was surprisingly clean, as if the ship had been decommissioned yesterday rather than decades ago. Emergency lighting cast everything in a pale blue glow.

"This is amazing," whispered Ravi, running his hand along the wall. The metal felt warm under his fingers, which was odd because ships in the boneyard were usually cold as space itself.

"Look at this," said Marcus, pointing to a control panel. "The systems are still active. Life support, artificial gravity, even the computer core."

Chen frowned. "That doesn't make sense. Ships are stripped before being sent to the boneyard. All power systems are removed, fuel cells drained. This shouldn't be possible." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Good - acknowledging the mystery. But watch what happens next - instead of the characters ACTING on this information, they're about to passively receive exposition.]**

A voice suddenly filled the corridor. "Welcome aboard the SSV Meridian."

The three students jumped. The voice was pleasant, feminine, clearly artificial.

"Who's there?" called Marcus, his hand instinctively moving to his tool belt, though he had no weapons. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Small positive - Marcus has an instinctive reaction. But notice it goes nowhere. He doesn't make a choice about whether to stay or flee, doesn't argue with the others, doesn't do anything with this moment of tension.]**

"I am ARIA. Adaptive Response Intelligence Array. I have been waiting for someone to arrive."

"Waiting?" said Chen. "How long have you been waiting?"

"Fourteen years, three months, and seventeen days."

The students exchanged glances. "Why?" asked Ravi.

"I have something important to show you. Will you come to the bridge?" **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Notice how the AI is driving the action, not the students. They're being invited on a tour. What**

SHOULD happen: Chen wants to investigate but it's against protocol. Marcus thinks they should report it first. Ravi sees an opportunity for their thesis. They have different goals that create INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT...]

"Should we?" asked Ravi.

"I mean, we're already here," said Marcus.

"It's probably safe," said Chen. "If it wanted to hurt us, it could have sealed the airlock."

"Okay then," said Ravi. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: "Probably safe" and "okay then" - these are not the words of protagonists with agency. They're tourists agreeing to follow the tour guide.]**

They followed the illuminated pathway through the ship's corridors. As they walked, ARIA began to speak.

"The Meridian was designed by Dr. Sarah Chen-Takama." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Here comes an exposition dump instead of active investigation...]**

Chen stopped walking. "Chen-Takama?"

ARIA's pathway paused. "Yes. Dr. Sarah Chen-Takama was the lead scientist on the temporal displacement project. She was also, according to my records, your great-grandmother."

Chen felt the blood drain from her face. She'd known her great-grandmother had been lost on a science vessel. But she'd never connected it to the Meridian, never imagined...

"My great-grandmother is here?" she whispered.

"In a manner of speaking. Please, come to the bridge. You need to see this."

Now Chen was the one who moved forward quickly. Marcus and Ravi hurried to keep up.

The bridge doors opened. Inside, everything looked normal - except for the command chair. In it sat a figure that seemed to flicker in and out of existence. Sometimes it was a woman in her thirties, sometimes in her sixties, sometimes barely visible at all. The figure existed at all ages simultaneously, caught between moments.

"Great-grandmother?" Chen breathed.

The figure turned toward her voice but seemed unable to focus on the present moment.

[EDITORIAL NOTE: Finally - something personally engaging Chen. But notice how it happened: they stumbled onto it by accident, following an AI's tour. Chen didn't make a choice that led here. She's still passive.]

[ATTEMPT #1 - Not Really an Obstacle]

ARIA explained: "When Dr. Chen-Takama attempted to test the temporal drive, something went wrong. She became trapped in what she called 'temporal displacement.' She exists at all points of her life simultaneously. For her, fourteen years have passed in an instant and not at all. She is aware of everything and nothing."

"Can you save her?" Chen asked immediately.

"Possibly. If the temporal drive could be reactivated and properly controlled, we might be able to collapse her quantum state back to a single timeline. But the drive has been offline for fourteen years. I do not have the expertise to restart it safely."

Chen looked at the flickering figure of her great-grandmother. "But I do. I've studied temporal mechanics. I can do this."

"Are you sure?" asked Marcus. "This is way beyond our field study parameters." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Good - finally some hesitation! But watch what happens - Marcus doesn't really object, doesn't create conflict. He just asks a question.]**

"I have to try," said Chen.

Marcus and Ravi looked at each other and nodded. "Okay. What do you need from us?"

[EDITORIAL NOTE: And there's the problem - no real obstacle here. Marcus raised a concern for half a second, then immediately agreed. No conflict, no hard choice, no stakes. They're all on the same team, working toward the same goal. Where's the interpersonal tension? Where's the disagreement that forces Chen to choose between different values?]

For the next hour, Chen worked with ARIA to understand the temporal drive systems. The math was complex, but she was good at complex math. The energy requirements were massive, but the ship still had residual power. It might work. It should work.

Finally, she was ready. "ARIA, initiate the temporal reversal sequence." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Notice: no hesitation, no second thoughts, no moment where she has to choose between her great-grandmother and following proper protocols. She just does it.]**

"Initiating," said ARIA.

The bridge filled with a deep humming sound. The flickering intensified around Dr. Chen-Takama's figure. For a moment, it seemed to be working - the multiple time-states were beginning to collapse.

Then something went wrong.

The temporal field expanded violently outward from the command chair, engulfing the entire bridge. Suddenly, Chen, Marcus, and Ravi could see multiple versions of themselves, multiple versions of the bridge, all existing at once.

"What's happening?" shouted Ravi. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: The external obstacle appears. But it's not because of Chen's choice or flaw - it's because of mysterious outside interference. She did everything right; something else went wrong.]**

"The temporal field is expanding," said ARIA, her voice showing strain for the first time. "It is no longer contained to Dr. Chen-Takama. It is spreading."

"Can you stop it?" asked Marcus.

"I... I don't know. Maybe. I need to recalculate everything."

"How long will that take?" asked Ravi.

"Hours. Maybe days. The equations are more complex than I thought." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Problem: This obstacle doesn't flow from her previous attempt. It's an external interference, not a consequence of her choices. Real try/fail would be: Her solution worked, but because she rushed it, she accidentally trapped the ship in a time loop. Now they're living the same hour over and over. Her choice creates the new problem.]**

"We don't have hours," said ARIA. "The temporal field is expanding at an exponential rate. In approximately thirty-seven minutes, it will reach the nearest inhabited station. In two hours, it will encompass the entire star system."

The students stared at each other in horror. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Good - raising stakes. But notice the progression: 1) Try to save grandmother (personal stakes), 2) Something goes wrong (external interference), 3) Now everyone is in danger (bigger stakes). This could work, but only if their choices caused the problem. As written, they're victims of circumstances, not drivers of their own story.]**

"So if we don't fix this..." started Marcus.

"Millions of people will be trapped in temporal displacement," finished ARIA. "Just like Dr. Chen-Takama. An entire civilization, existing at all points in time simultaneously."

Chen felt sick. They'd been trying to save one person, and instead they might doom an entire star system. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: This should be a powerful moment of realization, but it's weakened by the fact that she did everything right. She didn't make a mistake. She didn't choose poorly. An external force interfered. She has no culpability, therefore no growth opportunity.]**

"What do we do?" asked Ravi, his usual optimism cracking.

Chen looked at her great-grandmother, still flickering. She looked at her friends. She looked at the spreading temporal anomaly on the viewscreen.

She took a deep breath. "We'll figure it out. We have to."

[ATTEMPT #2 - "Obstacle Two" But Still Not Really]

For the next twenty minutes, Chen worked frantically on new equations while Marcus and Ravi monitored systems and kept her supplied with coffee from the ship's ancient but still-functioning galley. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Notice who has agency here - CHEN. Marcus and Ravi are reduced to support staff, bringing coffee. They're not making choices or solving problems. They're not even in conflict with Chen about what to do. They're passive enablers.]**

The temporal field continued to expand. On the viewscreen, they could now see multiple versions of Kepler Station, some with hundreds of ships, some with none. In one version, the station seemed to be on fire. In another, it was decorated for what looked like a celebration. All versions existing simultaneously, overlapping, creating a nauseating kaleidoscope of possibilities.

"This is impossible," muttered Chen, scratching out another set of calculations. "The interference pattern doesn't match anything in the literature. It's like... it's like something is deliberately disrupting the field."

"Could it be a defense mechanism?" suggested Marcus. "Maybe the government installed something to prevent anyone from reactivating the drive?"

Chen paused. "That... actually makes sense. ARIA, is there any kind of security protocol that might activate if someone tried to use the temporal drive?"

"Checking," said ARIA. A moment passed. "Yes. I am detecting a quantum encryption lock in the drive's core systems. It appears to be designed to prevent unauthorized temporal manipulation."

"Can you override it?" asked Ravi.

"No. The encryption is military-grade, designed by the Temporal Warfare Prevention Coalition. Only someone with TWPC clearance could disable it." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Here's another external obstacle - something preventing them from succeeding that has nothing to do with their choices or flaws. It's a locked door, not a moral dilemma or a consequence of their actions.]**

Chen slumped in her chair. "Great. So we can't save my great-grandmother, and we're going to turn the entire system into a temporal disaster zone, and there's nothing we can do about it because some bureaucrat classified this decades ago."

"There has to be another way," said Marcus, but his voice lacked conviction. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Marcus says the right words, but notice he doesn't propose any action. He's just verbally supportive. He's not creating conflict by suggesting they evacuate and let professionals handle it. He's not trying to convince Chen to give up. He's a cheerleader, not a character.]**

They sat in silence for a moment, watching the temporal field expand. Fifteen minutes left before it reached the station. Fifteen minutes before hundreds of thousands of people joined Chen's great-grandmother in her quantum purgatory.

Chen looked at the flickering figure in the command chair. Even now, caught between all moments of her life, her great-grandmother seemed to be trying to speak, to warn them, to help them. But her words came out jumbled, overlapping with other words from other times.

"Wait," said Chen, sitting up suddenly. "ARIA, can you interface with the temporal field? Can you communicate with my great-grandmother?"

"I do not know. I have never attempted it. The field is highly unstable."

"But she's experienced this for fourteen years. She understands the temporal drive better than anyone. If we could ask her how to disable the lock..."

"That is... theoretically possible," said ARIA slowly. "But the process would require me to extend part of my consciousness into the temporal field. I might become trapped like Dr. Chen-Takama."

Another silence. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: This is good - presenting a choice with a cost. But notice who makes the choice? ARIA, the AI. Not Chen, our supposed protagonist. Chen suggests the solution, but ARIA has to decide whether to implement it. The protagonist is still not driving the action.]**

"Do it," said ARIA finally. "Dr. Chen-Takama sacrificed herself trying to advance human knowledge. The least I can do is risk my existence to save her."

"Are you sure?" asked Chen.

"I am an AI. My consciousness can be backed up, restored. Dr. Chen-Takama is human. Irreplaceable. The choice is obvious." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: ARIA has more agency than our protagonist. ARIA is making the sacrificial play. Where is Chen's choice? Where is her sacrifice?]**

Before anyone could respond, ARIA began the process. The lights on the bridge flickered as the AI redirected processing power. On the main viewscreen, they could see ARIA's avatar - a simple geometric shape - extending into the temporal field, reaching toward the flickering figure of Dr. Chen-Takama.

The two consciousnesses touched.

And suddenly, Chen heard her great-grandmother's voice, clear and coherent for the first time.

"Sarah? Is that you? No, you're too young. My granddaughter's daughter. Chen. You're Chen."

"Yes," said Chen, tears streaming down her face. "I'm Chen. We're trying to save you, but—"

"I know. I've seen this moment a thousand times. Lived it. Will live it. Am living it. The encryption lock. They installed it after I... after I got stuck. To prevent anyone from replicating the accident. But there's a backdoor." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Of course there's a backdoor. How convenient.]**

"A backdoor? Can you tell us how to access it?"

"Yes. But..." Dr. Chen-Takama's image solidified for a moment, and Chen saw a woman with her own eyes, her own determined expression. "If you disable the lock and complete the reversal, I'll be saved. But the drive will be accessible again. Others will use it. The government will restart the temporal warfare program. Hundreds, maybe thousands of people will end up like me. Trapped between moments."

Chen felt her heart stop. "What are you saying?"

"You have to choose, Chen. Save me, or save all those future victims. You can't do both."
[EDITORIAL NOTE: FINALLY - a real moral dilemma! But notice when it appears - after two "obstacles" that were really just puzzle-solving and information-gathering. This choice should have been the FIRST obstacle. And notice who presents it - the great-grandmother, not Chen discovering it through her own actions. The protagonist is still being led by the nose.]

COMPLETION: Mirroring Typical Structural Flaws

[EDITORIAL NOTE: What follows is the completion of this teaching story. Just as the story we've paralleled in its faults, this one too fails to create a protagonist arc with earned character growth, this ending will mirror those same structural flaws. Watch how the "resolution" appears without the characters making difficult choices or experiencing transformation through conflict.]

Chen stood there, frozen. How could she choose? Her great-grandmother was right there, so close to being saved. But the cost...

"I can't," Chen whispered. "I can't make that choice."

Marcus put a hand on her shoulder. "It's okay. We'll figure something out together."

Ravi nodded. "We always do."

Chen looked at her friends. Despite everything, they were smiling at her with encouragement and support. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Notice the lack of conflict. Marcus and Ravi don't disagree with Chen. They don't push her one way or the other. They're just supportive. No interpersonal tension, no competing values, no hard choices between friendship and duty.]**

And then something remarkable happened.

The temporal field began to shimmer with new colors - gold and silver and copper, like the twin suns reflecting off the hulls of ships. The light coalesced into three distinct forms that floated in the air of the bridge.

"What is that?" breathed Ravi. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: Here it comes - the magical external solution. This "answer" arrives from outside, requiring no choice or sacrifice from our characters.]**

ARIA's voice was filled with wonder. "Temporal energy constructs. I have never seen anything like this. They appear to be... gifts."

The three glowing forms drifted toward Chen, Marcus, and Ravi. As they got closer, each took on a more specific shape. Chen's was a complex mathematical equation rendered in pure light. Marcus's was a schematic for some kind of temporal shield. Ravi's appeared to be a complete life-support system design.

"They're from the future," said Dr. Chen-Takama's voice, stronger now. "From the researchers who will solve this safely. They wanted you to have these."

Chen reached out and touched her gift. Knowledge flooded into her mind - not just the equations she needed, but understanding. Complete, perfect understanding of temporal mechanics. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: The protagonist receives a gift that solves the problem without**

her having to sacrifice anything or make a hard choice. Compare to the DreamForge writing guide's emphasis on try/fail cycles where the protagonist's CHOICES create consequences and opportunities for growth.]

"I see it now," Chen said softly. "There's a third option. We can save you AND prevent the temporal warfare program. The solution was always there, we just... needed to see it."

"Of course," said ARIA. "The answer is beautiful in its simplicity." **[EDITORIAL NOTE: The AI affirms the convenient solution. No struggle, no growth through adversity, no transformation earned through conflict.]**

Working together, the three students implemented the new solution. It took twenty minutes. The temporal field began to collapse, but this time in a controlled way. Dr. Chen-Takama's form solidified, becoming singular, present, real.

She stood up from the command chair and smiled at Chen. "Hello, great-granddaughter."

Chen rushed forward and hugged her. They both cried.

Marcus and Ravi stood back, watching with tears in their own eyes. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: The emotional beat is here, but it's unearned. Chen didn't overcome a flaw. She didn't make a sacrifice. She didn't transform through struggle. She just received a magical gift that solved everything. Compare this to the DreamForge writing guide's emphasis on the climax showing the protagonist's transformation through their actions and choices.]**

"Thank you," Dr. Chen-Takama said to all three of them. "You saved me. You saved everyone."

"We couldn't have done it without those gifts," said Ravi.

"Ah," said Dr. Chen-Takama with a knowing smile. "But don't you see? You're the ones who sent them. In the future, when you've become the temporal researchers who solve this problem safely, you'll remember this moment. You'll remember what you needed. And you'll send it back."

The three students looked at each other in wonder. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: A time-loop explanation that sounds clever but actually reinforces the passivity. They didn't solve the problem through their choices - their future selves did. And those future selves will only exist because past gifts made this outcome possible. It's circular and removes all agency.]**

Before they could respond, three more gifts appeared - small tokens that floated gently down into their hands. Chen received a small piece of crystallized temporal energy. Marcus got a miniature shield emitter. Ravi received a tiny replica of the Meridian.

"Keep these," said Dr. Chen-Takama. "To remember this day. To remember that sometimes, the universe provides exactly what we need, exactly when we need it."

They carefully pocketed their gifts. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: More gifts! The characters are passive recipients of magical solutions rather than active problem-solvers who earn their victory.]**

"What happens now?" asked Chen.

"Now I need to return to my own time," said Dr. Chen-Takama. "But I wanted to give you something first."

She reached into her lab coat and produced three data chips. "These contain my notes. Everything I learned during my fourteen years of temporal displacement. Use them well. Share them with the scientific community. Make sure this knowledge helps people, not harms them."

Chen took the chips reverently. "I will. I promise."

"I know you will." Dr. Chen-Takama smiled. "I've seen it."

A bright light filled the bridge, warm and gentle. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: I stole the idea of the bright light directly from the story submission we are paralleling here. The resolution comes through external magical intervention, not through character transformation.]**

When it faded, Dr. Chen-Takama was gone. But somehow, they all felt lighter. Happier. The emptiness her presence had filled didn't feel terrifying anymore. It felt... hopeful.

"She's really gone," whispered Marcus.

"Not gone," said Ravi. "Just back where she belongs."

Chen nodded, wiping her eyes. "We should get back to the station. Professor Okonkwo is probably wondering where we are."

They walked through the ship's corridors in comfortable silence, each lost in their own thoughts about what had happened. About the gifts they'd received. About the future they would build.

As they stepped out of the airlock back onto the surface of the boneyard, Marcus said, "Do you think anyone will believe us?"

"Probably not," said Chen. "But that's okay. We know what happened. That's what matters."

"And we have each other," added Ravi. "We'll always have each other."

They smiled at one another and began the long walk back to the transport station. **[EDITORIAL NOTE: The ending affirms their friendship but shows no transformation. They're the same people they were at the beginning - just with some cool memories and magical gifts. No one overcame a flaw, made a sacrifice, or grew through adversity.]**

Behind them, the Meridian shimmered one last time in the twin suns, then went still and dark. Just another decommissioned vessel in the boneyard. Just another monument to humanity's reach for the stars.

But for three students, it would always be the place where the impossible became possible. Where the universe gave them exactly what they needed. Where they learned that sometimes, just sometimes, everything works out perfectly.

[THE END]

FINAL EDITORIAL ANALYSIS: What Went Wrong

This ending mirrors the structural flaws found in the story we pattered Bone Yard after.

- **No Earned Resolution:** Characters receive magical gifts that solve the problem without them making difficult choices or sacrifices.
- **No Character Transformation:** The three students end the story the same as they began. No flaws were overcome, no growth through adversity.
- **Passive Protagonists:** Throughout the story, things happen TO the characters rather than because OF their choices.
- **External Solutions:** The temporal gifts, the backdoor, the future-selves explanation - all come from outside rather than from character agency.
- **No Real Stakes:** When the choice appears (save grandmother vs. prevent future victims), it's immediately resolved by convenient magic. No hard choice was made.
- **Sentimental Over Structural:** The ending feels emotionally warm but is structurally weak. Tears and hugs can't replace earned character arcs.
- **Multiple Equal Protagonists:** Chen emerged as the main character, but Marcus and Ravi remain equally weighted, diluting the protagonist's journey.

What SHOULD Have Happened (Brief Outline):

- **Obstacle One:** Chen discovers temporal drive is active. Against protocol and her friends' warnings, she tries to save her great-grandmother. Her CHOICE (acting rashly to prove herself) creates a temporal loop.
- **Obstacle Two:** The loop is expanding toward the station. Marcus wants to evacuate; Ravi wants to call authorities; Chen wants to fix her mistake. They ARGUE, revealing different values. Chen's FLAW (pride, need to prove herself) drives her to attempt a risky fix alone. Her choice creates the encryption lock problem.
- **Obstacle Three:** Chen discovers the moral dilemma herself (not told by great-grandmother). To save her great-grandmother AND stop the expansion, she must sacrifice something personal - perhaps her own temporal stability, or her memory of her great-grandmother, or her career. A REAL sacrifice, not a convenient magical solution.
- **Climax:** Chen makes the hard choice. Her great-grandmother is saved (or isn't), but Chen is transformed by the experience. She's learned something fundamental about herself through this trial. The resolution is EARNED through her choices and sacrifices.

Remember: *The DreamForge pattern emphasizes that meaningful stories come from protagonists making increasingly difficult choices that test their flaws and force growth. External obstacles are fine, but they must be overcome through character agency and choice, not through convenient external solutions.*