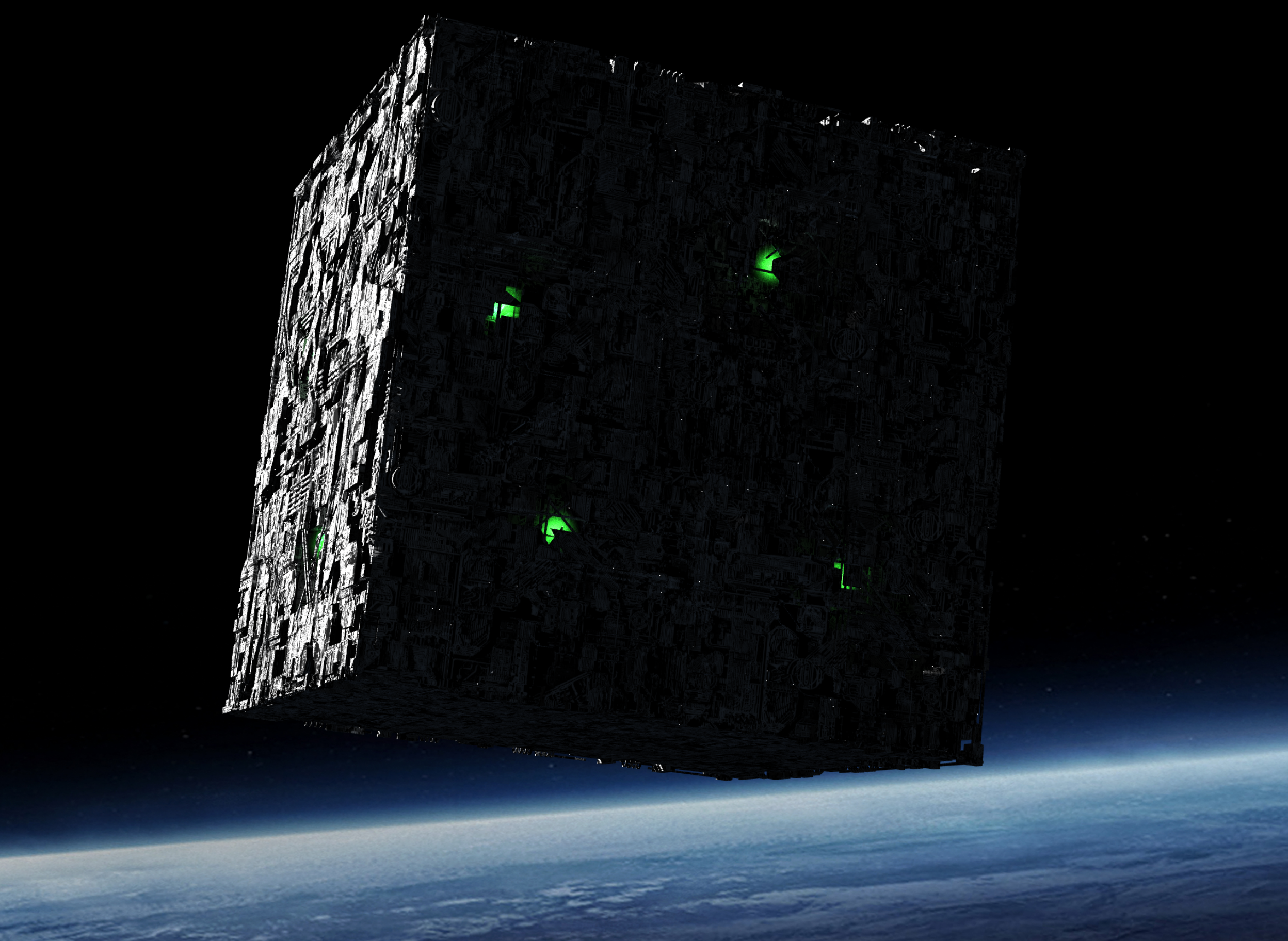


— WE HAVE —
ENGAGED
THE BORG

**THE ORAL HISTORY OF
THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359**



ANDY POULASTIDES & ERIC V. MUIRHEAD



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ANDY POULASTIDES & ERIC V. MUIRHEAD
EDITORIAL WORK BY ANNIE MUIRHEAD

SUPPLEMENTAL WRITINGS
JOHN CONCAGH, CLAUDE BERUBE, & HYE MARDIKIAN

AUTHORS

Andy Poulastides & Eric V. Muirhead

LEAD EDITOR • PROOFREADER

Annie Muirhead

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

John Concagh, Claude Berube, & Hye Mardikian

BOOK DESIGN • PREPRESS TECHNICIAN • ASSISTANT EDITOR

Hye Mardikian

INTERNAL ILLUSTRATIONS & MAPS • WOLF 359 MEMORIAL STATION LOGO

Ste Johnson

COVER RENDER

Graham Gazzard

STARSHIP RENDERS

Keene Sin

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TIMELINE

Beginning with New Providence's founding
until the 2396 decommissioning of *USS Hood*

LINEAR COLOR KEY

Galactic Events

USS *Enterprise-D* Events

Borg Incursion

2123

New Providence Colony founded on Jouret IV

PRELUDE

Historical context to Wolf 359

2293

SS Lakul destroyed by energy
ribbon, Starfleet first made
officially aware of 'Borg'

2311

Tomed Incident — Romulans
retreat behind Neutral Zone

2332

Romulans first encounter "Borg"

2343

Galaxy class Development Project launched

2350

"Project Corvidae" authorized
by Starfleet Intelligence

2363

USS Enterprise-D launched

2364

- First encounter with "Q"
- Romulans re-establish contact with
Federation reporting missing colonies

2366

The destruction of New Providence
and the acquisition of Locutus

- Taela Shanathi becomes CINC Starfleet
- Qo-Lan Amitra Sib'xau inaugurated as President

•42761.3

- Q flings 1701-D to J-25, first encounter with Borg
- Admiral Hanson recruits Lt. Cmdr. Shelby to Starfleet Tactical

2365

43997.05

- USS *Lalo* destroyed by Borg
- President briefed about Borg threat

- Crimson Tacit issued, Starfleet recalled to Sol System

- President addresses Federation, "We Must Negotiate" speech

- Hanson and Ross present plan to stop Borg at Wolf 359

- Force of 40 starships assembled and deployed to Wolf 359 system

43975.2

CONTACT LOST WITH NEW PROVIDENCE COLONY

43992.6

- *Enterprise* dispatched to investigate loss of contact with New Providence, Confirm presence of Borg
- USS *Zelensky* joins *Enterprise* over survey of Jouret IV
- *Enterprise* offloads non-essential personnel to Starbase 157

43997.2

- *Enterprise* engages Borg, Picard is hailed directly and ordered to surrender himself
- *Enterprise* flees into Paulson Nebula

43999.8

- *Enterprise* forced to leave Nebula, is engaged by Borg, Picard is taken

44001.4

- *Enterprise* engages Borg ship and attempts to rescue Picard, discovers he has been assimilated
- *Enterprise* fires modified deflector pulse at Borg to no effect, ship is crippled, Borg head towards Earth

44001.6

- USS *Ferrik* diverted to path of Borg cube with information suggesting secret base in Wolf 359, ship is assimilated
- Task force assembles in Wolf 359 System and deploys
- President Amitra and elected officials evacuated to Janus IV

44002.3 • 2367

The Battle of Wolf 359 and Sector 001 Invasion

44002.3

BORG ARRIVE AT WOLF 359

44002.350

- 30 minutes after first contact, all Federation ships are destroyed

Enterprise arrives at Wolf 359 12 hours behind Borg cube

USS *Excalibur* engages Borg to delay ships arrival to Earth

Enterprise engages Borg for third time, is successful in seizing Locutus, Cube resume course for Earth

- Starfleet orders fleet to disperse into Oort cloud and awaits cube's arrival
- Sol Defense League activated
 - Borg ship arrives in Sector 001, destroys SDL Ships

Enterprise arrives in Sol System, attempts to access Borg collective via Locutus

BORG SHIP IS DESTROYED BY INTERNAL CASCADE FAILURE

44012.3

- *Enterprise* ordered to McKinley Station for repairs

2396

USS *Hood* formally decommissioned
at Wolf 359 Memorial Station

2376

- Wolf 359 Memorial Station officially opened
- Remains of ships previously removed from system for evaluation (including *Ahwahee* and *Kaneda*) are returned

2373-75**DOMINION WAR****50058.9**

- Min Zife inaugurated as President

50893.5

- Second Borg Incursion

2371

Shanthi Returns as
CINC of Starfleet

2370

- USS *Hood* formally returns to service following extensive reconstruction and testing

47538.5

- USS *Defiant* launched from Antares shipyards

48650.1

- USS *Enterprise* declared total loss following Veridian III mission

2369**KLINGON CIVIL WAR****2368**

- Starfleet authorizes deployment of *Straal*-class orbital facility to Wolf 359 to assist with salvage operations
- Shanthi Resigns as C-in-C
- Jaresh-Inyo inaugurated as President

44152.6

- J.L. Picard cleared to return to active service
- *Enterprise* leaves Sol System after six month refit

44038.1

Fleet arrives in Wolf 359 led by USS *Endeavour*

POST-WOLF 359 & ONWARD

Salvage, recovery, and Incursion-related aftermath

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0887345-359

• 740 287 001 001
258 730 021 001

• 963 554 663 663
7X3 0E0 5A2 A32

159 180 143 143
• 147 987 170 010

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489



4091

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8845

9932

1212



**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMITTEE ON
THE INVESTIGATION OF THE BORG INCURSION
OF 2366 AND THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359**

CHAIRMAN BY ADMIRAL (RET) LANCELOT HOLLAND, PMV, CME, SC

HOLLAND COMMISSION

FROM: STARFLEET COMMAND
COMMAND AUTHORIZATION REQUIRED



 **AUTHORIZATION: GRANTED**

PREFACE

"On stardate 43975.2, Starbase 23 received a distress signal from the New Providence research colony on Jouret IV. The garbled transmission spoke of a large cube-like vessel that had entered the system and destroyed the small number of colony defense ships. The last transmission before all contact was lost showed a massive, black monolithic shape slowly descending over the colony.

"Although not widely known outside the upper echelons of Starfleet Command, this was the Borg: a powerful race of cybernetic life-forms, first encountered a year prior by the USS Enterprise (NCC-1701D, c. J-L Picard) over 7,000 light-years away.

"What was to follow over the following days would rock the Federation to its very core: the destruction of 39 starships at Wolf 359, the loss of over 11,000 sapients, and Earth – the seat of the UFP Government and home of Starfleet – threatened with total assimilation."

I wrote those words almost 25 years ago as part of the introduction to the Holland Commission Report.

No doubt many will be familiar with that work, commissioned after the Borg Incursion of 2366; it is a very clinical, succinct description of the events that took place almost 30 years ago. To speak of 39 starships and 11,000 lives in the wake of the losses sustained throughout the Dominion War, it's perhaps easy to become numb to such figures. With the cushioning effect of time, as we move further away from the raw immediacy, the horror slips first into memory and then into myth. We run the risk of forgetting that these are not just numbers – not just statistics, dates, and names, but living beings and members of Starfleet. They had lives and their stories deserve to be remembered and to be told.

I was serving in the JAG office on the Arcturus Orbital during the incursion. I remember when we received the Crimson Tacit signal from Starfleet Command; no one understood why we were receiving such a signal. We thought it had to be a test or a mistake. Maybe someone started a rumor? Perhaps as a prank started by some "lower deckers" to get a rise out of their senior officers? Initially, we thought the only investigation would be to find the offending culprit. But it soon became clear that this was no mistake – and that Earth itself, a core world of the Federation – was under imminent attack.

In the aftermath, President Amitra ordered an inquiry to investigate the attack. Admiral Holland was charged with leading the commission, and I found myself reassigned to aid in the monumental task of gathering data from across the Federation – to build a picture of what had happened over those 24 days.

Over the next four years, I conducted thousands of interviews across dozens of worlds. I have reviewed the flight recorders of the ships lost at Wolf 359, and relived their loss over and over. I have even come face to face with the Borg themselves through interviews with former drones (or xBs, as they have come to be known). The final report was over 17 yottabytes of data – including analysis from the Collegia Strategorum on Zakdorn – detailed and highly classified breakdowns of the ship classes lost at Wolf 359, psychological profiles of the Borg collective, and numerous logs from officers present throughout the events. There was even a report from the Ferengi Commerce Authority on the impact of the incident on latinum prices.

What was missing, however, were the stories of the beings directly affected by the events that took place. Although added to one of the numerous appendices, they were not front and center of the report – nor should they be. The monumental task placed on the commission was not only to determine the facts, but also to better prepare the Federation for future outside threats. In that regard, we succeeded. I would venture an opinion that without the findings of the report the outcome of the Dominion War could have been very different. But those stories are important – for they connect us to the moment in a way no holorecording or tactical analysis ever could.

As 2366 fades further into the past and eventually out of living memory, it is our duty to ensure that those perspectives survive for future generations: to carry the memory of those lost forward into the future. It is far too easy for the lessons of the past to drown in the depths of Memory Alpha. I now give my best attempt at a “personal history” of the “First Borg War.” It is my hope that the reader will connect to these events and more importantly to the individuals who lived them, witnessed them, and – in many cases – died as a result of them.

I would like to thank Jake Sisko who first approached me with the idea for this volume. While many may know Jake as the son of Benjamin Sisko, as a war correspondent, or for his novels, he is also a survivor of Wolf 359 and one of its victims. Over the years I have gotten to know him quite well through interviews and correspondence. He taught me the importance of not losing

sight of the personal story and the view from the ground, especially with events as monumental as these.

Also, El'rik Zh'uhead from the Starfleet Academy Department of History, whose insight and support has been vital to ensure this record is completed. He indulged me with many a late night subspace communique as we cross-referenced details with the archives with Memory Alpha and Starfleet's databases to build as complete a picture as we could.

I present this record to you and humbly ask that you remember that the galaxy of 2366 was very different from that in which we live in today. I have, as much as possible, tried to remain an invisible presence throughout and to allow the voices to speak for themselves.

It is my intention that when you have finished you will have some insight to what those of us who lived through the incursion experienced.

THE AUTHOR

— 2396



CHAPTER 1

FIRST CONTACT

- 007 • Prelude
- 011 • El'rik Zh'uhead
- 014 • Sonya Gomez
- 018 • Guinan
- 021 • Data
- 024 • J.P. Hanson
- 026 • Transcript of Admiralty Meeting
- 032 • Elizabeth Shelby
- 035 • Sirna Kolrami
- 038 • Tebok
- 042 • Hugh



PRELUDE

SOL STATION

Stardate 75361.8 – 2396



With that, it is finally complete: a culmination of over three decades of my life's work, resulting in what I hope will be the definitive account of the first Borg Incursion.

For what feels like the hundredth time, I read through my introduction. Even now I still spot a minor correction to make here and there, but eventually I just send it to my publisher and close the PADD. They'll complete any final corrections and will, no doubt, have some notes; I still have to do a holorecording. But for now at least, it is done.

I look up and suffer a moment of disorientation as I recall my surroundings. I have been hunched over the PADD for what feels like hours, and I'm greeted by the quiet blue ambiance of one of the many departure lounges at Sol Station. In line with Starfleet Headquarters some 35,000 km "below" our geosynchronous orbit, it's quiet right now – around 05:25 station time. Only the constant hum of the air recyclers and the occasional announcement, distant and soft, to alert personnel and travelers of starships arriving and departing.

Today is going to be a big day. As I look out of the massive panoramic sheets of transparent duranium and across the expansive Spacedock, I see there are several starships docked throughout the facility. Even at this early hour, shuttlepods and auxiliary ships tender back and forth between the ships and the dock. Many of the ships were built long after Wolf 359 and incorporate hard-won lessons from that encounter. They tend to be smaller, sleeker ships than those I grew up making models of. I'm certain this is due to various technical innovations that Starfleet has integrated into its ship design over the years since the late 2360s, but I can't help but feel that the ships look and feel harder – more aggressive, and with harsher angles dominating their designs.

One ship stands out, though.

I can't help but smile as I take it in. A vessel whose design dates back over 100 years sits quietly across the lounge from me – all curves and soft angles with long, graceful nacelles. Even the class name "*Excelsior*" evokes a time when there was nothing Starfleet couldn't achieve if it applied itself. From below, searchlights illuminate sections of the hull, and I can see the fresh markings that have been applied while the ship has been docked for this, her final mission:

USS *Hood* (NCC-42296), the ship that survived Wolf 359.

My reverie is disturbed as a pair of crewmen enter the lounge to prepare for the day's events.

I collect my PADD and slide it into my case to leave the lounge area. In a few hours, this place will be filled with dignitaries and press who have come to see our departure – and I have an important appointment to keep...





EL'RIK ZH'UHEAD

SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH

Stardate 72533.2 – 2395

San Francisco has been synonymous with Starfleet Command since its founding in the mid-2130s. It is home to Starfleet Academy, where the next generation of officers are trained to serve the needs of the United Federation of Planets and its citizens. I meet Professor Zh'uhead in what is affectionately known as "The George and Gracie Memorial Theatre," or "G&G." Originally conceived in the wake of the Cetacean Probe of 2286 as "The Starfleet Command Central Crisis Planning Center," or "SCCCPC."

I suspect the choice of venue is no accident, since its construction was in response to any direct threats to Earth and the very heart of the Federation. The Andorian zhen has held the position of head of the academy's Department of History since 2381, and is widely considered one of the foremost experts on the Alpha Quadrant's geopolitical landscape in the latter half of the 24th century. His book, "Sheer Hubris: Federation Foreign Policy From 2293-2373," is required reading in the Federation Diplomatic Corps.

Starfleet likes to portray to the galaxy that it is always informed and always in control. But far too often, when "shit hits the fan," to use an old Human expression, the only ideas senior leaders have are to either run, or hide in a hole rather than confront our weaknesses.

The unfortunate fact remains that, sometimes, you *need* a hole in the ground to hide in. 2366 was one of those times, and we were lucky that the G&G existed to help coordinate a response to the Borg's advance on Earth. However, the fact that Starfleet leaders didn't feel the need to build a facility like this until after their proverbial bacon was saved by two Cetaceans and a fugitive admiral named James Tiberius is symptomatic of a much deeper problem in the Federation.

For 200 years, we simply believed we were invincible. Federation technology combined with good ole fashioned Starfleet guts would solve any problem. Even in the darkest moment, there would be some hero who would emerge to save us all from destruction. The past 30 years, however, have shown us that it also takes a lot of Starfleet *blood* as well.

After the end of the Earth-Romulan War in 2160 and the founding of the UFP a year later, Earth wasn't seriously threatened for almost a century. In 2257, the Klingons got close, but never made planetfall. We may never know why the High Council sued for peace at the last moment, but it's one of those mysteries of history that keeps folks like me employed. It looked like the next 100 years would be a bit tougher.

In 2274, there was the V'ger Incident, but that too ended without any real damage to the planet. In 2286, the whale probe caused Starfleet to completely update their planetary defense plans. However, the planet was only really disrupted for less than 24 hours. Then what happened?

♦ Urm...I don't know?

Exactly! [his antennae stand straight up with excitement] NOTHING HAPPENED. After the Khitomer Accords in 2293 the Klingons went from our greatest adversaries to a broken, humbled empire trying to redefine their role in the galaxy. The Romulans retreated behind the Neutral Zone – trying to prevent the chaos that engulfed the Klingon Empire from spilling across their borders. For 50 years, Starfleet stood alone. We were the victors, and the only superpower left in the stars.

From 2300 to 2360, the expansion of the UFP grew at an exponential rate. We nearly doubled in size – from 80 member worlds in 2302 to over 145 in 2354. Meanwhile, Starfleet's defense and modernization resource budget dropped 64 percent during the same time period. The number of active capital ships in the fleet dropped from 672 in 2392 to a mere 329 in 2350. Twice the territory to defend with less than half the resources.

♦ But what about the Cardassians? You wrote in your book that starting in the 2340s they became the primary threat to the Federation.

It's true: there was a slight bump in Starfleet's defense resourcing at the start of the Cardassian War. But after it became apparent that the union wasn't an existential threat and the conflict would merely be an extended border dispute, the Federation Council didn't back the rhetoric with resources. No one wanted to go to full-scale war to defend a "hermit planet of quiet religious folk with ridged noses," or a few farmer colonists who were widely viewed as zealots. Those days aren't our proudest.

We *did* get the *Ambassador* and *Galaxy*-classes because Starfleet could always get more resources to build bigger laboratories – but not bigger photon torpedoes or phaser banks. *That* was the Starfleet that officers like J.P. Hanson and Jean-Luc Picard grew up in. They were taught that war was obsolete, so they never prepared for it. Instead, they thought every player in the galaxy would yield to logic, diplomacy, and a hot cup of tea.

Unfortunately, that mindset was to cost them. It was to cost everyone.

SONYA GOMEZ

USS KALPANA CHAWLA, NEAR BELAGAVI IV

Stardate 47706.1 – 2370

The USS Kalpana Chawla – or “KC,” as she is affectionately known to her crew – is a small Hemmer-class ship attached to the SCE [Starfleet Corps of Engineers]. The ship and several like her are continuing efforts to restore the subspace relay systems damaged during the Borg Incursion. Progress has been delayed due to rising hostilities with the Cardassians (and now the Klingons, too), but this work is essential. It must continue in order to give Starfleet early warning of any future Borg activity. Lieutenant Gomez previously served aboard the USS Enterprise, and was present during the first official contact with the Borg in System J-25.

I was right out of the academy and just couldn't believe my luck. The *Enterprise*! Everyone in my class wanted that posting. When you grow up reading about Starfleet and seeking out new life and new civilizations, it was always an *Enterprise* at the front leading the way.

I joined the ship at Starbase 173. We took a shuttle so we could catch a good look at the ship from the outside. Hardly anyone had seen a *Galaxy*-class ship, and I have to tell you: I still get goosebumps thinking about the first time I laid eyes on her. It was huge! Like, I had thought the *Excelsior* which brought us out to 173 was big, but *Enterprise* dwarfed everything in the fleet! It looked so sleek and futuristic. I was smitten.

♦ What was it like serving on board?

It certainly wasn't what I was expecting. The ship was so new and Starfleet had put so much into the class, I think they were a bit hesitant to really let us out into deep space. After the loss of *Yamato* they were not taking any chances. The engineering department was still establishing itself, and Lieutenant La Forge requested me specifically to be a part of his team.

[She beams with pride.]

I think it's fair to say that the crew were still finding their feet, but it was an absolute honor to have served under Captain Picard.

◇ Can you tell me about the J-25 Incident?

You've been through the academy, right? Did you ever attend any of the seminars about non-corporeal entities? I don't think anyone really gave them too much credence – especially when they were talking about beings like Trelane or Organians. It all sounded so far-fetched, just so...un-Starfleet. I'd heard about the Q Continuum and I was still working my way through all the logs and orientation material since coming aboard the ship. So, when we heard that the captain had mysteriously vanished and later that Q¹ was involved, I really didn't grasp the danger we were in. I don't think any of us except maybe the captain appreciated that.

I was in main engineering when the ship rocked, and it felt like the inertial dampers went out of phase. I was hit by a wave of nausea but fortunately I was able to keep it down – the last thing I wanted to do was throw up all over the master system display [MSD]. After a moment, it passed, and the bridge asked all decks to report in. As far as we could tell, all ship systems were fine. Lieutenant La Forge went to attend a conference with the senior staff, but already the scuttle butt was working in full force and we started to hear rumors that we had been thrown over 7,000 light-years from our previous position! It was insane! There was no indication of any wormholes or subspace anomalies. I'd seen a report that the year prior, a being known as the "Traveler" had done something to the ship's engines – but all of our stations said the warp drive was offline, and our deuterium tanks showed no excessive usage. Most of the engineering team were new since the guarantee group had returned to Utopia Planitia the year prior. But we heard from folks who had been on board for longer that it was likely some trick from this Q, and not to worry – they usually got bored and would probably leave soon.

◇ Were you not worried that the ship was now 7,000 light-years from Federation space?

A little. That was more from realizing there was a being whose abilities were so far beyond ours that it was indistinguishable from magic, but we were out in the unknown! Past the frontier. This was what the *Enterprise* had been designed to do. It would take around two years to travel back to the nearest starbase, but

1 The Q are a highly powerful race of potentially omnipotent non-corporeal beings first encountered by the crew of the USS *Enterprise* on stardate 41153.7.

the *Galaxy*-class had been envisioned with long duration exploration missions in mind. The ship could happily operate without support for five years or even longer. This was exciting and we were out there! Seeking out new life and new civilizations. When I heard that the captain was going to explore the nearby system I was so excited – *this* was what I had joined Starfleet for. Even now, in the midst of a crisis, we were still exploring. I think I was literally bouncing around engineering.

The ship went to Yellow Alert, and we immediately went to stations and brought the warp core to standby. When we'd made sure all systems were ready if the bridge needed shields or weapons, that's when it arrived.

♦ The Borg?

A Borg, maybe? I'm still not really sure how that works. They have some kind of collective consciousness? It just seemed to materialize right through our shields, and started to conduct a visual survey of the warp core.

♦ Were you scared?

Really it was more excitement. A species that we had never encountered before – no one in the Federation had ever seen something like this. I know we're meant to try and leave our preconceptions and cultural biases at the airlock, but it was a little intimidating. It was clad in some sort of black polymer armor, with wires and cybernetic devices implanted throughout its body. The organic parts I could see were ashen and pallid; it seemed like the life had been leached from it. Lieutenant La Forge ordered us to secure our stations and to exit engineering while we waited for security to arrive, but we were never hostile – and we didn't interfere while it was looking.

We gathered just outside the doors to engineering. As the captain and a security detail came past, I heard the captain try to initiate first contact with the Borg. More than anything, I wanted to be able to go and watch – it was a moment of history in the making. But then something happened: systems started to drain and I could hear the pitch of the warp core start to change, as though it was preparing for a shut down. We rushed back into engineering to monitor what was happening as the Borg threw one of the security officers clean across the room! Lieutenant Worf fired a phaser at it, but it had no effect. Even while

this was going on, it felt like there must have been some misunderstanding – some sort of communication issue. My station was on the upper deck regulating the plasma infusers. As I headed past on the gangway I could hear the captain implore the Borg to stop interfering with the ship's systems, but the Borg just continued.

The captain told Lieutenant Worf to stop the Borg using any means necessary. His next shot stopped the Borg. It collapsed slowly and its cybernetic attachment continued to twitch for several moments after the organic parts had stopped.

I think I was in shock, looking down at it just lying there. I had never seen a body before, let alone seen a being killed. I could feel my heart thundering in my chest and felt numb as a second Borg materialized next to the first. My hands were shaking as I tried to operate the LCARS interface. The second Borg finished whatever the first had been doing, then it knelt down beside its fallen companion. I wondered if it was going to check on it, or maybe say something, some kind of rite, but instead it tore several components right out of the fallen Borg's body and materialized away. This time, I couldn't keep it down and was sick all over the plasma infuser control array.

GUINAN

USS ENTERPRISE, QUALOR SYSTEM

Stardate 46231.8 — 2369

The El-Aurians are one of the most mystifying species ever encountered by the Federation. Ostensibly Human in appearance, they describe themselves as a race of "listeners." Starfleet records note the first encounter with the species was in the late 23rd century following an undisclosed natural disaster that had rendered their system uninhabitable. The enigmatic Guinan is a close friend and confidant of Captain Jean-Luc Picard and has served as the hostess of the Ten-Forward lounge on board the Federation flagship since 2265.

More than anything, I miss the color of the sky.

I don't think there was anything unique about Shamash, our local star. El-Auria was what the Federation calls a Class-M world, and to the best of my knowledge, was nothing special compared to the countless others in the galaxy. But there was something in the hue of the sky that was different – just a hint of violet.

My species has traveled far, far across the galaxy. We like to think of ourselves as a race of listeners, but sometimes we don't always hear what is right in front of us.

We first encountered the Borg around 800-900 Earth years ago; a small research ship encountered a strange race of cyborgs and decided to observe them. We considered ourselves disconnected from other affairs in the galaxy, and maybe a little aloof. We watched and we listened, but we never interfered. I suppose we believed ourselves above such concerns.

The research team followed the Borg for several years. They saw the Borg assimilate countless species, watched empires rise up against them, and then collapse as the Borg adapted and swept through their systems – all of which was noted, recorded, and transmitted back to El-Auria.

♦ Did they not try to help or warn people of the danger coming for them?

No. El-Aurians are blessed – or perhaps cursed – with long lifespans, certainly by the standards of most Federation species. When you live for thousands of years and all those around you pass in less than a hundred, you find it easy, and even necessary, to detach yourself from the lives of those more ephemeral. So we studied the lives of the civilizations we encountered. When we were younger, we would occasionally go and live amongst them – marry, have families...but then you watch your loved ones eventually die. Your children, your grandchildren, dear friends, and then sooner or later we all found our way back home. So you can see: when you have a mindset like that, you don't feel compelled to get involved. No more than a Vulcan might interfere with a *le-matya* hunting a *sehlat*.

The research team stopped reporting abruptly one day. This was before my time, but it was just assumed the ship had a malfunction of some sort. By then they had been following the Borg for close to 200 years and they'd shown no indication of even knowing the team was there.

♦ Why didn't your people try to find out what happened?

We didn't have a "Starfleet," or even a centralized government. We'd tried that a few millennia ago – did the whole "empire" thing – but in truth, we'd outgrown it. Most of us just wanted to get out and explore, to experience the universe. There wasn't a particular reason; we would just pick a direction and go. For all we knew the ship's crew had encountered a new civilization and decided to live among them for a while. It wasn't unheard of. I don't think *anyone* gave the Borg another thought until around 100 years ago.

I wasn't there, so most of what I know has come from others and pieces I've been able to put together. Apparently, the Borg sent a single ship. We had no vast fleets to fight them or to hold them at bay, and our arrogance meant we had no allies to come to our aid. The Borg came to El-Auria and ripped our cities right out of the ground...a civilization stretching back across eons extinguished in a matter of days.

The irony, I learned later, was that the research team had grown tired of passively watching. They'd tried to warn a species at the far end of the Gamma Quadrant. *That's* what drew the Borg's attention and led them to my home.

[Guinan is silent for a moment and looks out over the busy lounge.]

I was on Bajor at the time – this was before the occupation. I was a painter and I had a wife, but I was starting to get homesick. The skies over the Kendra Valley are beautiful, but they lacked that violet. [she smiles]

When word reached me I left immediately. I didn't even say goodbye. I encountered other El-Aurians who had heard what happened; we chartered a couple of ships and headed towards home to try and help who we could. Some of us headed towards the Alpha Quadrant, some stayed close to El-Auria, and others decided to head out away from the galaxy. To get as far from the loss and pain as they could.

As for me? Well...I still listen. But I also try to guide.

DATA

Stardate 46242.2 — 2369

USS *ENTERPRISE*, QUALOR SYSTEM

Lieutenant Commander Data is unique within Starfleet. He is the only fully synthetic life-form recognized as sapient by the Federation – which has been traditionally skeptical of synthetic and artificial life-forms dating back to the mid-2200s. Despite his unfathomable processing power and physical abilities far in excess of most organic life, Data has taken a career path through Starfleet and is, at present, second officer aboard the USS Enterprise. I conduct my interview in his quarters, where he sits at a large computer interface (and most bizarrely) with an orange cat sleeping soundly upon his lap.

It had become apparent that the *Enterprise* was no match for the Borg vessel. It out-classed the ship in both armament and defensive systems, and possessed technology far superior to that of Starfleet. The tractor beam not only disrupted attempts at creating a warp field, but also inhibited shields and limited the ship's ability to maneuver. The ship was effectively immobilized.

The Borg then employed some form of particle beam which sliced through the primary hull, removing an approximately 10,379 cubic meter core and taking it into their vessel. There were 18 casualties. The captain ordered the use of any force necessary to disable the tractor beam and we were successful in freeing the *Enterprise*.

◆ Your weapons were effective?

Initially, yes. However, we have since observed the Borg's ability to adapt, resulting in diminishing returns whenever our weapons are used. Additionally, the networked nature of the Borg means that the destruction of a single Borg results in the entire collective learning, adapting, and working together to mount a resistance.

◆ Why didn't *Enterprise* attempt to escape at this point?

Starfleet's primary mission remains one of exploration and the discovery of

new life-forms. Despite the preceding events, Captain Picard felt that it would be prudent to discover as much as possible about the Borg. Any gleaned insight could be vital to understanding the Borg and possibly enable future contact.

Our sensor scans of the Borg ship had proved inconclusive, and we were unable to identify a designated bridge or engine room. Attempts to scan for individual life signs had also been inconclusive. In effect, the interior of the ship remained a mystery. Given the capabilities the Borg had displayed, it was determined that an away mission was the most prudent course of action. Commander Riker, Lieutenant Worf, and myself transported into what we had believed to be an undamaged and uninhabited section of the ship.

We were in error.

As we materialized within the cube, we found ourselves on a walkway adjacent to a vast space which seemed to run the length of the ship. As far as we could see in either direction, Borg were positioned into alcoves along each walkway. This afforded me the first opportunity to observe the Borg in person. My initial observations were that these were less individual life forms, and more *components* – perhaps analogous to cells within a body.

♦ *Could you elaborate, please? What do you mean?*

The Borg that we could observe were all connected directly to the ship through the use of specialized interfaces fitted to their alcoves. Each Borg was unique in its design, and presumably equipped to fulfill a specific role within the operation of the ship.

The connection was so perfect between Borg and ship that in many ways it is impossible to state where one ended and the other began. The ship was the Borg and these “drones” were merely an extension of that.

[*The android cocks his head slightly.*]

In fact, the use of “drone” to describe the individual Borg mirrors many parallels between the Borg ship and different colony species found on many worlds. Such organisms include the ant and bee insect groups of Earth, the Klendathu Arachnia, the Internecivus Raptus of Nost...

♦ *Please, Mr. Data – the Borg drones?*

Ah, yes. The drones were uniquely suited to an individual task. Presumably, there is redundancy present throughout in the event that parts of the ship are destroyed, to facilitate the regeneration and continued operation of the ship.

For the duration of our time on the Borg vessel, the drones continued to ignore us. The majority of their attention seemed to be on the restoration of the vessel's core systems. It is interesting to note that the drones do not appear to require respiration or sustenance in a typical organic manner. However, atmospherics are maintained – broadly similar to that of a Class-M environment. I surmised this was to facilitate their young, who appeared to be born as solely organic and had the cybernetic interfaces added as they mature.

Fascinating.

Our scans of the interior indicated the ship's power systems had been restored and were cycling up to full power. When we notified Captain Picard, he ordered the away team transported from the ship back to the *Enterprise*. The Borg's subspace fields then reactivated and the cube recommenced its pursuit.

♦ Was there nothing you could've done to disable the ship while you were on board?

Given our very limited knowledge of the Borg, it is unlikely that we would have been able to effectively disable or delay the Borg's regeneration – let alone destroy the vessel. The decentralized nature of the vessel, lack of traditional control rooms, and distributed power networks made a conventional assault impossible. Additionally, that is not in keeping with the ideals of Starfleet. We did not fully understand the motivations of the Borg. We wished to limit any possible escalation of hostilities until all other avenues had been explored.

♦ How were you able to escape them?

We could not. Despite pushing the warp engines beyond their normal operating limits, the Borg easily overtook us and destabilized the *Enterprise*'s warp field. In the end, the only thing which prevented the destruction of the ship was the whim of Q, who – deeming his point made – returned the ship to the Alpha Quadrant.

J.P. HANSON

USS NEBUCHADNEZZAR, EN ROUTE TO SOL SYSTEM

Stardate 42769.3 — 2365

ACCESS INCLUDED AUDIO FILE "01.06"

Admiral J.P. Hanson was described by those who knew him as "high ranking and hard driving," often fighting against the current when popular opinion was that Starfleet should focus more on the scientific and exploration programs at the expense of tactical concerns. He believed the Galaxy-class development program was an expensive boondoggle. What follows is a subspace transmission from Admiral Hanson – en route to Sol System from Starbase 83 – to Rear Admiral William Ross, Starfleet Chief of Plans.

Bill, it's J.P. I've just left Starbase 83 and I'm en route to Earth to speak in person, but this is too important to wait. I'm employing Vanguard Encryption Protocols with this message; ensure the room is secure before proceeding.

Enterprise arrived unexpectedly two days ago. Some minor damage, 18 casualties, and one hell of a story. I've attached Picard's logs for you to review, but to cut right to it: I think we're in trouble.

It was that damned imp Q. I still don't know what his fascination is with Humanity in general – and Picard in particular – but he flung *Enterprise* 7,000 light-years in an instant to J-25; out to Beta Quadrant.

They encountered the remains of post-industrial, possibly even post-warp civilizations – but before any real analysis could be conducted they were approached by a vessel of unknown configuration. They identified themselves as the Borg.

[he sighs] This is bad, Bill. This is very bad. These *Galaxy*-class ships were sold to us as being "superior in every respect" to whatever we might encounter for the next 25 years. And there these Borg started dissecting *Enterprise*, and there was nothing the crew could do about it. They were extremely adaptive to anything and *everything* that was thrown at them. For a short duration phasers and photon torpedoes were of limited effectiveness – before they adapted.

From Picard's reports and the footage I've seen, they completely outmatched *Enterprise*. The only reason the ship survived at all was that Q grew bored and flung the ship back to Federation space. They suffered 18 casualties, and from what the chief engineer and head of security informed me, the Borg gained full access to LCARS – completely bypassing our encryptions and cyber defense suites. We have to assume they had *full* access. We'll have to review what has been compromised and take appropriate steps.

[HANSON can be heard tapping his ready room desk.]

I want a meeting with you once we get to Spacedock. We're going to want to set up a division within Starfleet Tactical. Our only saving grace is that the Romulans are between us and J-25. If the Borg are coming this way, they will have to carve through *them* first which will buy us some time...but these Borg are beyond anything we've faced, Bill.

We aren't ready. Not for this...Hanson Out.

END OF FILE

TRANSCRIPT OF ADMIRALTY MEETING

ACCESS INCLUDED AUDIO FILE "01.07"

The following is an edited transcript of a holorecorded meeting of the Department of the Starfleet senior staff on stardate 42886.71 (approximately one month after the Borg Encounter at J-25). The meeting took place in the Fleet Admiral Nogura Heihachiro Conference Room at Starfleet Headquarters in San Francisco, Earth.

Starfleet Intelligence partially declassified and approved the redacted recording for public release on stardate 63047.71

FLAG OFFICERS PRESENT

Fleet Admiral Taela Shanthi
CHIEF OF STARFLEET OPERATIONS

Admiral Owen Paris
**VICE CHIEF OF
STARFLEET OPERATIONS**

Vice Admiral Ellen Hayes
**CHIEF OF STARFLEET
INTELLIGENCE**

Vice Admiral J.P. Hanson
CHIEF OF STARFLEET TACTICAL

Rear Admiral (Upper
Half): William Ross
CHIEF OF STARFLEET PLANS

Vice Admiral Thomas Henry
CHIEF OF STARFLEET SECURITY

Vice Admiral
Jennifer Chapman
**CHIEF OF STARFLEET
SUSTAINMENT AND LOGISTICS**

Rear Admiral (Lower
Half) James Leyton
CHIEF OF STARFLEET PERSONNEL

Admiral Eliza Brooks
**CHIEF OF STARFLEET MEDICAL/
STARFLEET SURGEON GENERAL**

Rear Admiral (Upper
Half) Norah Satie
**STARFLEET JUDGE
ADVOCATE GENERAL**

The 10 admirals sit around a large polished oak conference table while a series of intelligence reports play out on the room's holoscreen. Fleet Admiral Shanthi sits at the head of the table with her Vice Chief, Admiral Paris, directly to her right. The remainder of the senior staff sit along the sides of the table by position. Occasionally, the admirals pass notes or ask whispered questions to their aides (mostly lieutenant commanders and commanders) seated in chairs along the walls behind them. The names of the aides were not recorded. The elapsed meeting time on the holorecording reads 2 hours, 37 minutes, 15 seconds.

PARIS: Ma'am, if you don't have any more questions about the trade conference with Zuronda IV, we'll move on to the next item on the agenda.

SHANTHI: No questions.

PARIS: Next slide, please.

[The holoprojector in front of the conference shifts to an image of a Borg cube captured by the 1701-D's flight recorder during the J-25 incident. A list of facts and statistics are in a text box along the right side of the image.]

SHANTHI: So, that's "the Burg" that Jean-Luc and the *Enterprise* encountered last month across the Beta Quadrant?

[ADMIRAL HAYES checks her notes on a PADD.]

HAYES: Actually, I believe that's pronounced "Borg," Ma'am.

SHANTHI: Well, my apologies to their ambassadors when they arrive on Earth. Make a note of that to our second contact ships...

[Everyone around the table, with the notable exception of REAR ADMIRAL LEYTON, chuckles.]

SHANTHI: Alright, Ellen, what have your folks down in the J2 shop figured out?

HAYES: Unfortunately, Ma'am? Not much. If you look at the briefing packet provided with your meeting notes, beyond what was in the *Enterprise's* initial reports and logs, our data points are pretty slim. When they vaporized their dead in the ship's engineering and bridge sections, absolutely zero traces of organic or artificial material were left.

PARIS: That's impossible. Even a phaser at level 20 leaves some trace of genetic material or atomic variance.

HAYES: Sir, Starfleet Medical concurs with our scientific analysis.

SHANTHI: [turning to **ADMIRAL BROOKS**] Eliza?

BROOKS: It's true, Ma'am. I talked to their CMO, Katherine Pulaski, myself. I had her run a level 10 bioscan over the carpets, hull plating – even the atmospheric processors in the hopes that *something* was left in the life support re-processors. Absolutely zippo. Beyond the name “Borg,” and the fact they are bipedal, I can't even tell you what type of *life-form* they are.

[SHANTHI and PARIS exchange interested looks.]

HANSON: That seems to show an even higher level of technological ability than previously indicated. They were able to cut through the shields and hull plating of a *Galaxy*-class like they weren't even there.

CHAPMAN: I've had the engineering folks over at Utopia Planitia and Jupiter Station run the specs three times. They're *still* not convinced that the under-performance of the *Enterprise*'s defensive systems wasn't another bug in the system like we saw on the *Galaxy* or *Yamato*. The design has only been in space for *three years* and we've already had a catastrophic failure and a near catastrophic failure...

HANSON: Jennifer, you can't seriously believe that? Their cutting beam took out a clean cylinder of the saucer section like a core sample from freshman year “Intro to Geology”!

CHAPMAN: I've seen the tapes too, J.P. This is just what my engineers are telling me.

HANSON: Maybe your engineers should try fixing their own eyes before they try fixing anything else...

PARIS: Save it for poker night at the Admirals' Club, you two. **[the table chuckles again. PARIS turns back to VICE ADMIRAL HAYES]** Ellen, you're telling me that besides the basic sensor logs and Commander Data's tricorder, the most sophisticated scientific suite ever installed on a spacefaring platform in the history of the quadrant can't even tell me what that giant cube thing is made of or how fast it is capable of traveling?

[HAYES shrugs.]

HAYES: Pretty damn fast based on how it chased down the *Enterprise*, but that's all I know for sure. We've been able to put together some theories on how their ship functions based on secondary evidence, but nothing conclusive. We also picked up some weird trace magnetic resonances in the *Enterprise*'s hull plating

where it was affected by the Borg cutting beam. It might be a way to identify them if we ever come across a suspected area where they've already been–

LEYTON: [interjecting] Surely *all* the resources of Starfleet Intelligence can do something more than that, Ma'am? These technological terrors are obviously a major threat to the entire Federation and we must take that threat seriously. Our defensive plans are woefully inadequate and we need to know what we're facing to change that...

[There is more than a hint of derision in his voice. HAYES looks visibly annoyed at the young admiral's tone.]

HAYES: [in a commanding tone] I don't think you apparently understand how a real strategic-level analysis works, Rear Admiral Leyton. I know you've only had those pips for about five minutes, but trust me: I'm very good at my job. I don't spit out theories I can't back up with facts. That Q thing just snapped his fingers and threw the *Enterprise* right at the feet of those beings. That ship and crew weren't prepared for a major, in-depth analysis...

LEYTON: [muttering] Well, if Picard were as good as people seem to *think* he is, maybe he would have gotten more information instead of getting 18 good people killed on his watch while trying to make friends with those cyber things...

HENRY: Excuse me? I know Picard. You think you could have done better?

LEYTON: Yes, Sir, I think I could have! When I was in command of the *Okinawa* on the Tzenkethi front, I was able to do my job while safeguarding my entire crew!

[HANSON shifts uncomfortably in his seat. ADMIRAL SATIE leans forward and gives an approving nod towards LEYTON.]

PARIS: *Enough!* We are not here to second-guess the actions of Captain Picard or any member of the *Enterprise* crew. It's regrettable that 18 Starfleet personnel lost their lives at J-25, but there is no indication of any negligence–

SATIE: Sir, that's not entirely true. While I concur that there was not enough evidence to charge Captain Picard with any violations of criminal or administrative regulations, it does make one wonder why the captain of the Federation's flagship was so ineffectual in dealing with a repeated, hostile alien presence on his ship–

HAYES: We've been over this; they gave everything they had to get away from the Borg–

SATIE: Actually, I was referring to Picard's inappropriate relationship with the Q entity, which obviously puts Federation citizens at risk–

HENRY: Well, Norah, I'm sorry that a Starfleet captain was unable to stop an alien with godlike powers from invading his vessel—

SATIE: Plenty of captains have done it before—

SHANTHI: **[sharply raising her hand]** *Stop this right now!* Everyone, please: remain professional. I realize that there are apparently some strong opinions and sharp disagreements about how this incident was handled, but remember my command philosophy: we always defer to the starship commander *on the scene*. Unless their actions are criminal or unethical, which there are no indications that Captain Picard's were, we unconditionally support them. Is that understood?

[SHANTHI looks around the table with a sharp gaze. All the admirals with the exceptions of LEYTON and SATIE make eye contact with her in return.]

SHANTHI: Admiral Leyton, I know that as a recent starship commander, you find it difficult to let go of the “chair” mindset. However, when you took the promotion to the admiralty, you agreed to put that part of your career behind you. We make decisions for the whole of Starfleet and the Federation in this room. I know the conditions fighting the Tzenkethi were difficult. Harsh, even. Your actions were always to the highest standards of Starfleet conduct and that is why I concurred with your promotion from captain to admiral. Now, I need you to place your experience behind the problems of Starfleet personnel and how we place the right leaders in the right places to make positive change for the Federation? *That is all.* Is that understood?

[LEYTON now looks her straight in the eyes.]

LEYTON: Yes, Ma'am. Very clearly.

SHANTHI: The Borg may be a new threat, but we don't make strategic policy on whatever “monster” we encounter out in the stars each week. Planet destroyers, ancient sentient probes, rapid aging plagues, crystalline colony-eating entities: these will always be out there. It is our job to keep our heads forward and look long-term. The Borg are 7,000 light-years away and even if they turned towards the Federation today, it would take them almost *three years* to arrive. Are there any indications that is happening, Ellen?

HAYES: No, Ma'am.

SHANTHI: Well then, in that case I'll focus on the Klingons, Romulans, Ferengi, and the other species of the *here and now* until the evidence suggests otherwise.

[HANSON raises his hand.]

HANSON: Ma'am, we all remember what it was like to be a brand new, one-pip

admiral. Full of piss and vinegar, ready to change the galaxy right?

[The table chuckles for a third time. LEYTON still doesn't join the others. This time his face seems to be a mix of embarrassment and anger.]

HANSON: While I agree we shouldn't drop everything and concentrate on the Borg, I *also* agree with James that they are a real threat. We should put a few more resources towards planning for their possible arrival...if, and when that day ever comes.

SHANTHI: What is it you suggest?

HANSON: Let me put together a working group at Starfleet Tactical. I could bring in a few new people...

SHANTHI: Don't you already have senior research analysts in your headquarters you could put towards the Borg?

HANSON: Yes, Ma'am, I do. But I could use some new blood with actual deep space experience: a few younger versions of Jimmy Leyton over there that have the knowledge and "can do" attitude to light a fire under the research and theory folks.

PARIS: Who do you have in mind, J.P.?

END OF FILE

ELIZABETH SHELBY

USS ILLINOIS, EN ROUTE TO ZAKDORN

Stardate 47626.9 – 2370

Elizabeth Shelby was viewed by many as the heir apparent to Admiral Hanson following the incursion of 2366. She has been instrumental in analyzing the aftermath of Wolf 359, and oversees recommendations for improvements in ship design and tactical doctrine to ensure the lessons learned that day are not squandered.

During the Holland Commission Report, Commander Shelby and I worked closely, and her frank, no-nonsense approach to identifying the Starfleet's failings was a refreshing contrast to the hand-wringing and finger-pointing from others within the organization.

This interview, one of many, was conducted on board the USS Illinois while en route to Wolf 359. Commander Shelby greets me as I enter the crew lounge with a warm smile and a raktajino.

When he [Admiral Hanson] approached me, I really didn't have any idea of what I was getting into. I'd never even heard of "Starfleet Tactical," and every fiber of my being told me that this was a bad career move.

The thing about Starfleet is it's full of seat fillers. We don't tend to cycle crews through postings like the Andorians or the Klingons do. People find nice cozy spots, they get comfortable, and then that's it for 15 years. Frankly, I wanted my own ship. But there was no way I was going to get there from the engine room of an *Oberth*, so I figured, here's a flag officer personally inviting me to join this think tank. I'll go babysit the brass for a while and then use that to leapfrog onto the bridge of an *Ambassador* or *Nebula*-class ship.

When I beamed into San Francisco on the first day? It was even worse than I had feared.

♦ What do you mean?

Well, there were plenty of admirals, but once again: seat fillers. A lot of them looked like they had been there since Khitomer and I doubted any had any *real* clout with command for assignments. My heart sank and I felt I was there

just to be a glorified PA, or worse, eye candy. After the first day of being shown around what you could laughably call “tactical operations,” I went straight to the 602 to drown my sorrows and to give my career an Irish wake.

I was actually composing a request to Captain Blackswan to see if I could return to the *Yosemite* before they shipped out when Admiral Hanson parked himself down at the bar next to me, ordered a couple of scotches, and placed one in front of me. All without saying a word.

There was this real uncomfortable silence while he just...held the glass and stared at it. The ice was a large cube in the middle of the glass, and he seemed hypnotized by it. All I could see was the ice sitting in the scotch. I even picked up my own glass and looked to see if there was something in there.

[She holds her cup of *raktajino* up in front of her and stares at the dark liquid in the mug.]

He downed the scotch in one and turned to me. I was a little taken aback, to say the least. But he stared at me, and then very gravely told me that we had five years to save the Federation.

I thought “great, he’s already drunk,” and was about to try and leave when he held up his hand and tapped some commands into his PADD. He told me that I should go back home and read the dossier he had just cleared me for. Then he took my scotch, downed *that*, and just left.

When I got to my quarters, I pulled up the dossier and read through it. Then I got up, found a stiff drink, and read it again.

I walked into the job the next morning with a head feeling like an intermix chamber, and if i’m honest? I still didn’t really buy into how grave the threat that Hanson was making the Borg out to be. But when you’re out there serving in a starship you have a very insular perspective, and you don’t have a good grasp of the wider picture. Even more so if you aren’t on the command staff.

When I was at the academy (and even in the fleet) there was this perception that Starfleet was this omnipresent force: always there and ready to save the day at a moment’s notice. It did feel like we were entering a new golden age with the *Galaxy*-class starships; those things were game changing, at the very forefront of Starfleet’s scientific and exploratory mission. But we were only

building six, and then the plan was to send them off to the farthest corners of the Federation while *Mirandas* and *Excelsiors* continued to run about between starbases. The Romulans had practically vanished over a century ago, the Gorn and Tzenkethi had no interest in expanding into Federation space, and while the Klingons had all but recovered from the fallout of Praxis, they showed no interest in returning to an antagonistic posture with us. It was in many ways a true golden age – turns out that the brass were *terrified* by it.

♦ I'm sorry, they were “terrified” by peace?

No. They were terrified of doing anything – and I do mean ANYTHING – that might risk it. It had been over 10 years since the last war game, and they didn't like calling it that. I think the term Hanson used was “joint tactical operation.” There was even a reluctance to dispatch multiple starships to certain sectors for fear it could be viewed as overly provocative! Madness! But that was the prevailing mindset in some parts of the admiralty. As a result, Admiral Hanson had been forced to fight tooth and nail just to keep Starfleet Tactical as a viable department. He knew that just because it was sunny today, didn't mean it wouldn't rain tomorrow.

SIRNA KOLRAMI

Stardate 50196.3 — 2373

COLLEGIA STRATEGORUM, KANSARI CITY, ZAKDORN

The Collegia Strategorum in Kansari City is considered the preeminent strategic think tank in the United Federation of Planets. Rumor still has it that Zakdorn's accession to the Federation in 2256 was accelerated to ensure that the Starfleet would have access to this group of advanced tactical thinkers during the conflict with the Klingons. No alien species has dared to invade Zakdorn space in over 9,000 years.

Kolrami's office is rather dark, cluttered, and musty. There must be well over a thousand books from at least three dozen different worlds stacked carpet to ceiling: every single one on strategy, game theory, or some combination of the two. The only free space on the white plastered walls is dedicated to a giant certificate nearly one meter by one meter in size from the Interstellar Strategema Federation awarding him the title of "Fourth Degree Grand Master" in the game.

Over the previous half-century the Federation had become very accustomed to peace and it was determined to keep it that way at any cost. This thinking had become so institutionalized that Starfleet could no longer countenance any scenario where it might have to face any foe of equivalent or greater power. Instead, it preferred to allow reputation and myth to keep the locals in line as it were. This caused the withering of Starfleet's tactical division to little more than a think tank, and the cessation of multiship deployments near any of the Federation's borders. They didn't want to give the impression of showing force. There was a distinct air of confidence that there was no force in the galaxy that couldn't be dealt with diplomatically – with, perhaps, a small show of capabilities from an *Ambassador* or *Galaxy*-class.

J-25 changed all that.

I was, of course, the natural candidate to conduct the "asymmetrical operations evaluation." Humph! What nonsense! Starfleet was so utterly terrified of being perceived as a military organization that they went to absurd lengths to avoid calling it what it was – a *war game*! Preposterous! We'd petitioned Starfleet to allow the collegia to conduct *some* form of tactical

assessment for several years; we needed to update our models and understand what the modern Starfleet officer would do in unusual situations. Most of our assumptions were based around assessments of individuals such as Georgiou, Decker, Kirk, and others of a similar vintage. But they'd graduated from a very different academy into a very different Starfleet.

For 80 years, we'd never had a serious existential threat to our existence. It's easy to build starships larger, brighter, and more comfortable than five-star hotels when the Romulans have retreated behind the Neutral Zone and Klingon warriors become more concerned with tea ceremonies and flower arranging than combat and conquest. This is *exactly* why you need experts like me outside of the service: to tell you how tradition and self-aggrandizement will get you all killed. Picard and Riker *loved* lecturing me about how Starfleet needn't consider itself a military force anymore – that tactics and fighting ability were beneath their “evolved sensibilities.”

I requested *Enterprise* specifically for the evaluation – given it was the ship which had encountered the Borg at J-25, and that Captain Picard had some measure of tactical experience from the Maxia incident aboard *Stargazer*. I must say, however, that in assessments conducted within the collegia since, we have identified several alternate strategies that he could have used to destroy the hostile craft and save the ship. But then, he is only Human.

His first officer, however, Commander Riker – he was certainly a product of this “New Starfleet,” more concerned with how his subordinates viewed him and far too much fraternization. I heard that he would play some sort of musical instrument in the ship's lounge! How unseemly!

The exercise itself was largely inconclusive. Without Starfleet being willing to embrace multiple exercises involving multiple ships, there was only a limited amount of data possible to be gleaned. But what we were able to ascertain seemed to confirm many of my and my colleagues' greatest fears: that Starfleet officers were no longer able to adequately protect the Federation.

♦ But from my understanding and from your own report, Commander Riker was able to win the–

He did NOT “win,” and nor was “winning” the goal of the assessment. It was both to ascertain what sort of officers the academy was producing, and predict how they would perform in a J-25 style encounter. As it transpired, he and the

majority of the crew viewed it as an irrelevance. A distraction. While Starfleet's existence has always been scientific and explorative at its core, it has a responsibility to protect its citizens. Not every member has its own Imperial Guard or High Command. Can you imagine what would have happened if the Romulans really knew the state of Starfleet at the time? Or the Cardassians? Starfleet had been riding on the coattails of James Kirk too long. And it was only then, when they were called to account that they started to understand just how wanting they were.

This was further evidenced during the exercise when a Ferengi Marauder attacked the *Enterprise*. Picard and Riker risked one of only two extant *Galaxy*-class starships in the entire Federation to save 40 crewmembers with no valuable experience, and an 80-year-old *Constellation*-class pulled from the scrap yard. It was ludicrous! Starfleet cannot hope to win a major conflict by building massive capital ships that can be lost on the whims of impulsive, churlish command crews.

♦ From what I recall from my reading at the academy, that does sound a lot like Kirk.

Nonsense! Kirk was one of the *finest* tactical minds to ever graduate from the academy. I would have liked very much to face him in a game of strategema. I doubt he would have lasted much longer than the fourth plateau, but still! To face a mind such as his would have been extremely diverting. You see, strategema is so revered by my people because it distills the essence of combat to its purest form. Within that world, we can view its myriad patterns and possibilities, move and counter move, action and reaction. These are laws as fundamental to waging of war as physics are to the universe. You cannot just flout them when they are inconvenient. Kirk knew this. He would analyze the situation, he would change the paradigm – he would adapt, but he would not cheat. He would respect the purity of the challenge. Riker cheated, and Riker got lucky. NO STRATEGY CAN EVER RELY ON LUCK! If it does, it is not a strategy. It is a guess, and it is only a matter of time before you are *undone*.

♦ I see...tell me, Mr. Kolrami, have you ever heard of the Kobayashi Maru?

TEBOK

PARADISE CITY, NIMBUS III

Stardate 69181.9 – 2392

In the wake of the Romulan home system's destruction and the dissolution of the Romulan Star Empire, many of its former officers have become more accessible to historians. Some are able to share what were once the greatest secrets of a state that no longer exists. Former Admiral Tebok is one such individual – having found himself out of favor with the current regime, he's been "relegated" to Nimbus III. The once-famed "Planet of Galactic Peace," it is now little more than a Romulan settlement and trading post on the former Neutral Zone. Tebok sits in his booth at the back of the "Sha Ka Ree Cafe." He wears a stark black tunic with a military cut; the bartender informs me that he is often found here, holding court and regaling travelers with embellished stories of the "glorious days of the empire."

You see...the Federation is so utterly self-absorbed, they think the entire galaxy revolves around Earth or Tellar. If it doesn't happen right on their doorstep, they just don't want to know. We have seen this again and again throughout history; something that's no doubt inherited from the Vulcans.

[This last word delivered with the hint of a sneer.]

After our little "special operation" in the mid-2100s (by your calendar), we decided to focus our attentions *away* from the Alpha Quadrant. It was clear that with your newfound "Federation" and Klingons bickering, it was not worth our while to get involved. We turned our focus out into the Beta Quadrant, and up towards the galactic north. Oh the *wonders* we discovered! Do you know, on Tarantinos IV we encountered the most *beautiful* crystalline falls? When the sun hit them just right, they would emit harmonics so beautiful, it brought the first vanguards to tears...but more importantly the latticework improved the efficiency of our cloaking devices by over 62 percent! Can you imagine!? Of course, we made extensive holorecordings of the site before mining began. If you like, I can share the holoprogram with you.

♦ Thank you, maybe later.

Hmm. Well, as you wish. Where was I? Ah, yes! The empire expanded up and away from the Federation and the Klingons. We enforced the Neutral Zone. We kept tabs on events along our southern border. Maybe we...prodded or “stirred the pot” every now and then, as good neighbors should. There was that unpleasantness with the *Tomed*, but honestly we had no interest in expanding to the galactic south. The empire grew and it was glorious.

♦ But what about other species? Surely there were sentients you and the empire encountered, other powers?

Well, yes. The Remans, for example: our original hosts on Romulus are now widely known, thanks to the Dominion War and that cur *Shinzon*. But we found very little in the way of indigenous, intelligent life as we advanced. At first, we did not think too much of it, but then around the middle of the 2330s we began to suspect why. We encountered the remains of civilizations – vestiges of empires which had vanished; always we found the suggestion of once great cities or spaceborn infrastructure, but all that was left were the roads or debris at Lagrange points. Finally, with our vanguards traversing ever closer towards the Delta Quadrant, we encountered *them*.

♦ The Borg?

Yes. The “Borg.” Although in time, we would call them the *Llaetus’le*. In your tongue it means “disease.” We stumbled upon one of their ships stripping a planet of resources and we had never seen the like. This...huge, black, monolithic *cube*! It was pulling entire *cities* up from the surface of this planet! Our ships remained cloaked and observed for days as the ship moved throughout the system – painstakingly removing every trace of whatever civilization had inhabited the world. Our people observed ships fleeing these worlds, but the invaders largely ignored them – focusing instead on harvesting the resources before leaving. Such power! I’m sure you can *imagine* what the praetor thought when he was informed. We had to possess it! The *entire focus* of the Romulan Science Directorate, the Tal Shiar, and the Imperial Navy was to study and control this new force.

There was, however, the little matter of needing to move resources away from the Neutral Zone. With you and the Klingons getting on so well since Khitomer, there were some efforts to “improve” those relations. Then the

bastard *Enterprise-C* got involved at Narendra III. It nearly undid all our hard work, but fortunately we were able to turn that to our advantage.

[There is the ghost of a smile as he mentions the *Enterprise-C*. I make a note to follow up later.]

We started to pursue these Borg, as you say. Observing at first, probing where we dared – moving slowly and cautiously at first...until we felt ready to make our first move: to try and capture one.

♦ A drone?

No, *a ship*, my friend! We were confident by this point that we had the technology to disrupt the Borg's communication and weapons systems. It would allow us to seize the ship and give us access to their computer systems. From there, we could study and dissect them at our leisure and begin incorporating that wonderful technology into our own fleet.

I was stationed on a small asteroid base inside the Chimera Nebula where the ship would be brought for study. Oh, I was just a young *uhlan* at the time, but there was such excitement in the air at the prospect. Eventually, the word came through that they had identified a suitable candidate; the cube was alone on the very edge of Romulan space. We amassed a small flotilla of half a dozen warbirds – mostly *Ivarix*, but also the newer *N'renix*-class, the very top of the line at the time.

I remember watching the ships as they left the nebula and cloaked, heading off towards the prize.

[He has a sad smile and orders another glass of tea.]

No one ever saw any of those ships again and we soon realized just how grave a mistake we had made. The Borg came for the base.

Suddenly, and without warning, a cube arrived and began to dissect the facility – just as we had planned to do to the Borg. Myself and several others had been surveying the proximity net, but there had been no warning at all! Fortunately, the shuttle was warp capable so we headed away as soon as we realized what was happening. We had inadvertently shaken the *carbro*'s hive and they were not happy about it.

Romulan High Command started getting reports of the Borg arriving at

long-range outposts. Cloaked scouts were now finding themselves under scrutiny whenever they dared to approach Borg ships. We had severely miscalculated. Now, there was the very *real* threat that the demons' attention would be pointed towards the heart of the empire itself! Thus began our long, tumultuous relationship with the *Llaetus'le*. We had to cease our expansions, and pulled back towards the imperial core.

There were many engagements in this time. You speak reverently of Wolf 359, and Sector 001, but have you ever heard of Cesovis? Saiter IV? *Metobos*?! No, of course you haven't, because we didn't *tell you*! In each instance, thousands of brave Romulans gave their lives to hold back the Borg advance. However, ultimately it proved futile, ha!

We knew that the Borg were not really interested in the lands they took, or even the resources they seized. No, what the Borg were interested in was technology. We noticed that they would ignore older ships and focus on the newest weapons we were throwing at them. They would go out of their way to seize research labs when there were far more valuable prospects within easy reach. It was then that an idea was formed. We cannot stop the tide, but perhaps...*perhaps* we could divert it.

♦ What do you mean?

Come, I think you will want a drink for this next part. BARKEEP! Bring *kali-fal*! And leave the bottle; we are going to need it...







HUGH





USS KETER, OHNIKA III ORBIT  Stardate 55606.7 – 2378

There is a certain amount of trepidation as I enter the interview room for the first time, coming face to face with the Borg – although to use such labels for Hugh is unfair. He is by appearance a young Human male in his mid-30s; much of the carapace-like armor typifying Borg drones removed in favor of a dark gray dermal regeneration biosuit and post-op gown. His skin is no longer the pallid gray that typifies the drones of the collective, but parts remain mottled and clammy around larger augment eruption sites. Surgical tape is present across the side of his head, and the faint stubble of hair beginning to grow is visible across the newly-exposed parts of his head.

Hugh – or “Third of Five,” as was his Borg designation – was first disconnected from the collective in 2368 after an encounter with the Enterprise. After stepping back onto the galactic stage in 2378 stemming from an emergency hail about his settlement’s implant-related organ failures, he has already petitioned the Federation to allow his supervision in helping rehabilitate former Borg drones (also known as “xBs”). At time of interview, Hugh serves as the main liaison between his ~1,200 member xB coalition on Ohniaka III and the Federation – trying to help its citizens affected by the collective.



In many ways, the Borg do not see themselves too dissimilar from the Federation. You seek to promote...harmony. Stability. To foster an environment where all can thrive and live peacefully. The Borg *also* seek this. They only assimilate when a world has achieved a level of technology which will add to the whole. It allows new worlds to grow – to find their place in the galaxy.

◇ I’m sorry, are you saying that the Borg **HELP** the galaxy?

N-no, ah – perhaps I’m not explaining it very well. My body is weary from my procedures, and I sometimes still struggle with words. It can be very limiting, simply...*talking* like this, when one has known the Borg. When you are within the collective, after all, you have access to the thoughts of all the others, and there is a...clarity that I miss. As much as my friends and I delight in our agency to choose words, there are so many...nuances, *subtleties* that are hard to convey – even when two beings come from the same planet and culture. Trying to talk when there is no shared frame of reference can be daunting, and universal translators can only do so much.

[He flexes his right hand. It has scarring, metal on the backs of his middle fingers, and two divots near his wrist. Hugh notices my watching and stops to hold his Starfleet mug instead.]

Let me try again. Are you familiar with Starfleet's Prime Directive?

♦ Yes. It forbids Starfleet or Federation entities from interfering with the development of pre-warp civilizations.

Exactly. The Federation does not want to interfere with that species' development, because you want them to find their own voice – so that their own voice may be *unique*. All the members of the Federation share that goal, but what about the Romulans? Or the Klingons? What if there were a world that the Federation wanted to...*protect* – to allow it to grow and develop, but another power wanted to *exploit* its resources? Would the Federation intervene to stop that? *Could* the Federation intervene if that world were outside of its borders? The Borg assimilate cultures only when they have found their voice, and *then* they add it to their own – but only after they have learned how to *sing*.

♦ You make it sound very poetic, but that doesn't seem to mesh with your own experience of leaving the Borg, from what I've read.

[Hugh rapidly shakes his head] My friends and I think, over time...the Borg's own prime directive has become warped. Ill-focused. We have been updated as to the collective's activity from your records, since my severance in 2368 – and their actions seem to support this theory. [he wrings his hands] For example, did you know that...despite *all* the knowledge and data within the collective, the Borg do not know their origins? Or if they *do* possess that knowledge, is it sequestered away from the main access nodes? It is not disbursed nor installed in any drone unit's memory banks. Why hide it? What for?! Over time, it has become less and less about *preserving* voices and more and more about adding to the *choir*.

The Borg are methodical. They don't view themselves as "evil," or as conquerors. They are not trying to "take over the galaxy," or anything as dramatic as that. At their core, the Borg truly want a peaceful existence in the galaxy; or, at the very least, they seek order amongst chaos. A kind of self-sustaining "perfection"...I'm not trying to make excuses for them, but – it is important you understand that this isn't about ego. At least not for the Borg.

♦ Why are the Borg so interested in the Federation?

Ah...well, the Borg have been aware of the Federation and its member species since its inception. The first references to Vulcans – Species 3259, as they're called – are over 500 years old. Humans were first encountered 200 years ago. But they had not yet attained a technological level that would have added to the collective. They were logged and noted for future assimilation. The Borg would not drop everything and head straight for Earth.

[He pauses for a sip of his tea and takes a deep, long breath before continuing.]

When the Borg encountered the *Enterprise*, I remember...they were shocked at the level of technological advancement that had been made in so short a time. It was an unexpected flash that caught the hivemind's sector-wide sights. And in that flash, the Borg saw a...*collective*, in the Federation – one that could rival their own in just a few short centuries if it continued to develop at the pace it was proceeding. It had been a very long time since the Borg faced a civilization which could potentially *defy* it. And the – the level of *diversity* within the Federation... It was perplexing! Enrapturing! The Borg added the voices to their own, true – but they then became *Borg*. There was nothing *besides* Borg to us. Romulans would absorb civilizations and make them serve Romulan interests, but the Federation did not make the worlds conform to a single ideal. There was so much...harmony where there should not be. Or – where the collective didn't think there *could* be. The Borg were intrigued, and they were also *terrified*.

♦ Terrified? Of the Federation?

Of what the Federation might *become*. And also, that the Borg could be *wrong*. Here was *proof* that it might be possible to co-exist – to live and to thrive without *becoming* Borg. Each life being its own...symphony, its own entity outside a singular instance – where the individuality of every being was precious. Treasured. *Celebrated*: just as my friends and I have celebrated our own lives.

After all, I...had no life, prior to the collective. My mother was assimilated while pregnant, and the Borg removed me as a fetus into a maturation chamber. A pregnant drone is inefficient for the collective.

I have memories...no, that's the wrong word. I have recordings of her

assimilation and my “birth.” Before, when we were Third of Five, it was just a data point. But now, since I’ve become Hugh, I wonder what has become of her...

[He nervously flexes his hand again.]

It’s been a long time, since I’ve actively accessed these data points. They are like...distant nightmares, now.

[Hugh pauses again for tea, sitting upright in his seat with another deep breath.]

I have diverged from our topic...there were significant calculations done within the collective, about how best to approach the Federation. Should it be assimilated? Should it be negotiated with? Ignored again, for now?

In the end, the decision was to send a single ship to gather more information. To test how the Federation would respond.

END OF CHAPTER 1



CHAPTER 2

NEW PROVIDENCE

049 • Interlude

052 • El'rik Zh'uhead

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INTERLUDE

SOL STATION

Stardate 73361.3 – 2396



The recycled air is cool on my face as I walk through Sol Station towards *Hood's* berth; I find it refreshing and comforting. Given the early hour, the lights are dimmed, and hallways largely untravelled. Despite the dock being in constant operation throughout the 24 hours of Earth's day below, circadian rhythms are observed and the station feels like I am the sole occupant of the facility.

Today's event is the culmination of several years of planning and the subject of no small amount of controversy. When Starfleet announced that the *Hood* would be decommissioned there was a particularly nasty fight between the Smithsonian, Fleet Museum, and about a half dozen other institutions that wanted to welcome the ship into their collections. In the end, the final resting place for *Hood* was obvious: she would return to Wolf 359 and stand sentinel over the ships and souls that remain there.

I exit the turbolift and walk along the short corridor towards *Hood's* berth. There are more people here making preparations for her departure; young fresh-faced ensigns and crewmen pass me by as they go about their assignments, off to ensure that *Hood* is ready to leave on time. Most – if not all – are too young to have even been born when the Borg first came. They will never know the Federation that existed before; it feels like it was another lifetime, or something out of a holonovel.

The interface over the departure lounge reads "USS *HOOD* (NCC-42296) - Departure 11:00 UTC." Glancing at my own chrono, I see it is almost 07:00, far too early to go aboard, so I decide to go and find a seat in one of the adjacent lounges. I turn to leave, but striding towards me with a wide smile on his face is a man whose name is forever linked to the *Hood* and the events of Wolf 359: Admiral Robert DeSoto.

"Well, it's good to know I'm not the only one who can't read a chrono," he says as he clasps my hand. His smile is warm and welcoming, and he wears the gray and red uniform of a Starfleet admiral despite his retirement – as is his right.

"Admiral," I say warmly with genuine delight to see him. It is thanks to DeSoto I have been allowed to attend such an auspicious event.

He raises a finger in mock warning. "Now, we have been over this; it's Robert. Even if I wasn't retired, you get to call me Robert. So, have you been aboard?"

"No, I just arrived; I was finishing my introduction across the way," I say, gesturing in the vague direction of the adjacent pier.

"You've finished? That's fantastic; I hope you'll allow me a sneak peak?"

There is a glint of mischief in the admiral's eye. He knows how much I dislike putting my voice forward alongside those who lived through the Borg Incursion. But it was largely through his prompting that I agreed to add an introduction to the work, so I nod and confirm with "Of course."

"Speaking of sneak peaks...what do you say? Shall we go aboard?" Once again there is that glint of mischief in his eye.

"I-I, er – I don't want to get in the way," I start to stammer, but the admiral is already walking.

"Oh I'm sure Brad won't mind. After all, I recommended him for the command!" he says with a wink.

He leads me back around towards the *Hood's* departure lounge, where a large number of chairs and holorecorders are arrayed and a podium is set up at the front. As we enter the vestibule before the airlock, a pair of ensigns walk past us wide-eyed and quickly return to whatever duty they are performing.

The large circular door opens, leading to the clear connecting tube. We walk across into the dock itself – I find there is always a small moment of vertigo as my sense of scale is thrown off. Despite their modest size – compared to, say, a *Ross* or *Galaxy*-class ship – the *Excelsiors* are still massive to behold, and we make our way to the *Hood's* outer airlock door.

The admiral steps aboard and turns to face me. "Permission to come aboard?" I ask almost hesitantly.

"Granted," he says with a grin.

I step across the threshold, and onto the *Hood*...

EL'RIK ZH'UHEAD

SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH

Stardate 72533.2 - 2395

Captain Zh'uhead leads us from G&G to the maglev, which runs under the city and connects Starfleet Command with the academy and its spaceport. After a brief ride, we arrive at the Marin Headlands north of the Golden Gate Bridge and Starfleet Academy's campus. We head into sh'Rothress Hall which houses the Department of History. Down a tiled hallway filled with model starships from centuries past and around the corner from an arms room housing the Starfleet Security Historical Weapons Collection, we find Zh'uhead's office.

You ever seen a tornado?

♦ No, I grew up on Cestus III.

[chuckling] Yeah, me either. The weather control system on Andoria is just as effective as the ones here on Earth. Weather was always either clear and sunny or a gentle, crisp snow; the climate engineers never let any thunderstorms develop to the point they could get really dangerous. Good thing, too! When I started transitioning, I couldn't stand the humidity homeworld storms brought with them, and here my great-great-zhethen would talk about ice cyclones that spat out *hailstones* the size of balls they use in parrises squares!

[He searches through a stack of papers on a bookshelf. Then, he pulls out a folded paper star map that looks like it was issued to a cadet 30 years ago. Zh'uhead grabs a PADD stylus and points to the area of space at the intersection of the Federation, Klingon, and Romulan empires.]

2245: The SS *Kobayashi Maru* is lost at Gamma Hydrae, Section 10.

[He moves the stylus to different nearby points on the map as he speaks.]

2267: The USS *Constellation* is destroyed in System L-374 by a massive machine made of pure neutronium that carved up and ate planets like First Contact Day salmon.

2274: V'ger obliterates three Klingon battlecruisers, followed shortly by the destruction of the Federation monitoring outpost at Epsilon IX.

2286: The USS *Saratoga* is completely disabled and nearly destroyed by the Cetacean Probe as it enters Federation space in Sector Five along the Romulan Neutral Zone.

2311: The Imperial Romulan warbird *Tomed* attacks the Foxtrot Sector, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Starfleet personnel.

2346: Over 4,000 Klingon colonists are massacred on Khitomer...

I could go on, but I think you get the point about this particular corner of space. In any case, this area has earned itself a rather pointed nickname on Starfleet charts.

[He points to a title on the map in bold letters: "Tornado Alley."]

Do you get the reference?

♦ No?

Neither did I, but I was a budding historian even as a cadet. I looked it up. Apparently, until the 22nd century, the North American Great Plains from Texas to the Dakotas were an area where thunderstorms and natural disasters were so frequent, they were simply a fact of life. People even dug shelters into the ground because bad weather could arrive at a moment's notice, wiping your entire town off the map. It was simply the cost of living. Every bad storm that crossed the old United States found its way to those parts – just like every disaster the Federation faced for over a century seemed to travel *straight through* these four small sectors of space.

[He stabs his stylus on another point in "Tornado Alley." It's the Jouret System, home of the New Providence colony.]

Those colonists had seen their fair share of storms in 150 years. They were used to frontier living, and thought they could handle anything. Then it got quiet.

From 2347 to 2366, there wasn't a single major incident anywhere near New Providence. Based on the transmissions and personal logs I studied, they chalked

it up to Starfleet turning their attention across the Alpha Quadrant towards the Cardassians. The Romulans had vanished after the Treaty of Algeron. The Klingons signed the Treaty of Alliance in 2352 and officially became our friends.

The colonists believed that the frontier had moved on. I suppose it was like the sense of safety provided by a weather control system. You feel like disasters and tragedy are things of the past, until finally you can't even find someone who remembers what they look like under the age of 120.

[He pauses.]

I took an "Introduction to Earth History" course here at the academy a few decades back. In one of the textbooks was a picture of a town in Oklahoma that was flattened by a tornado in the mid-20th century. It stuck in my memory because it was as if the entire population had just been wiped away from the face of the planet. There was nothing left but a few scattered pieces of debris in a sea of empty foundations. Where a few hours before there had been a vibrant, living community, now there was simply nothing.

War is a terrible thing, but at least there's someone to blame. There's an enemy that can be defeated. Death can be avenged. Destruction can be fixed with reparations.

[He leans back in his chair.]

But the Borg were not an enemy. What they brought to the shores of the Federation was not war. They were like those ancient cyclones: a force of nature that materializes, strikes, destroys, and moves on to obliterate another day. Just like those poor souls centuries ago, the people in their path back in 2366 had absolutely nothing that could stop them. All they could do was hunker down and hope for a miracle.

TEBOK

PARADISE CITY, NIMBUS III

Stardate 69181.9 – 2392



Don't look at me like that! Don't tell me you are so naïve as to believe that the Federation would not do the exact same thing given the circumstances. Why, you DID do the exact same thing! When your *Enterprise* – the next one; D was it? When THAT *Enterprise* encountered the *Borg* in the Masi System [J-25] did the Federation think it prudent to notify the Romulan Senate of this extremely powerful and aggressive species that was closer to our borders than yours?

No, of course not. You did not even share that information with the *Klingons* until the *Borg* were already at your doorstep. You saw the empire as a convenient bulwark for the *Borg* to break against on its march to Earth. "The only saving grace is that the Romulans are between the *Borg* and us." Your Admiral Hanson said that; I watched that recording with my own eyes!

[He glares at me for a moment before his mask of geniality returns and he sips from his glass of *kali-fal*.]

In truth, I do not hold that against you. You knew of the *Borg* long before J-25, and we knew that you knew, or at least that some of you knew. That was the life we led in those days. We were keeping secrets from you, Starfleet Intelligence was keeping secrets from Starfleet, the *Tal Shiar* was keeping secrets from everyone, and so on...but I digress; where was I?

◆ The Corridor.

Yes! The Corridor. We knew that the *Borg* wanted technology. If we're being brutally honest, that is one area that the Federation *does* excel at. You Humans are like children: forever inventing and knocking things together, just to see what would happen. It's a miracle you haven't destroyed your own star.

[There is an awkward silence as he looks pointedly at me to see if I will comment on the destruction of the *Hobus Star*. Within Starfleet, some believe the supernova was triggered by the Romulans testing a stellar weapon, but this has never been proven.]

We could have allowed the knowledge of the Federation and Starfleet to fall into the Borg's tendrils. Once again, the Starfleet was kind enough to take care of that for us with those *Aerie*-class ships, but that would not have served our purposes – especially considering a direct course would take them through the very heart of the empire. We had to be more subtle. And if there is one thing the *Rihannsu* are good at, it's subtlety.

Now, the Corridor. In effect, it functions a lot like a stable wormhole, but you do not have to enter or exit at a fixed point. It allows for travel at speeds well beyond anything possible with traditional warp. I do not exactly know the nature of the Corridor; you would have to speak to one of our scientists...if you can find one in this accursed age. One of them tried to explain it to me once, and started babbling something about *mushrooms*. Bah! I did not need to know *how* it works to know that it *did*.

After its discovery, we spent considerable resources attempting to understand and replicate the Corridor. It was a natural phenomenon, and while our scientists would go on about there being some vast, galaxy-spanning network, we could never find a way to access it – except from this single part of space. So, we used it to traverse across the empire, and went to great lengths to ensure neither Starfleet nor the Klingons ever learned of it. We surmised that this was the sort of resource that might attract the attention of the Borg, so we started to leave little...*breadcrumbs* to try and lead their ships towards it. Any ship or outpost out on the fringes that might encounter the Borg had, in their computers, information hidden away about the Corridor, as well as the top secret Tal Shiar research base located within the Neutral Zone.

♦ Was there really a research base?

Almost certainly. You know the Tal Shiar: they are a law unto themselves, but the information within the databases was entirely fictional. So, we sent these fishing expeditions out into the Borg space. They would warp around, cloak and decloak in systems we knew had seen Borg activity...some would come back having never encountered them, some would be destroyed, some would vanish never to be heard from again, but finally – to use a Human phrase – we got a bite!

I was a *rh'iov* [commander] by this time; in command of the *Susse-thrai*, a *D'deridex* warbird, and the "honor" of observing the Borg sphere that was heading to the Corridor fell to me. I suspect I offended someone quite high up for such an illustrious assignment – but as a good and dutiful son of Romulus, I did my duty and the *Susse-thrai* and its pack followed the sphere into the Corridor to see if we had succeeded.

We shadowed the sphere as it made its way through into the Neutral Zone. They had become quite accustomed to our ships following them, and no longer viewed the *D'deridex* as worthy of their attention. Presumably, they had already taken enough to learn all they wanted. The sphere proceeded to attack a number of OUR outposts along the Neutral Zone. It was extremely disappointing, given the time and energy we had put into this endeavor. They had already taken plenty of outposts on the other side of the empire; I don't know what they hoped to achieve. But then! It headed across the zone, and made for the Algeron System and the outposts along the Federation side. Finally, we were making progress!

We maintained a respectful distance while the sphere extracted the outposts from the planets and asteroids they were located on. These were largely automated outposts much like our own, but even so: witnessing the Borg casually lifting entire settlements up out of a planet's gravity well as easily as we might tractor a shuttle into a bay never ceased to be humbling.

We shadowed the ship for about three days as it made its way across the sector, before abruptly the sphere suddenly left: departing at high warp back towards the Corridor. I detached the *Lykos* to follow the sphere and track its course back through Romulan space. But the sphere was able to access parts of the network we had never been able to, and vanished when our ships were ejected into realspace.

I took the *Susse-thrai* and its companion to observe Starfleet's response, and gauge how much they would admit to knowing of the Borg. Would they share this information with us? Could we, perhaps, form an alliance against the Borg?

As it transpired, they sent their newest toy to investigate. A *Galaxy*-class; the *Enterprise*, no less. Did you know that it was the decision to build the *Galaxy*-class that prompted the senate to authorize the construction of the *D'deridex*-class?

[He pours another two glasses of *kali-fal* and hands one to me.]

♦ No, I did not.

A tale for another time, perhaps. We already had extensive knowledge of the ship's capabilities, but it was deemed useful to test their capabilities and to gauge how the ship compared to our expectations. It was a very impressive ship, but it would seem they had not yet ironed out all the bugs. My ships conducted flybys – each time degrading our cloak to see how effective the ship's sensors were. We also wanted to see how they would react both to the disappearance of the outposts, and our presence inside Federation space. I must confess I was a bit swept up in the drama of it all.

"We...are back," I told Picard. It took all my *ereiriov*'s¹ willpower not to roll his eyes. Once we had departed we both burst out in laughter.

[He downs his drink and pours himself another.]

The next time I followed the Borg across the Neutral Zone, when they came for Picard...we did not find it so amusing.

1 The Romulan Star Empire term referring to the commissioned rank of "sub-commander," the word encompassing ranks like lieutenant, major, centurion, and in some cases even tribune.

HEATHER KOTONO

NEW KYIV, ADELPHOUS IV

Stardate 48625.6 – 2371

The colony of New Providence on Jouret IV was the first location the Borg attacked upon entering Federation space in 2366. First founded in 2123, it was its proximity to both the Klingon and Romulan Empires that brought Starfleet and the Federation to invest so heavily in the colony. As the political climate changed, so too did the colony's importance as a listening post and staging ground – until only the Daystrom Institute Annex remained.

Heather Kotono is the captain of the freighter Nassau, which frequents the Qo'noS/Adelphous/Devorus run passing through Klingon, Federation and Romulan territory. She was born on New Providence, and her family were among the original settlers who left Earth in the early 22nd century. We meet in her cabin aboard the Nassau. It feels very confined and lived in; she apologizes for the mess, explaining that she doesn't leave the ship much.

They came across in an old DY-250: the SS *Rhode Island*, which had been retrofitted with a warp drive. Have you ever seen those? They look more like they belong in an ocean – like an old Terran submarine. They were originally sleeper ships from before the nuclear war on Earth and First Contact. Once warp drives started to be available, people would retrofit whatever ships they could get their hands on and hurtle off into the galaxy. I bet it drove the Vulcans mad, but that's always been Humanity's way: show them a horizon, and the first thing they want to do is get across it. But those ships were never meant for interstellar travel. They were cramped, fragile, and more were lost than actually made it to habitable planets. The *Rhode Island* was lucky, and they made it all the way to Jouret IV. Took them almost five years.

When the colonists first arrived, they brought the ship down from orbit and disassembled it to make the first settlement. It was little more than a collection of cargo containers and collapsable hab modules – but it was home, the promise of a new life. Imagine it: these people had grown up in a world stricken by devastation, by nuclear war, by disease and poverty...and then their entire lives were turned upside down by discovering that Humanity was not alone in the galaxy. It just blows my mind a little.

When I was a little girl, we would go to the Founders Park. Nothing remains of the original settlement; it was all recycled and repurposed until the colony became self-sufficient and more permanent structures could be built. But there was a museum which had models and artifacts from the *Rhode Island* – I think it even had an original warp coil! And there was a reproduction of a couple of the original container buildings; they had people who would dress up in period clothes, showing the school kids how the first settlers lived when they arrived.

I never got a chance to go back after finishing school. You know how it is when you are a kid – history is boring, and there was a whole galaxy out there. Why did I want to spend my time learning how the first settlers processed impulse manifolds into plows, or how they had to adjust the soil gradients to allow Earth crops to grow? But I always meant to go back. I just figured there would be time, someday. I mean it's not like it was going anywhere, right?

[Heather gives a small sad laugh and wipes her eyes on her sleeve.]

Growing up on New Providence was just like any other Federation colony, really. The Federation and Starfleet had invested pretty heavily there during the previous century, given our proximity to Klingon and Romulan space. My grandfather would tell us stories of how they had drills in the event of a Klingon attack, and how they had shelters below key buildings with transport inhibitors and heavy durasteel doors to keep them out. I loved my grandfather very much, but he was of a time, and some of his views of Klingons were still stuck in the 2260s. Since Khitomer, though, things like the listening station and planetary garrison had been long since removed. There was still the research center – part of the Daystrom Institute – and the dark energy physics laboratory. I think there was some talk about wormholes or transwarp corridors; I honestly didn't pay it much attention. Like I said, there was a whole galaxy out there to explore, so as soon as I was old enough I signed up with the mercantile guild and went out to see it.

New Providence was still home, though. I never lived anywhere else. Even when I got my own ship, home was still down on the surface. I never felt at peace "living" on the ship, although I did find a house on the other side of the city from the family – I still wanted a bit of distance.

After I completed my training and after a few years working my way up to captain, I settled into a route of ferrying supplies across the sector. We ran the

route down along what used to be the Klingon Neutral Zone and down across to Qo'noS, then up to Romulan space to Delta Velorum.

Klingons and Romulans may hate each other, but the Klingons still want their *kali-fal*, and the Romulans still want their bloodwine – go figure. I was on a run to Devoras when it happened.

Crossing the Romulan Neutral Zone is always an experience. Their border ships run cloaked and like to sneak up behind small unsuspecting freighters to decloak right on top of them. I think they make a game of it; how close can they get before tripping the proximity alert? We were about two light-years from Lambda Hydrea when this warbird decloaked right on top of me. Not the usual *Trajan* or *Pretorian* border ships, this was a *D'deridex* – it was *huge*! Almost put Shermmy into sus-an.

♦ Shermmy?

My engineer. He's a Saurian – when they get really distressed they can go into a catatonic state.

Anyway, this warbird tells us that there is a navy exercise taking place, and that we will have to report to Lambda Hydrea for inspections. Didn't think too much of it at the time; it would hardly be the first time that the *Rihannsu* had decided to make life difficult for freighters. Usually it was sending some message to the Federation or the Klingons or whoever they were mad at – but this was the first time a *D'deridex* had delivered the message.

When we got to the outpost, they were just as confused as we had been. They didn't know of any general policy shift or operation, but we were told that a 10 light-year exclusion zone was being enforced, and that no unauthorized ship was allowed to depart for at least 72 hours – so, we went to the bar.

[She is silent for a long moment staring into the middle distance.]

I don't know why I suddenly felt the need to call home, I don't even know why I tried. Usually when the Romulans do these exercises, they also shut down the subspace network. But that was still up – it was early morning ship time and everyone was asleep, so I headed up to the bridge to the small nook that we jokingly referred to as my "ready room." I brought a blanket with me, pulled my legs up into the chair like I used to when I called home from the guild, and

connected to the network.

It was midafternoon there. I think Mom answered; she looked like she had been working in the garden. Had that silly hat to keep the sun off her, shirt sleeves rolled up...they loved that garden.

Dad was out, Mom said, at "a seminar at the institute," he claimed, but she suspected he was hooning around in that damn ATV he'd gotten ahold of. Mom was convinced he was going to roll the thing and get killed, or worse – damage the garden.

[She laughs, but tears are now flowing freely down her face.]

She asked if everything was alright with me and why I was calling. I didn't have an answer – said I "just wanted to catch up." I could tell she knew something was bothering me. How do mothers always do that? Even from light-years away? She smiled that knowing smile, but then...but then it all went dark, like a huge shadow was passing over – almost like an eclipse. I asked what it was; she looked up and away, said maybe it was rain, but then the transmission died. I tried to reconnect but it wouldn't; I tried to tell myself that it was just the Romulans messing with the network. I could have tried calling Starbase 157 or 23, but I was telling myself to stop being silly and to go to sleep – so I went back to the cabin and stared at the bulkhead for the next six hours.

We were allowed to depart the next morning, but I still couldn't get through to the colony. Not to anyone. I wanted to head there right away, but we had cargo we needed to deliver. I tried reaching out to Starbase 23 or 157; they told me there was some disruption with the relay network in the sector, and that there was a ship en route to re-establish contact. You can't imagine the relief I felt at hearing that, and it was silly – the Romulans weren't about to start a war against the Federation, and they certainly were not going to start with *New Providence*! But I still felt uneasy, and I still kept trying to connect almost hourly.

When we arrived at Devoras, I told the crew that as soon as we unloaded we were heading straight back to New Providence. Any who wanted could stay or ship out with another freighter, but they were all happy to get back to Federation space; the Klingon food had not agreed with them and Romulan food tends to get a bit bland. As soon as the last cargo had dematerialized and the transit papers had been logged, we broke orbit and headed home.

We were close to the Unroth System when we finally got the news: a direct message from Starbase 157. It was a frequent stop on our route, and the commander knew my dad. He said that the colony was gone. I didn't understand – I kept asking what did he mean “gone.” He said he couldn't say anymore over subspace, but that we should head to 157 and that the Jouret System was off limits. I knew full well that Starfleet barely had any ships in the region, so I asked him how he expected to stop me and killed the connection. Then I tried to push the engines up to warp 8 – *well* past what they're rated for. The ship's doctor, Labelle, and our helmsman had to sedate me. They took the ship to Starbase 157, and probably saved our lives.

[Heather takes a sip of tea from her cup, holding it almost protectively. She notices my look.]

It's my lucky cup. Mom brought it for me when I went to the guild, and it's stayed with me ever since...

They didn't want to let us go back to New Providence, told me that there was nothing left – nothing to see or to mourn. They set up an exclusion zone and wouldn't let any ships into the system; they wouldn't even release images. It was infuriating. Even after the Borg had been destroyed, they *still* wouldn't let us go home! When we were finally allowed last year, I understood why.

There was nothing left of the colony. I don't mean that it was rubble and destruction – It was gone. As if a giant hand had just scooped it right up out of the ground.

I remember I had this idea that maybe, *maybe* some people had made it to those shelters my grandfather was always going on about. Maybe some people had survived and that Starfleet had to dig down to them – to rescue them, but the shelters were gone, too.

All that remained of New Providence – of my home, of my family – was a crater, and a hole where my heart used to be.

ELIZABETH SHELBY

USS ILLINOIS, EN ROUTE TO ZAKDORN

Stardate 47626.9 - 2370



We'd made some real progress – or at least it felt like it. Admiral Hanson was able to convince enough of the top brass that at the very least Starfleet needed to start looking seriously beyond the traditional adversaries such as the Klingons and Romulans. The loss of the *Yamato* went a long way to make the admiralty reevaluate the policy of all the eggs in a few baskets.

♦ **Why was that? I thought *Yamato* was destroyed by a computer virus?**

It wasn't really a virus, per se. More an incompatibility between the Iconians' computer architecture and the isolinear based systems we use – but the net result was the loss of the most technologically advanced starship in the quadrant after less than two years in service. You have no idea of the PR disaster that was for Starfleet – to say nothing of the lives lost.

Suddenly, this technological marvel we created was gone, and the idea of a single *Galaxy*-class replacing a dozen or more *Miranda* or *Excelsior*-class ships didn't seem quite so sound. They issued requests for new ship designs for smaller, more modular starships with a greater focus on interoperability and flexibility. Admiral Hanson was even able to convince Starfleet to conduct *war games*! The first attempt with *Enterprise* ran into some problems, but there was a feeling within Starfleet Tactical that it was no longer a dirty word – that it was okay to acknowledge that while Starfleet's primary mission is and always will be peaceful scientific exploration, it *also* has a duty to defend the Federation, and to be ready to face those challenges. It seemed like my work was done, and I was eager to get my career back on track.

By our best estimates based on the intelligence we had, the Borg were at least five years away from Federation space, and they would have to pass

through the Romulan Star Empire. We anticipated that we would have plenty of time to get the new ships and weapon systems distributed throughout the fleet, and Admiral Hanson wanted to make sure there were commanders out in the fleet who were willing and able to think tactically.

We got a notification that *Enterprise* was heading to the Jouret System to investigate loss of contact with the New Providence colony. The distress call received by Starbase 23 spoke of a cube-like vessel entering the system and descending into the atmosphere over the colony. Obviously the similarities to reports about the Borg started alarm bells ringing, not the least due to how soon after J-25 – less than 18 months. All of a sudden, our assumptions and carefully laid plans weren't worth a whole lot. We needed confirmation. If the Borg had reached Jouret, that suggested they had bypassed Romulan space – or that our intelligence networks inside the empire had woefully underestimated how effective the Tal Shiar were at counterintelligence to keep something like the Borg from us. Turns out that it was our own intelligence doing that job for them.

We were on the *Zelensky* and Admiral Hanson told me that Commander Riker, the *Enterprise's* XO, had been offered command of the *Melbourne*. It was a new *Nebula*-class variant about to be launched from the Utopia Planitia, and Hanson was going to recommend *me* to Captain Picard as his replacement. In hindsight, this was probably a mistake on the admiral's part.

[She takes a sip from her *raktajino* and tries to hide a smile.]

When we boarded *Enterprise*, in my mind I was already the ship's XO, and was already “measuring the windows for new drapes,” as my grandmother used to say. Captain Picard was a legend within Starfleet, and I was giddy with excitement at the prospect of serving under him – becoming his protege. The patronage of Admiral Hanson and Captain Picard would rocket my career into the center seat of a *Galaxy*-class all my own. There was such a warmth and assuredness to him – command seemed to fit him like a well-tailored suit. I was less enamored with Commander Riker.

I had read up extensively on the crew of *Enterprise* following J-25 and the Braslota war games. Here was a man who had been on the fast track to command – served with distinction on the *Pegasus*, the *Potemkin*, and the *Hood* – but after arriving on *Enterprise* seemed to just stop. Starfleet had offered

him two commands; the *Melbourne* was the third attempt to get him into the captain's chair. Now all I could see was a seat filler in my way.

It's safe to say that was not my *finest* hour. I let my ambition cloud my perceptions of the commander and it colored my interactions with him. We ended up butting heads repeatedly, and I struggled to keep my frustration in check. Fortunately, Commander Riker was a consummate professional, and despite my – shall we say *terse* – manner we did work well together...eventually.

The *Enterprise* had been at what remained of New Providence for a little over two days when we arrived. The scans and analysis matched data from the disappearance of Federation and Romulan outposts near the Algeron System about two years prior. At the time, the official line within command was the Romulans had likely destroyed them to disguise some operation, or provide a distraction – destroying the outposts on their own side of the Neutral Zone to provide an alibi. But in the aftermath of the *Enterprise's* encounter with the Borg at J-25, we now had the data which could link the colony's disappearance with the Borg directly.

From what we gleaned through analysis of the *Enterprise* once it returned from J-25, the Borg left unusual and unique magnetic resonance traces throughout the hull and system – a footprint, if you will. These would degrade over time, so there were no traces at the Quebec Outpost – despite the similarities to the destruction and what was observed at J-25. But at New Providence, we were early enough that the traces remained. We had our footprint, and now evidence that the Borg were operating in Federation space.

♦ You make it sound as though you were *excited* by the prospect?

In a way I was; it proved that Admiral Hanson was right, and it validated all the work we had put in over the past 14 months. But I had no idea of what was about to come; none of us did. Admiral Hanson and the *Zelensky* immediately headed back to command, and I remained on *Enterprise* to ascertain the extent of the Borg Incursion, and to discover if the Borg were still here. We had every reason to believe – much like the previous colony disappearances – that the Borg had not remained in Federation space, and instead returned to wherever they had come from.

Looking back, I wasn't worried. Despite everything, I thought I knew about the Borg. Despite witnessing first hand the devastation on Jouret IV – the entire colony ripped from the surface of a planet – I was still convinced that we would prevail and it would be okay. After all, with Captain Picard in command, how could we not?

TRANSCRIPT OF ADMIRALTY MEETING

ACCESS INCLUDED AUDIO FILE "2.06"

The following is an edited transcript of a private conference call between the Starfleet Vice Chief of Staff and select personnel on stardate 43993.5 (~12 hours after Lieutenant Commander Shelby discovered the Borg were responsible for the destruction of the New Providence colony). Admiral Owen Paris and Vice Admiral Thomas Henry connected from their offices in the Archer Building of Starfleet Headquarters in San Francisco, Earth. Vice Admiral J.P. Hanson dialed in from his flag quarters on board the USS *Zelensky* en route to Starbase III after leaving Lieutenant Commander Elizabeth Shelby on board the USS *Enterprise-D*.

Starfleet Intelligence partially declassified and approved the redacted holorecording for public release on Stardate 63047.71.

FLAG OFFICERS PRESENT

Admiral Owen Paris

VICE CHIEF OF STARFLEET OPERATIONS

Vice Admiral J.P. Hanson

CHIEF OF STARFLEET TACTICAL

Vice Admiral Thomas Henry

CHIEF OF STARFLEET SECURITY

OFFICERS REFERRED TO IN MEETING:

Fleet Admiral Taela Shanti

CHIEF OF STARFLEET OPERATIONS

Vice Admiral Jennifer Chapman

CHIEF OF STARFLEET SUSTAINMENT & LOGISTICS

Lieutenant Commander Elizabeth Shelby

STARFLEET TACTICAL BORG SPECIAL PROJECTS CHIEF

Vice Admiral Ellen Hayes

CHIEF OF STARFLEET INTELLIGENCE



PARIS: [annoyed] What is it, J.P.? I'm a very busy man since Taela had to drop everything for an emergency diplomatic conference. We didn't even have time for a proper handover brief before she left me in charge.

HENRY: Owen, I heard the folks over in sustainment and logistics had to pull crisis planning all-nighters for the last three days. What's going on?

PARIS: It's a total cluster, Tom. The Ruling Council of Angel One paused their application for Federation membership and President Amitra is livid. She says she and the diplomatic corps are too busy with important Cardassian negotiations to clean up another one of Starfleet's messes and ordered Taela not to return to Earth until she's "fixed the Angel One screw up." So, Taela grabbed Jennifer and a few other members of the S&L staff in the middle of the night last Tuesday, and sprinted straight towards the Angel System at maximum warp.

HENRY: [rubbing eyes] What imagined injustice does "Amitra the Ice Queen" accuse us of doing now? [muttering] *I can't wait for the next election...*

PARIS: [sternly] I'm gonna pretend I didn't hear that, Tom. Besides, you know these meetings are recorded, right?

HENRY: [sarcastically holding up both hands] I retract my statement, and have full confidence and respect for the commander-in-chief [CINC] duly elected by the people of the United Federation of Planets. Still, what Starfleet logistical issue could possibly cause an entire *planet* to scrap their membership bid?

PARIS: [rolling eyes] You're gonna love this one. Apparently, Mistress Beata is up for re-election, so she's looking for some hot-button issue to energize her base at the polls. She says that Starfleet male uniforms are "not revealing enough" and it would be "immoral to force her brave women warriors to interact with fully-clothed men" on Federation starships and installations. Unless Starfleet dresses their men to show more cleavage and accentuate certain "parts" of their bodies, Angel One will walk.

HENRY: So, Beata would be willing to give up membership in the Federation – the most powerful and open union in the Milky Way Galaxy – over *chest hair*? What the hell is wrong with her?

PARIS: You know how crazy conservative Angel One is. That place makes Andoria look like *Risa* at times.

HENRY: Then let them walk!

PARIS: Amitra says their location is too vital. If Angel One joins the Federation, Starfleet can position long-range tachyon sensor grids on its outlying moons to cover the breadth of the Romulan Neutral Zone – all the way from the Typhon Expanse to Starbase 718...

HENRY: **[gritting his teeth]** Which means she can order us to decommission even more starships in the next budget...

PARIS: On the nose, Tom. Fewer starships means more credits towards her terraforming and transwarp corridor research initiatives...

HENRY: So, Amitra would trade theoretical future Federation worlds in the Gamma and Delta Quadrants for security today in our own backyard?

PARIS: That's what happens when your cabinet is filled with pissant interstellar relations majors from Harvard, Lor'Tan, and U Mars. She's more convinced than ever that the Klingons are licked, the Romulans are running scared, and you can buy peace with the Cardassians by sharing deuterium reserves and ceding territory in disputed areas. I mean, one of her campaign slogans was "War is Always the Wrong Choice." She's pivoting all the Federation's resources towards Cardassia and Ferenginar, and away from the old Beta Quadrant rivalries. She's even pressuring the Klingons to take more responsibility keeping the Romulans in check under the Treaty of Alliance. Hell – even said in a diplomatic call yesterday that the empire isn't "paying its fair share for defense."

HENRY: Unbelievable. I bet K'mpec's ambassador took that one real well...

PARIS: Guess making peace with *new* enemies is more important than maintaining peace with old ones.

HENRY: I don't care if it gets me a Surak Prize for Peace, Owen; I'm not showing my nipples in uniform to appease Beata. Ham-fisted primadonna with winged shoulder pads and gas giant-sized teased hair–

PARIS: **[chuckling]** Don't worry, Tom – if there is one thing that Taela and I agreed on before she left, it's that *NO ONE* wants to see your nipples...

HANSON: **[forcefully interjecting]** Plunging necklines and codpieces aside, can we talk about the Borg now?

PARIS: Sorry, J.P., sorry; just a little worked up after last week. Your report, please.

HANSON: I just received word from Commander Shelby on the *Enterprise*. Her energy readings confirm our worst fears: New Providence was destroyed by the Borg.

PARIS: [searches through a stack of PADDs on his desk] Well, I'm trying to figure out how that's possible considering that less than *two months ago*, your best estimates put the Borg more than five years away from our borders. How did they get here so fast?

HANSON: Quite frankly, Sir, we don't know. It could be transwarp. Maybe they found a wormhole? Maybe that Q creature snapped his fingers again...*anything is possible*. Regardless, they have reached the edges of the Federation and we need to respond.

HENRY: Jean-Luc and the *Enterprise* are securing the immediate area around New Providence, and there's at least nine other starships within a week's warp from that location. If the Borg want to press their luck, we'll give them a bloody nose and make them think twice about further violations of our space.

HANSON: I don't mean to sound pessimistic, Tom, but based on the reports from J-25 last year, we should consider creating an ad hoc fleet of at least 40 to 50 ships from the Klingon and Romulan Rapid Response Forces to intercept. I'm not sure a single *Galaxy*-class can slow them down.

PARIS: A single *Galaxy* better be able to slow them down, J.P.! Cannibalizing the Klingon and Romulan RRFs would require authorization from the Federation Council and consume *half* our annual emergency response budget; Amitra is already on our ass about cost savings! After I get off the line with you, I have another call with the San Francisco Fleet Yards because I have to figure out how to keep five 90-year-old *Excelsior*-classes in service for another decade, because her administration won't authorize the construction of another *Galaxy* to replace the *Yamato*!

HANSON: Sir, the Borg just obliterated an entire Federation border colony without even blinking—

PARIS: [holding up his hand] I don't mean to sound crass, but we lose two to three colonies a year to hostile alien action. If the president gets her way with the Cardassian treaty negotiations, we'll lose 10 more colonies overnight in the disputed area. J.P., the deaths of 900 people at New Providence are certainly a tragedy, but I don't see the justification there to significantly alter the Federation's entire strategic posture for an enemy we haven't even *located* yet...

HENRY: I think we have enough flexibility in our current lines of funding to redirect those nine ships without justifying any additional spending. Besides, Picard and

the *Enterprise* are pulling lead on this operation. They're our best, and if anyone can figure their way out of a jam, it's them. Once they find the Borg, we'll move to intercept. They can either negotiate, withdraw, or be destroyed.

[HANSON's console beeps with the distinct tone of an emergency message.]

HANSON: Excuse me.

[HANSON's image is replaced with the seal of the UFP. After a few moments he returns.]

PARIS: J.P., what is it?

HANSON: Careful what you wish for, gentlemen. I think we've found the Borg. Starbase III just intercepted a distress call; it's from the USS *Lalo* near the Zeta Alpha System.

PARIS: **[confidently]** How fast can the *Enterprise* arrive to assist them?

HANSON: **[downtrodden]** I don't think there'll be a need for that. The *Lalo* is gone...

HENRY: **[confused]** Gone? What do you mean "gone"? Destroyed? Captured?

HANSON: No, Tom: just *gone*. They've disappeared – just like New Providence. Long-range scans indicate nothing is left; not even a single milligram of debris. They've just...disappeared.

HENRY: Well let's not get ahead of ourselves; we don't know for certain that this was the Borg. Have *Enterprise* get out there and assess the situation–

HANSON: *Enterprise* is en route, but gentlemen, if our track is correct, there is a high likelihood that the Borg are heading towards the core systems. Their current course could take them to Andor, Vulcan, or *Earth*...

PARIS: **[collapsing back in his chair]** I'll get a hold of the president. Tom, find Ellen and have her join us...

END OF FILE

DISTRESS CALL FROM USS LALO NCC-43837

ACCESS INCLUDED AUDIO FILE "02.07"

The following is an edited transcript of a distress call received at Starbase 157 from the USS *Lalo* (NCC-43837), a *Mediterranean*-class support ship. Five hours after departing from Zeta Alpha II en route to Sentinel Minor IV with a cargo of industrial mining equipment, the *Lalo* encountered a Borg cube which moved to intercept them. The distress call abruptly ended less than 60 seconds later. All contact with the USS *Lalo* was lost on stardate 43997.05. 57 souls were aboard. No trace of the ship or any survivors have ever been found.

Starfleet Intelligence declassified and approved the redacted recording for public release on stardate 63047.71.



[The holorecording begins with a view of the *Lalo*'s bridge. A Rigellian helmsman and a Bolian navigator sit at the forward consoles. A Saurian sits in the captain's chair with his Tellarite first officer to his left. A Caitian woman stands behind them at the tactical console.]

CAPTAIN JENOGII: To anyone who can hear this message: this is Captain Krota Jenogii of the Federation starship USS *Lalo*. We are five hours out from Zeta Alpha II en route to Sentinel Minor IV. We have encountered an unknown, cube-shaped alien vessel. They appeared directly in our flight path less than two light-years away. We attempted to hail them with messages of peace and friendship on all known frequencies. However, they did not respond, and instead moved to an intercept course. The ship is bigger than any I have ever seen, but it is moving towards at incredible speed. Helm, how fast are they going?

HELMSMAN: Warp 9.3, Sir!

CAPTAIN JENOGII: They are moving to intercept us at warp 9.3! Our engines are limited to only warp 8; Our engineer is trying to give us more power, but we are quickly being overrun. Please, if you are hearing this transmission: please assist us, Please!

TACTICAL OFFICER: Sir, they've closed to less than 50,000 meters!

[Suddenly, the ship lurches heavily. The entire bridge crew is nearly knocked from their seats. The transmission begins to break up. The audio shrieks with static.]

TACTICAL OFFICER: They've locked on to us with some kind of tractor beam. Shields are being drained, down to only 40 percent!

CAPTAIN JENOGII: **[shouting nervously]** Engine room, we need more power to the shields now! Please to anybody listening, we need assistance now! Please!

TACTICAL OFFICER: Shields are down!

[The sound of screeching metal echoes across the bridge.]

TACTICAL OFFICER: They've activated a particle beam. It's cutting into the saucer! Hull integrity failing!

[Sparks fly as consoles explode and EPS conduits overload. The officers try to shield themselves with their hands to no avail. The navigator is blown backward three meters to the floor.]

CAPTAIN JENOGII: Please help us! Please—

[A bright flash of green light fills the screen as the top bulkhead of the bridge suddenly lifts away, exposing the compartment to the vacuum of space. Without warning, the transmission terminates into static. All contact is lost at precisely time index 43997.05.]

END OF FILE

L'GARREY

CTSU SHIPYARDS, GANYMEDE

Stardate 65053.9 – 2388

When the Pandrilite Amitra was elected to the United Federation of Planets presidency in 2364, it had seemed inevitable and for many in Starfleet it felt like an ominous portent of things to come. She had been extremely vocal in her criticism of the organization and stated that it was no longer fit for purpose in the latter half of the 24th century. L'Garrey served Amitra as chairman of the campaign for her election and then as her chief of staff for her term. He is credited with being able to navigate the "Neutral Zone" that had sprung up between the office of the president and Starfleet in the early 2360s. Now retired from politics and serving as a consultant for the Colonial Transportation and Settlement Union, I find him in his office looking out over the CTSU's Ganymede shipyards.

It was late and I was prepping the itinerary for the president's upcoming goodwill visit to Cardassia Prime. President Amitra campaigned on a policy of ending the border dispute with Cardassia; and with the revelations about what the Cardassians had done to Bajor, public opinion was starting to swing away from our efforts to end the conflict. It was a mess, and we were getting dragged through the mud in the press.

The Secret Service notified me that Starfleet was here and that they wanted an immediate briefing with the president. Someone once told me that good news never arrives at night, so naturally I was already a bit on edge when three admirals beamed into the Palais at 23:00. I knew Owen Paris quite well having worked with him back in '48 when he was captain of the *Al-Batani* and in the aftermath of Setlik III. That he came with both Ellen Hayes and Tom Henry – the heads of Starfleet Intelligence – was ominous. Hayes seemed really uncomfortable, as if she did not want to be there and had something more important to attend to.

To be frank, relations between Starfleet and the president had been frosty at best – especially given her history and the campaign she ran for election. One of her first acts was to limit the number of the new *Galaxy*-class to just the six

under construction and to draw the fleet down to levels that hadn't been seen since the 2230s. Naturally, I headed to intercept them before they made it to the Ra-ghoratree Room – to see if the president really needed to be troubled. At this hour, I figured odds were that this was going to be some sort of ploy to get another *Galaxy* approved to replace *Yamato*; they'd been banging on that drum since the ship had been lost.

I caught up to them just as they were exiting the turbolift and heading to the Archer Room. The look on their faces brought me up short and I knew whatever it was it had to be serious.

I tried to get them to tell me what the issue was so I could gauge if I needed to bring in the president. All they would tell me was it was vitally important the president was briefed immediately, and that we should be prepared to call a session of the council right away. *That* got my attention; the admiralty usually hated having to deal with the council. So, I ushered them into the Archer Room and rang through to the residence asking the president to be awoken, and beamed directly to the briefing room.

We waited. I tried small talk, but they weren't in a talkative mood; even less so than usual. Besides accepting a glass of water, they remained tight-lipped and awkwardly formal.

The doors flew open and the president stormed in from the transporter pad. The last few days had been particularly tough dealing with the Cardassian liaisons for the visit – given her hue, she was probably nursing one hell of a headache. She railed against the admirals for interrupting the “first sleep she had seen in 82 hours,” and laid out the frustrations we were having with the Cardassians and Bajor. She told them flatly she didn't care if the *Enterprise* itself had been sucked into a black hole: under no circumstances would she authorize any more of those flying hotels for admirals to use as personal conveyance to cruise back and forth from Risa to Betazed.

I'll give the admirals their credit: they just stood there respectfully and placidly while she vented her frustrations at them. Eventually, she ran out of steam and collapsed down into her chair behind her desk.

She glared up at them and asked if they had anything to say for themselves. The admirals looked back and forth at each other. If I didn't know better I'd swear

they were communicating telepathically calling “not it.” Finally, it was Paris who took the lead. Of the admirals present, he wouldn’t have been my first choice given the history of Paris and the president when she had been on the Starfleet oversight committee. They are both professionals, but still I’m not sure that if I took them to Triskelion they wouldn’t kill each other.

Paris laid it out: the Borg, J-25, the loss of the New Providence colony, and the fact that this single ship – which so far not even a *Galaxy*-class could stop – was inside Federation space and heading towards the core worlds.

The president’s initial reaction was one of incredulity. It all just sounded so absurd: a race of cybernetic zombies hell-bent on taking over the galaxy? It’s the sort of thing you’d see in a cheap holonovel, and we had important work to do. We were supposed to be on our way at 14:00 towards Cardassia, and now we were being told of what? An invasion by a single ship? Even I found it a bit hard to swallow.

It sounded to us that Starfleet was just throwing a tantrum about the fleet reduction, and was using this as an excuse to stamp their feet and complain they didn’t have enough toys. The president said as much, too, which did not go down well. Hayes looked like she was on the verge of a warp core breach, and Paris leaned forward on the desk over the president saying that he resented the implication. The president was on her feet and it looked like we were going to revisit some of the classics from oversight circa 2360.

Hayes placed a hand on Paris and he thankfully backed down. She asked the president if she might call in a “consultant” to brief the president. That made everyone in the room sit up – even those of us standing. The president allowed Hayes to go and use the terminal in the private transporter suite, leaving this awkward silence in the room. Paris and Henry stood to one side conferring while the president sat at the desk. She had her PADD out and was looking at the latest reports coming from the Bajoran Sector. We dropped the ball there, and we knew it.

I think that might have been why she was spoiling for a fight. She couldn’t take it out on the Cardassians right now, and Starfleet had the misfortune to wander into her crosshairs. I went over to take the temperature and see how much plasma coolant I was going to need to replicate.

"What *is* this targshit?" she said. "It's *Starfleet* for crying out loud. Despite my best efforts, they have never been stronger – and it's just one ship!"

She had a point; even the Klingons recognized that any attempt to go toe-to-toe with *Starfleet* would be a very short trip to *Sto-Vo-Kor*. We were trying to do our best to rein them in before we triggered an arms race in our own backyard. In hindsight, we obviously could and *should* have handled things differently. The breakdown in trust between the presidency and the admiralty meant neither of us were listening to the admirals, and instead only heard what we imagined they said.

I could hear the hum of the transporter and the doors opened, Hayes reentered with a [REDACTED], and it was then that we realized just how serious the situation was.

[The following section has been redacted and is classified under Starfleet Order 212019 as pertinent to Article 14, Section 31 of the Federation Charter.]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Hayes escorted [REDACTED] back to the transporter room and shut the doors behind her. We were stunned. I don't even think Paris or Henry had any idea. I'd known Owen Paris for close to 30 years by that point, and the last time I saw him look this pale was the day his wife went into labor.

The president was very quiet – like a singularity had just swallowed up the world that she knew. We were all in shock. Hayes came back in, but there was no satisfaction on her face. I imagine that bit of theater had cost her more than a little bit of political latinum, but it did the job, and we knew this was serious.

The president took a breath and then she was back. Throwing the PADD down on the table, she asked the admirals what they needed. This was new territory for all of us: here was an adversary unlike anything the Federation had ever faced – a threat unlike anything seen in over a century – and it looked like it was heading straight to the Federation's very heart. Right now, the only thing in our favor was the one ship standing in its way: the *Enterprise* and her captain, Jean-Luc Picard.



WILLIAM T. RIKER

STARFLEET HEADQUARTERS, SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH

Stardate 44012.3 – 2367

William T. Riker is a name that will forever be linked to the events of 2366; when he found himself thrust into command of the Federation's flagship at the height of the crisis. In the coming days, weeks, and years, questions will be raised about Starfleet's response to the Borg: if more could have been done to save lives – or even to try a diplomatic solution – but no one can question the courage and professionalism shown by Captain Riker and the crew of the Enterprise during that harrowing time. This interview was the first conducted as part of the Holland Commission in early 2367.

Frankly, I found Commander Shelby a real pain in the ass. We have a good team on the *Enterprise*: the best in the fleet in my opinion. She came in gunning for my seat, oblivious to the way things were done on our starship.

She was, however, unsurpassed when it came to her expertise with the Borg, and that proved to be a valuable asset. I've recommended that her field promotion to commander be made permanent.

After she confirmed the New Providence attack was carried out by the Borg, our goal became to ascertain whether the Borg were still present in the sector and, if so, what their intentions were. Our analysis of the devastation at Jouret IV matched the findings from our investigation into missing outposts along the Neutral Zone on stardate 41986.0. We already had suspicions following similar patterns that we observed at J-25, but with the magnetic resonance scans and Shelby's "footprint," we had confirmation that the Borg had been operating in Federation space earlier than we had believed possible. I hate to say it, but Q might've done us a favor by flinging *Enterprise* into their path like he did. At least we had some lead time and were able to bring it to the admiralty's attention.

We took advantage of having Commander Shelby on board to evaluate the weapons systems under development with Starfleet Tactical – to see if any modifications could be made to our weapons and defensive systems in the

event of an encounter with the Borg. In truth, the news of the Borg attack hit us all hard and the crew had been pushing themselves to the very limit. The three shift pattern we maintain can be punishing. Commander Shelby, however, was *insistent* that I allow her to continue with Commander Data through the night.

It suddenly struck me that sometime in the past three years I had become “the old man.” I saw a lot of myself in Shelby. I feel I owe Captains DeSoto and Picard an apology, but at the time we had no reason to believe that the Borg remained in the sector. I was caught up trying to justify to myself why I should remain on *Enterprise* rather than accept command of the *Melbourne* – this just seemed like another day at the office.

We received a transmission from Admiral Hanson the next day. The *Lalo*, a freighter operating out of Zeta Alpha II, had sent out a distress call. The ship reported being under attack from a vessel, described as “cube-shaped.” The signal ended abruptly.

With that, we had confirmation that the Borg were here, now, in our own backyard. I felt a pit open in my stomach at the realization, but I was able to take solace from Captain Picard. Without hesitation, he ordered the ship to head to the *Lalo*’s last known location at warp 9. Hanson promised to send reinforcements, but any meaningful support was at least six days away. All we could do was keep the Borg occupied while the fleet mustered.

We stopped off at Starbase 157 to transfer the civilian and non-essential personnel off the ship. There was tangible tension in the air as we conducted our search pattern; we found no trace of the *Lalo* or the Borg and with every hour that passed the feeling of unease continued to grow throughout the crew. Counselor Troi and her staff worked around the clock to try and ease the fears. I don’t know what would have been worse at that moment: encountering the Borg, or not. As it happens, the Borg were not hiding. They were looking for us.

♦ For Starfleet?

No, specifically for the *Enterprise*. We were about eight hours into the search when Worf detected a vessel entering sensor range. Before we could move to intercept, they changed course and headed directly for us at high warp. When we caught sight of the cube on the main viewscreen, it was like a nightmare had returned to haunt us. I desperately wanted to wake up.

We notified Starfleet that we had engaged the Borg, but that seemed overly optimistic. The Borg had engaged *us*, and we had no idea how we were going to occupy the Borg for six days – to say nothing of surviving the encounter. Our only hope was that the Borg had sought us out, perhaps they were in a talkative mood, and maybe we would be able to establish some form of diplomatic relations.

I suppose, in a way, that's exactly what they wanted.

The Borg hailed Captain Picard directly, by name, and issued orders for him to surrender himself to the Borg. This went against everything we'd been led to believe about the Borg from our encounter at J-25, and what subsequently learned from Guinan and other El-Aurians. Hell, even Q told us that they didn't care about us – only our *technology*. It was all too much to process. Despite now being the subject of the Borg's personal attention, Captain Picard remained the leader and innovative thinker I've come to know.

The Borg employed the same tactics they'd used at J-25: first draining the shields with a type of tractor beam, and then holding the ship in position. We employed the shield modulations that Shelby and La Forge had devised which bought us some time, but they were quickly overwhelmed. The Borg employed their particle beam and sliced into the secondary hull – going straight for main engineering. Fortunately, the multiple redundancies and swift work from La Forge and his department ensured the core remained operational despite the loss of atmosphere. But still, we lost 18 people.

Phasers and photon torpedoes were ineffective, but once again Shelby was able to devise a solution by having Commander Data shift the phaser frequencies randomly. That freed us from the tractor beam and allowed us the freedom to navigate.

Captain Picard ordered the ship on a course taking us into the nearby Paulson Nebula. The composition of dilithium hydroxyls, magnesium, and chromium proved effective at hiding the ship from the Borg's sensors. We knew the ship was after us, but for the moment at least we could breathe and find our bearings. We bought time for Starfleet, although I couldn't imagine just what any reinforcements could do against the Borg. *Enterprise* was the most advanced starship in the quadrant and we might as well have been throwing bad language for all the good we did.

GUINAN

USS *ENTERPRISE*, QUALOR SYSTEM

Stardate 46231.8 – 2369



It was so quiet, that was my overriding memory of the nebula. The captain had evacuated most of the non-essential personnel and families off the ship at Starbase 157 and the ship just felt wrong. Empty.

♦ *Why didn't you leave the *Enterprise* at the starbase?*

Well as I said, it was the non-essential personnel who were removed. I think in a time of crisis someone who can run a bar is pretty damn essential. *[she chuckles]* Besides, El-Aurians have this knack of knowing where they need to be, and I needed to be on *Enterprise*.

I could sense the Borg just beyond the veil of the nebula. There was something different about them, something that I hadn't sensed at J-25. A... desire, I guess. That's the only word I could use to describe it, but they wanted something. They wanted Picard, and the longer we were out of reach in the nebula, the greater that desire grew.

They were moving around the edges, probing and scanning, but they wouldn't follow us in. I guess they were worried that if they did and we snuck out, they might lose us. It felt like a game of hide and seek, and they were "it."

The crew went about their duties and the rhythm of the ship continued, but it was there at the back of their minds – like this itch that you couldn't quite scratch. They went about their duties and were preparing the ship to face the Borg. I wasn't on El-Auria when the Borg came, but I wonder if my people did the same: stoically waiting for the inevitability of facing the Borg.

Tensions were starting to run high, though. Riker and Shelby were butting heads; under different circumstances I think I would have told them to go get a room and get it over with. But I was just as terrified as everyone else, and

just like everyone else I was doing my damndest not to let it show. That was easy for the first day; people were still coming to Ten-Forward, treating this like any other assignment or crisis, but the longer we sat in that nebula the fewer people came to seek the comfort of crowds. I can understand that; you want to bury yourself in your work, do everything you can to keep your mind occupied and hands busy. When you stopped to stare out into that beautiful cacophony of color, your mind inevitably started to venture out to what was waiting just beyond the edge of it.

It was the third day and all this was silent as the grave. **[she gestures around at the lounge we are sitting in]** But this was where I needed to be, so this was where I was when he came in.

♦ **Captain Picard?**

Of course. Have you met him?

♦ **No, not yet. He has repeatedly declined my request for an interview. Starfleet is making his logs available for the report, but eventually we'll need to conduct an interview for the record.**

Humans have a way of being stuck in the past. **[she smiles at a private joke]** Give him time, and I'm sure he will come around – but on that particular night he was touring the ship from stem to stern, an old naval tradition. He knew that we couldn't hide in the nebula indefinitely; we knew that as long as the cube was hunting the *Enterprise*, it wasn't heading deeper into Federation space, and for whatever reason Starfleet had not sent any additional ships to help. It was easy to surmise that Starfleet was looking to beef up its defenses at home, but in reality I doubt it would have mattered how many ships were thrown at the Borg. It wouldn't have stopped them. The Borg had taken on far larger and more powerful empires than the Federation. I don't think the Federation had it in them to do what was needed to defeat the Borg. I think if they did, then they wouldn't have been the Federation, and perhaps wouldn't have been worth saving.

He came and stared out those windows that so many others had shied away from – defying it, defying the Borg who had singled him out. After three days, even he was feeling a little maudlin. We spoke of Admiral Nelson at Trafalgar, and Honorius and the fall of the Roman Empire. He knew the Borg were unlike anything that the Federation had faced before, and there was a very real chance that the only thing standing between them and the fall of the Federation – of life

and civilizations as we knew it – was a little ship called *Enterprise*. He felt the weight of that; he would never show it to anyone, but I could see it. We shared a moment. I have known Jean-Luc for a long time; I think it's safe to say I've known him longer than anyone, and he could still surprise me with his resolve and his calm compassion.

I reminded him that the Federation was more than its members, it was more than its worlds. It's not a place, it's a people, and as long as even a handful of those people survive – as long as they can keep the dream of the Federation alive – then the Borg could never defeat them. They would never win.

Of course, the universe is not without a sense of drama, so the Borg took that moment to start firing into the nebula, and Jean-Luc headed for the bridge.

That was the last time I saw him like that. After everything that came later, he was changed. We *all* were, but I'll always remember just us existing together in that quiet moment.

WORF, SON OF MOGH

USS *ENTERPRISE*, DETRIAN SYSTEM

Stardate: 46424.1 – 2369

Lieutenant Worf holds the distinction of being the only Klingon currently in Starfleet, and has served as the chief of security on board the USS Enterprise since 2364. He is a physically imposing individual – as is often the case with members of his species – and his voice has a deep resonance that is almost poetic. He invites me to join him in a Mok'bara session which I politely decline, but he is content to allow me to observe as he moves through the various forms.

I disliked hiding in the nebula like some *Romulan*, but I understood the captain's reasons. The Borg are a formidable adversary, and our previous encounters had been less than satisfactory. Now, they were here on our very doorstep, trying to force their way into the heart of the Federation. So the captain used the *Enterprise* as bait to lure the Borg away from the core worlds while Starfleet could amass an armada to defeat them. At least, that is what I believed to be the case.

We sat in the nebula for three days to ready the ship and crew. I worked closely with Lieutenant La Forge and Commander Shelby to ensure our weapons would prove more effective than in our first encounter at J-25. We knew the Borg possessed an ability to adapt to our technology at a frightening pace, so we would have to ensure that every shot would count. We spent many hours running drills and simulations to prepare, and I ordered all phasers to be tuned to the frequencies that had been shown to be most effective.

I had observed firsthand how quickly the Borg adapted to our energy weapons. However, despite their considerable strength, they were neither fast nor agile. I believed that they would be vulnerable to blades and requested from the captain permission to train security in the use of the *mek'leth* and *bat'leth*, but this was deemed unfeasible given the possibility of discovery at any moment. In hindsight, I should have been persistent in my request.

Once it became apparent that Starfleet would not be sending ships to aid us directly, we were left waiting for the Borg to make the first move. Our sensors were largely ineffective inside the nebula, and we had no indication of the status or location of the cube outside of residual traces from passive sensors. We knew it was there waiting just beyond the edge of the nebula like a bear waiting for its prey, but eventually their patience dwindled and they began to fire magnetometric charges. They were drawn to the *Enterprise's* magnetic containment system and it became apparent that we could no longer hide. Good, I thought: now we would show these *toruk-DOH* the grave error they had made in attacking the Federation so brazenly.

On the captain's order we headed out of the nebula. We chose a course towards the galactic south – to lead the Borg away from the core worlds. There was some discussion about attempting to lead the Borg to the *Klach D'kel Brakt*.

♦ I'm sorry, the what?

You might know it as the “Briar Patch.” It is a region of space filled with false vacuum fluctuations, flooded with radiation from supernova remnants. It was hoped that if we could lead the cube there, it would potentially cripple or even destroy the ship – at least slow it down long enough to buy Starfleet the time it needed to prepare to take on the Borg. But even at maximum warp, the Briar Patch was almost a day away. We were able to evade the Borg for two minutes.

Immediately after leaving the Paulson Nebula and jumping to maximum warp, the Borg overtook us, disabled our shields, and collapsed our warp field – despite all the modifications and preparations we had made. I had positioned security teams in engineering, the computer cores, and at key points throughout the ship we felt would be susceptible to Borg attack. I was confident that I would be able to deal with any intruders we might face on the bridge.

I was mistaken.

As soon as the shields collapsed, the Borg established a tractor beam and transported onto the bridge. The first drone appeared to be of a similar design to the one I had killed at J-25, and the new phaser settings quickly dispatched it. But already a second arrived and this one had adapted to the new frequencies.

Commander Riker moved to tackle the intruder, but was tossed aside. I threw myself into the fray to take on the Borg. My phaser was ineffective, and

without a blade I would meet this foe hand to hand.

I savored the thought of facing the Borg in this way. We had conducted several simulations on the holodeck, and in every scenario I had been victorious. The Borg are without honor, but their strength would make them a formidable opponent. I felt the call of Kahless!

[He appears caught up in the moment and holds his hands before him.]

I lunged towards the Borg, already imagining how it would feel to slay this intruder, when it tossed me aside as if I were a pitiful Ferengi. In my haste, I failed in my duty to protect the ship and the captain.

A third Borg beamed onto the bridge and grabbed the captain, immediately transporting away with him. The Borg I had faced then left, and the one I had slain vanished as if it had been a hologram – some form of cellular destruction to prevent us learning better how to defeat them.

With the captain now their prisoner, the Borg ship disengaged and left at high warp.

Commander Riker had sustained a concussion from the attack, but issued orders to pursue the Borg. The cube continued to accelerate at an alarming rate, pushing the *Enterprise* to its very limits. What's more, we now knew for certain where the Borg were going with their prize.

They were going to Sector 001. They were going to Earth.

END OF CHAPTER 2

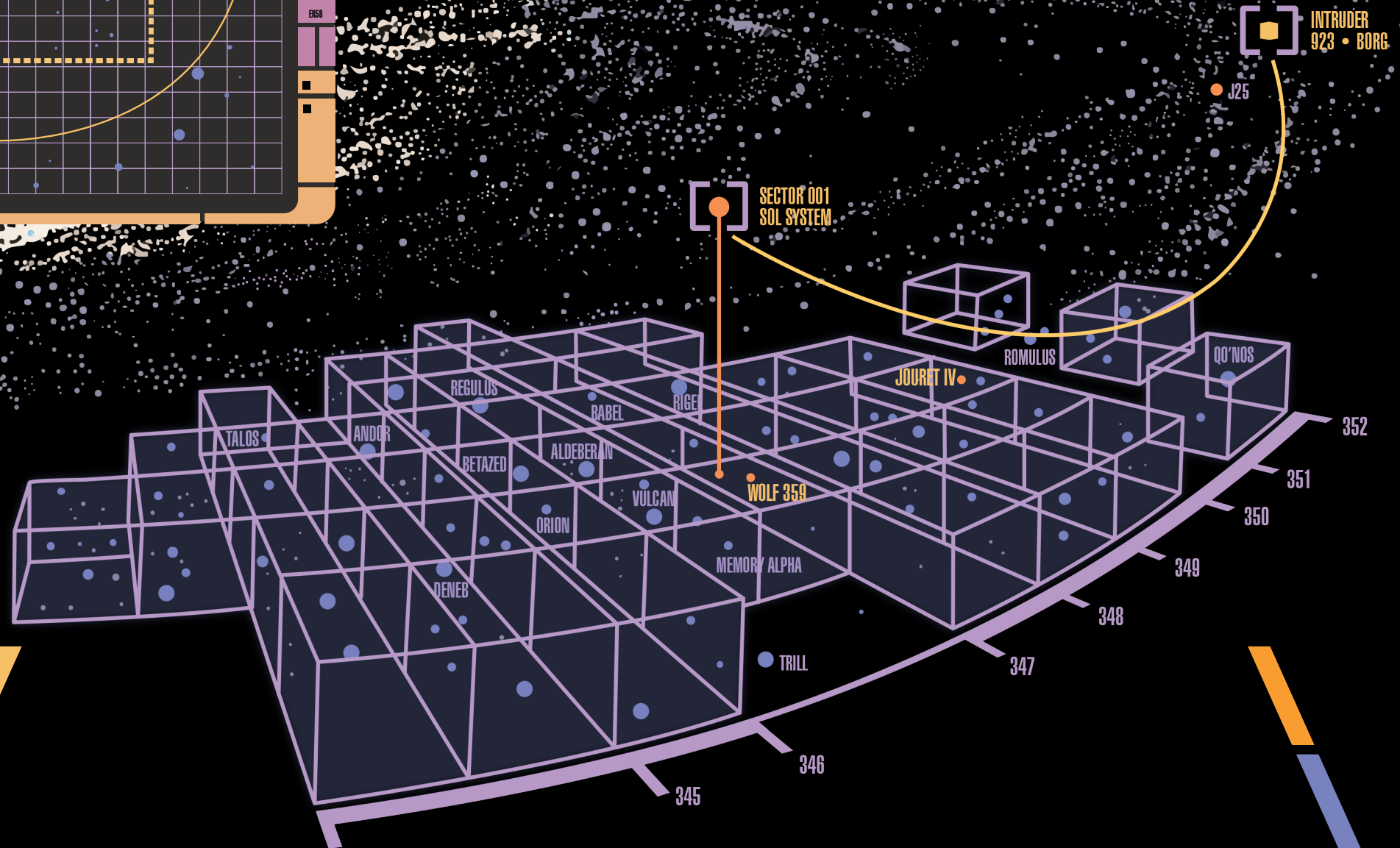
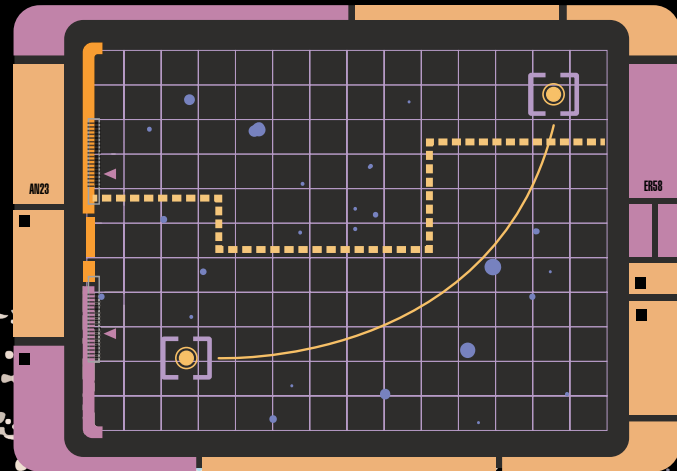
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INTERLUDE

USS *HOOD*, SOL SYSTEM

Stardate 73394.7 – 2396



I find myself in the observation lounge as the *Hood* departs Sol Station. The ceremony was largely what you would expect of such a send-off: a lot of speeches, lists of accolades, names, and places. Admiral DeSoto gave a moving account of why *Hood* was so important, and her newest and last captain spoke about the honor of being entrusted with such a legacy. I swear, he looked barely old enough to have graduated from the academy.

I spotted Captains Riker and La Forge in the crowd, too. I wondered if they would travel on *Hood* to Wolf 359, or if they'd be traveling on another ship – perhaps the *Enterprise*?

As we clear the station's space doors, the crisp darkness of the void replaces the artificial light. Spread out below is that beautiful blue marble: Earth.

I was born in Pike City on Cestus III. With my parents working in the diplomatic corps, we did our fair bit of traveling when I was young. I realize I've spent more time looking down on planets than looking *up* at the stars from the surface, but there's something about looking down on Earth. If you look just right – as the sun is about to travel behind the planet – it reflects off the water, and the light shifts into a red hue that speaks to me on a visceral level. I wonder if it's a genetic trait. I wonder if Vulcans feel the same way about their home world, if the sight of Qo'noS stirs the blood of the Klingons, even if they have no personal connection to the planet.

Earth is not a particularly unique world. It is, by most galactic measurements, exceedingly average; but despite everything, it has endured. It is home for Humanity, the Cetaceans, and the seat of government for the entire United Federation of Planets. That counts for something. There is a fragility when you see the cradle of Humanity from space, and I am reminded of the words of a 20th

century scientist when he saw a photo of the planet taken from further out in the solar system: referring to it as a “pale blue dot.”

For Dr. Sagan, the Earth was the only place in the entire cosmos which could support life. And that would remain the case for Humanity until 2063.

I hear the doors open as Admiral DeSoto walks in, tugging at the collar of his Starfleet dress uniform. “Damn things,” he mutters as he unfastens the molecular seam and opens the collar. “I thought the whole reason you retired was so you *didn’t* have to wear these damn dress uniforms.”

He makes his way over to the replicator and orders himself a *raktajino*. “Can I get you one?” he asks as he takes the steaming mug from the replicator.

“No thanks, but I’ll take a *Jestral* tea.”

The replicator hums once again, and the admiral brings the drink over to join me as we pass McKinley Station and a number of Starfleet ships parked at the Lagrange point’s anchorage.

“Something on your mind?” he asks as he passes me the tea.

I take a sip and savor the spicy bite as it hits my tongue. “No...it’s just so strange, being here on board. It feels like we passed through a temporal anomaly. I keep expecting to have the DTI [Department of Temporal Investigations] barge in and ask us what we’re doing here.”

We share a chuckle and enjoy a moment of silence. Looking around the room, there are keepsakes and mementos of this ship and others which have carried the name *Hood*. I have no doubt there will be another.

“It’s the carpets, right?” he says suddenly, the non sequitur taking me by surprise for a moment before realizing what he was referring to.

“When did we stop putting carpets on starships? Come to think of it, when did we *start*?” I ponder out loud.

As part of the *Hood’s* refit prior to her decommissioning and new role as a museum and memorial, the ship has been restored to match how she would have looked in the mid-2360s. The LCARS interface is now a mix of orange, yellow, and purple hues. The corridors, a pleasant light gray with tan highlights

and orange doors. Almost every square foot of the ship's decks is covered in carpet – harkening back to a time some 30 years ago, and quite at odds to the current aesthetic found in Starfleet. If anything, it feels quaint and invokes nostalgia for a more innocent time.

“I think when we stopped thinking about them as combat ships, and started thinking about them as *homes*,” he says, looking down at the floor. “You know, they were already fitted when I first came aboard, but they must have been added after *Hood* was launched. It was all linoleum in the 2320s.”

The ship shifts in its orientation as it passes the Lagrange anchorage, and the Earth comes to fill the windows behind us. I catch its reflection on the glass case that houses the bell from a naval ship named *Hood*, sunk in Earth's Second World War.

We both turn and stare at the Earth as it passes through our field of view, starting to shrink as *Hood*'s mighty impulse engines move us away from the gravity wells. Our course out of the system takes us past Mars and the remains of Utopia Planitia; out past the Jovian moons and Jupiter Station where a small service by the Sol Defense League will be conducted in honor of the lives lost when the cube first entered the system, before we finally jump to warp for our three day trip to Wolf 359.

The Earth diminishes in size over the next hour as we sit and talk, catching up on how each has been since we last saw the other in person. Suddenly, we realize we can no longer see Earth; it is just a pale blue dot amongst the stars, and the *Hood* has left her birthplace for perhaps the last time.

EL'RIK ZH'UHEAD

STARFLEET ACADEMY, SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH

Stardate: 72533.2 – 2395



On Earth itself there was the problem of what to tell the people. We live in a free society, unburdened by agencies like the Tal Shiar and Obsidian Order that curtail and control the flow of information. The very moment the president notified the Federation Council, they knew word would get out that impending doom was now on a direct course for Earth. But what can you say?

Of course, it's very easy for us here – almost three decades later – to look at the choices that were made on the ground. We shake our heads and sagely say that we wouldn't have done things that way, that we wouldn't have made those mistakes. Historians are blessed with 20/20 vision, but can you imagine what it must have been like at the very top of government or Starfleet? To know that there was a *very real chance* that, in less than seven days, your entire way of life would change regardless of what happened? How do you tell a system of billions that by this time next week they might all be dead, and there was nothing you could do about it?

Even today, I don't think people fully understand just how dire the situation was. After all, we survived not only *this* Borg encounter, but the second in 2373. Then there was the Dominion War and the threat of Founder infiltrators, the Breen assault on Earth, the First Contact Day massacre..."may you live in interesting times" indeed.

The president and her staff were in a hopeless position. The Borg were coming, and all they could do was rely on Starfleet and make plans to evacuate the system. At the time, Starfleet was not only under-equipped for this task, but an entire *generation* of officers had passed through an academy that no longer expected Starfleet to face such a mission. The idea of the "Lovecraftian horror" from space had been faced in the 2270s, and a single Starfleet ship had stopped that threat with mere words. The idea that it

would have to mobilize its forces in the face of a cataclysmic threat was absurd. Today, of course, Starfleet's organization is much more efficient, allowing it to be deployed en masse as needed. A direct result of the lessons taught by the Borg and Dominion, but that just wasn't the case in the 2360s. Trying to wield this force was like attempting to steer a small moon using only thrusters.

In the end, Amitra did the best she could with the hand she was dealt. The president's office made a statement and tried to be as open and available as they could. They clearly expected some sort of panic – especially once people discovered that it would be impossible to evacuate any meaningful portion of Earth's population. The last thing they expected was apathy and disbelief.

For decades, the news networks had struggled to attract the attention of the masses; no one is interested in hearing everything is fine, so the news had inflated the significance of the situation on the Cardassian border. They dubbed it the "Cardassian War" or the "Tzenkethi War" – when in actuality, the conflicts were little more than border skirmishes. That's not to take away from those who served and even died there, but for most people in the Federation it barely registered. So, now that a *real* threat was approaching, very few took those warnings seriously.

The saving grace was that there was no mass panic. No vast exodus of small craft, or anything that might make orbit attempting to escape. It was only *after* the Borg entered the system and were visible from the surface that people started to realize just how close they'd come to disaster. Then, at the last moment, Starfleet saved the day – justifying in the people's minds their lack of concern. I've heard from anthropologists that the study of the civilian response is absolutely fascinating, and uniquely Human.

♦ How do you mean? There are many other species living on Earth.

Quite so! But there is an innate trait within Humanity as a whole that might be unique in the galaxy – certainly amongst any species I have ever encountered. The blind faith that, in the end, everything will be alright – no, don't scoff. I know how that must sound, especially coming from an old Andorian like myself, but it is that singular trait: the willingness to believe that even in situations as utterly dire as those they have faced, in the end it will be okay. When the other sapients on Earth saw life just continuing as normal, many took it as a sign that surely

things were not so dire as they were being presented in the news, and it calmed them down, too. Such a wondrous disconnect between the perceived reality and the actual reality. It's quite fascinating!

It *has* almost doomed your species. When I read about the 20th and 21st centuries, I see that belief almost destroyed you because you weren't willing to act on the facts presented and just believed that, in the end, it would be alright.

♦ *I'm struggling to believe that it is such a uniquely **Human** trait.*

Ah, but how could it be otherwise? Had the Borg set a course for Vulcan, the population would have stoically accepted their fate. If it were Andoria, I shudder to think of what would happen. I can well imagine there would have been clan warfare; fighting over the right to be the most defiant in the face of the threat. The Bolians would have surrendered immediately, the Klingons would have launched every ship capable of breaking orbit to attack...

My point is that every other species would have had some kind of reaction as a whole, but it is only Humanity that would collectively shrug and then go about their day. It's the belief that when they do decide to try something – however risky – it will be alright in the end.

OWEN PARIS

Stardate: 53425.9 – 2376

"PROJECT PATHFINDER," EARTH

In the wake of the Borg Incursion, Starfleet placed a renewed interest in long-range observation and intelligence gathering – especially from the Delta Quadrant whence the Borg had originated. In the event of a future incursion, Starfleet wanted as much warning as possible, and so Starfleet Communications was formally established.

In 2376, Starfleet received a message from the USS Voyager which had vanished three years prior. Voyager had been flung into the Delta Quadrant and was some 60,000 light-years from Federation space. In the wake of this news, Starfleet established Project Pathfinder to attempt to establish communication with the ship. Admiral Paris, Vice Chief of Operations during the first Borg Incursion, was promoted by the Federation president and confirmed by the council to Chief of Operations in 2374. Additionally, the Pathfinder Project is of special personal significance to him.

As I await my meeting, a nervous-looking lieutenant sits opposite. After an uncomfortable wait, I am ushered into the admiral's office.

Back in the 21st century, someone once said “there are known knowns; these are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; these are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don’t know we don’t know.” With the Borg, we discovered another dimension: “the unknown knowns”!

Ellen Hayes dropped a photonic charge on us during our briefing with the president. It turns out that SI [Starfleet Intelligence] had been aware of the existence of the Borg since *at least* the late 23rd, and I’ve since seen evidence suggesting that it could date even earlier than that! After we left the Palais and transported back to San Francisco, I was about ready to strip her of rank and reassign her to the academy’s gardens! She’d sat in the meetings following J-25 and the loss of the outposts along the Neutral Zone and hadn’t said a word to us! I understand and appreciate the need for operational secrecy. I understand that things have to be classified and sometimes it’s best not to know. But I was vice chief of Starfleet operations and there was an existential threat to the very survival of the Federation! And the first I knew that we had intelligence on the Borg was when she marched in a [REDACTED] before the president.

To her credit, she didn't beat around the bush. She held up her hands and before I could load the photons said, "Owen, we've messed up. Give me 45 minutes and I'll have a briefing for you." She went off to rain hellfire on whoever had dropped the ball, and discover just how deep in the deuterium we were. I got on the comm to Fleet Admiral Shanthi, about two days out at maximum warp from Earth. I was left in the center seat to coordinate whatever response we could, but – to be frank – Starfleet was a poorly organized bureaucratic mess in the early 2360s. Hell, our response plans for a level one threat approaching a core world had last been updated in 2311.

We convened an admiralty meeting. Shanthi and Chapman called in from the *Roanoke*, and J.P. [Hanson] from the *Zelensky*. Ellen walked in with a small flotilla of admirals, captains, and a young Bolian lieutenant. Poor kid looked like he had been pulled from his bed into a living nightmare – trapped in a room with the entire senior command staff. Have you ever noticed that senior SI officers don't wear combadges? I've known Ellen for a good 30 years at this point. I worked closely with her in the planning for the Arias Expedition on the *Al-Batani*. But that moment was the first time I noticed the distinct gulf opening up between Ellen, the intelligence folks, and the rest of us.

I didn't see much point in blustering or belaboring the point. "There is a hostile ship in Federation space and it's heading towards the core. It's already destroyed one colony and seems more than a match for anything we can throw at it. We have Picard and *Enterprise* out there trying to track it down to see if they can delay its progress and buy us some time. But we need to know what we are dealing with." I ceded the floor to Ellen.

Most of this is public knowledge, but I imagine you'll still have to clear this before publication.

Anyway, Ellen stood up and started the briefing. Starfleet had formally been first made aware of the Borg in 2293 when a pair of *Whorfin*-class transports – the *Lakul* and the *Robert Fox* – had been chartered to bring refugees from a planet called El-Auria to Federation space. I had never heard of El-Auria; it existed somewhere out in the Delta Quadrant, and had been destroyed by a hostile cybernetic pseudospecies they referred to as the Borg. The ships were destroyed by some stellar phenomenon, but some survivors were rescued by the *Enterprise* (NCC-1701-B). Most people know of the story, but tend to focus on the death of Jim Kirk.

Once the survivors arrived they were interviewed, and special interest was placed on the nature of the Borg's attack on El-Auria. The interviews themselves still remain sealed under a 212019, but given how far the El-Aurians had traveled – and believe me, there were more than a few pointed questions about *how* they had managed to travel halfway across the galaxy in so short of a time – and given that the peace with the Klingons was still so new and unfamiliar, they were filed away. Largely forgotten, except by Starfleet Intelligence.

Not long after this, the Romulans encountered the Borg during their pivot away from the Alpha Quadrant, and found themselves embroiled in a messy quagmire that limited their expansion. They were boxed in on all sides. Naturally, SI and the V'Shar **[Vulcan Security Agency]** acquired this information from their sources, but for some reason references to the Borg were redacted from the briefing packets we received throughout the 24th century – again, under a 212019.

The single biggest revelation was Operation Corvidae. Since 2345, SI had been authorizing manned missions out to the far side of Romulan space from Deep Space Four, and into what was believed to be Borg territory. The Bolian, Lieutenant Ernos, was the current coordinator. There were five ships at the time – manned by civilian xenobiologists who weren't told the true scope of their missions. In one instance, they lost the entire crew of a small ship called the *Raven*, including their six-year-old daughter.

With that little revelation, the glares and looks directed towards Lieutenant Ernos could have melted a duratanium hull. Once again, credit to Ellen. She thanked him for the briefing and made it damn clear that any fault to be found would be with her and her predecessors. She lamented the number of “unknown knowns” that [REDACTED] still kept hidden away – even from her.

It's just like SI to have an office dedicated to looking out for long-range threats to the Federation, and then forget to tell anyone about it before the threat actually arrives.

It was clear that there were going to be some very serious discussions, and heads were likely to roll. In the meantime, we had to address the imminent threat in Federation space, and we had to figure out how to mobilize Starfleet to stop the Borg. If that was even possible.

L'GARREY

CTSU SHIPYARDS, GANYMEDE

Stardate: 65053.9 – 2388



It was such a nice morning. It's a weird thing to remember about one of the most life-changing days of my life. But there's something about the light in December – when you get a clear day, everything has a crispness to it. It had rained overnight, and everything seemed to sparkle. Starfleet had returned to San Francisco – presumably to see what other skeletons they had hiding in their closet – and the president was in conference with the vice president and some advisors. So, I went for a walk in a bit of a daze.

We'd just had this massive revelation about a cataclysmic threat that seemed to be heading right for us. Our understanding of the foundation of the Federation had been called into question, and the worst part? We didn't know what to do.

This was unprecedented in most of our lifetimes. We were supposed to be past this; something we had left behind in the last century. I had already begun compiling a list of people to call in as advisors; not too many Humans were still around from 2286, but there were many other species with long enough lifespans to have lived through the Cetacean Probe or V'ger. I knew Sarek of Vulcan had been on Earth around that time, but he had returned to Vulcan due to poor health, and from the reports I'd seen, it was unlikely he would survive much beyond the coming year. From what we had just been told there was a strong chance none of us would.

I headed up the Champs-Élysées, away from the Palais, as Paris was waking up. There were lights up for the Festivus celebrations, and the low sun was piercing as it crested over the Seine. Already, people of all species were heading to work or visiting the many cultural sites. A teacher ushered a group of young children all in matching yellow raincoats out of the metro, and unsuccessfully tried to keep them from being distracted by the lights and

noises of the city. I almost broke down in tears. I had this weight pushing down on me: this knowledge of something dark coming and I couldn't tell anyone. Merde – at that point I didn't even know if we would ever tell people! If [REDACTED] was right, why burden people with the futility of the situation and distress them in their final days? Let them enjoy their lives for as long as possible.

Fortunately, a Secret Service agent arrived before I could make a scene, and asked me to return. The president needed me. I didn't trust myself to speak, so I gave him a nod and he did a site-to-site transport back to the Palais. I excused myself for a moment to freshen up. I just stared into my own eyes in the fresher. I'd had my indulgent moment. But the Federation needed the president, and the president needed me, so I locked up all the doubt and despair deep, deep down in a little box and filed it under "deal with later."

The president was in the Ra-ghoratreii Room with Vice President Jaresh-Inyo and several members of the cabinet, still awaiting the Secretary of Exploration. There was no lack of irony that his sense of direction was less than stellar and had, on more than one occasion, become lost in his own office. The president was about to send security out to find him when he entered the room, somewhat flustered. It seems he'd been about to enter a hibernation cycle, so I guess we were lucky we caught him when we did.

The president laid it out for them: the Borg were coming. We didn't know where yet, but it was looking increasingly likely that the *Enterprise* would be unable to stop them. Starfleet didn't have any resources it could mobilize quickly enough or in sufficient numbers to stop the craft before it reached the core worlds. And they had to decide what to do now.

I could tell they weren't quite understanding what she said. Several confused looks passed back and forth so I just came out and said it. "The president wants to know if we should tell the people of the UFP about this imminent threat. And if so, how."

She shot me a look. I was being blunt, but we didn't have time to dance around with niceties. Besides – I hadn't slept in close to 36 hours at that point.

"Clearly, we DO tell the people," said the vice president. "It's not only the right thing to do, but it's inevitable. Over 900 people were on New Providence, 60 on the *Lalo*, near enough 1,500 on *Enterprise*. That's a lot of families who are going

to be asking after loved ones. It's not a question of *if* the news will get out; it's already out."

The president nodded at that. I recall she asked if the vice president had been present on Earth during the Cetacean Probe incident. Although he was alive at that time, he first came to Earth in 2302 so could not offer any personal insight. We knew we had to reach out to the Vulcans, but that would also mean bringing in the Core-Four,¹ and at that point we might as well just assemble the council for a session. The last thing we wanted to do was to go into a full session without more information and a plan of what to do going forward.

We had other problems, too. We were supposed to be on *Paris One* and en route to Cardassia for the summit in six hours. We'd been working on that conference for close to *three years*, slogging through some of the most fraught diplomacy that the president had ever experienced, despite serving in the cabinet of three previous administrations. We were going to have to tell Cardassia *something*. This summit was to be the crowning achievement of the Amrita presidency, and a more permanent peace between the Federation and Cardassia. And, maybe, a chance to help the people of Bajor. None of that mattered anymore.

The room descended into a cacophony of cross talking and raised voices as everyone tried to get a handle on what was happening. There was a knock and in came Zelda, one of the president's aides, with an urgent message from Starfleet Command.

A deathly silence filled the room, interrupted only by the soft chime from the communicator. The president moved to her desk, activated it, and the face of Owen Paris filled the screen. He clearly hadn't gotten any sleep, either.

He told us that the *Enterprise* had engaged the Borg, and lured them into the Paulson Nebula. Hopefully, it could keep them occupied while Starfleet assessed the situation and mounted some kind of response. Every moment the Borg spent in pursuit of *Enterprise* was one they were not heading towards us. He also said they were activating the old G&G, and that the president should relocate there.

The president ended the call and looked at me. "What is the G&G?"

1 The governments of United Earth, Vulcan, Andorian Imperial Council, and Tellar Prime.

"It's the Starfleet Command Central Crisis Planning Center. I'll explain later, but Madam President, the admiral is right. We should head over there."

We were all in broad agreement when I think the Secretary of Transportation, Kor'tazr, raised a hand. He had only been appointed the Friday before and this was the first session with the cabinet. I told him to put his hand down and just say what was on his mind.

"When do we start evacuations?"

We all just stopped dead in our tracks. It was only then that the sheer scale of what lay before us really hit home. Wherever the Borg were heading, there was no way we were going to be able to save everyone.

SAL MERCADO

DEEP SPACE NINE, BAJOR SECTOR

Stardate: 48928.6 – 2371

The Colonial Transportation and Settlement Union [CTSU] is one of the oldest institutions within the United Federation of Planets, tracing its origins to the late 20th century on Earth where it developed the DY series of sleeper ships before First Contact with the Vulcans. With the discovery of warp drive and Earth still recovering from the effects of World War III, many chose to seek a new life on the countless worlds now available to them. The CTSU experienced a period of unprecedented emigration and expansion from the late 21st to early 23rd century.

Sal Mercado has been with the CTSU for over 50 years, and has supervised the establishment of over 15 colonies in that time. He now works as a consultant for the Bajoran government as they establish their first colonies in the Gamma Quadrant.

I don't know who the Federation's leading experts on colony relocation are, but any list of the top 10 has got to include the CTSU. We have a fleet of the most advanced and versatile colony transport ships in existence. 2366 was already shaping up to be one of the worst years of my life – long before I or anyone else at the CTSU had heard the name "Borg," let me tell you.

The thing about colony ships is that it's not just about how many people you need to move from planet X to planet Y. There're flight paths, perishables, transporter and shuttle considerations, how much equipment will the colony require, is the planet hiding any nasty surprises, how long do we have to remain to support the colony becoming self-sustaining...I won't bore you, but the list of considerations is longer than an Edosian's arm. And that's just when the colony you are transporting is *remaining* in Federation space. If you are crossing territorial boundaries **[he lets out a long sigh]**, let's just say there is a reason that usually there are several years – even *decades* – of planning involved before a single colonist sets foot on one of our transporter pads. We run a finely turned operation that's built upon the idea of preparation, preparation, preparation!

So, you can imagine our delight when we were contacted by Starfleet to evacuate the Tau Cygna V colony in under 48 hours! We didn't even have

any ships available. These are specialized transports and are in extremely high demand – but it was life or death and they needed a ship capable of evacuating around 15,000 Humans from an H-Class planet before the Sheliak arrived and established their own colony. I'd never heard of the Sheliak, but the threat was deemed serious enough for Starfleet to threaten to requisition a ship if we didn't voluntarily divert one right away.

Thing was, the nearest transport we could get was undergoing refit, and would take three weeks to get to Tau Cygna V. I understood that it was urgent and they needed it done now now now, but there's a reason these ships have to undergo such strict refurbishments between charters, and three weeks was the best we could do. It was going to throw our schedule all to hell.

Starfleet managed to buy us the three weeks, but that was just enough time for us to get the *Bungaree* to the planet! Once we arrived, there was a Sheliak ship in orbit threatening to destroy the colonists and the *Bungaree* if we weren't out of the system by 43191.6! Fortunately, we had the USS *Zenobia* as our escort with a Federation ambassador and legal team to deal with them, so we could just focus on the evacuation. I don't know what they did, but it bought us enough time to get the people off and a good thing too, because the colonists were *not* making our life easy.

I know I'm being too hard on them, but *my god!* Their leader, Gosheven, was a thorn in my side. Someone told me that he had been against evacuating the colony, but after converting, was trying to manage the entire thing. And, as is usually the case when an overeager amateur tries to do a professional's job, he just got in our way. No amount of zealousness is going to make up for training and experience. I just wish people would understand that and let us get on with it! Despite only three weeks of lead time, we were able to get the colonists off the planet in 72 hours. Then there was the question of where to put them! We had no way to know if they could even survive on a Class-M planet. Class-Hs are hazardous to most Humans, and we had no idea what specific adaptation or mutation allowed them to survive on one. We couldn't just drop them off at the nearest Class-H and hope for the best. While we tried to figure it out, that transport was out of commission. The *Bungaree* was docked at Starbase 133 while Starfleet conducted tests and tried to find a world suitable for them.

A month or so later, I was summoned to the station commander's office.

By this point, I was spoiling for a fight. This entire endeavor had been a complete *grozit* from the start, and I was not afraid to tell them that! I had spent my entire adult life working for CTSU, and had heard enough stories about the unreasonable expectations of Starfleet captains who needed everything done by yesterday – well, the galaxy just doesn't work like that! I was rehearsing this whole rant when the wall screen activated and I found myself face-to-face with the head of Starfleet. Behind her were several other admirals and the *president* of the UFP!

If there was anything that was going to take the plasma out of my nacelles it was that. I mean, yes, an evacuation of this scale was unusual, but I couldn't understand why it would get all the way to the very VERY top! I stammered an apology for the delay in rehousing the colonists, but Shanthi raised her hand and stopped me. "I need you to understand that what I am about to ask you is highly classified, and if you breathe a word of this to anyone you will be tried for treason. You must acknowledge this before we go any further."

I nodded my ascent, still dumbstruck at the absurdity of this whole situation. I suddenly got a real sick feeling in the pit of my stomach and needed to sit down.

♦ Why was that?

Well, I remember hearing tales – as you do in this job – about a device that Starfleet had developed: one which could terraform a planet instantly to whatever requirements you needed. You can imagine why people in this line of work might long for something like that. Anyway, that morning after the latest round of yelling with Gosheven and his contingent, I had remarked to my assistant that if that thing *did* exist, I was going to personally make my way to whatever depot it was languishing in, strap Gosheven to it, and blast him at the nearest asteroid I could find.

I put my hands up and started to stammer that I was only joking about the asteroid and how I thought it was just a myth and didn't know anything. Shanthi just looked back to the president, and then back to me and told me she had no idea what I was talking about, and to shut up and focus. Then she asked me what it would take to transport the population of a core world. It was such a non sequitur that it took me a moment to register what had been asked. I decided to just treat this like a presentation to some high schoolers while my brain caught up to what was happening.

"If you want to do it properly, 50 years."

The way their eyes went wide I could tell something was very wrong.

They were looking at each other, so I continued. "It's not just about getting the people off the surface. You need ships, you need transporter buffers, and you need somewhere to relocate them. You can't just have a ragtag fleet fleeing whatever tyranny or disaster: you need a destination. And right now, I'm struggling to find a home for just 15,000."

Someone towards the back raised a hand. "Where are you getting that number from?"

"The only time the mass evacuation of a population that size has ever been considered was Qo'noS following the Praxis disaster. Initially, it was thought that the fallout would render the planet uninhabitable within 50 years. At the time, the Federation looked into options to evacuate the planet. We were confident we could get them off the planet in the allotted time frame, but it didn't answer the question of where we could put them. In the end, it was deemed easier to fix the damage to the planet's ecosystem and mitigate the effects of the fallout from Praxis than attempt to move the population."

They muted the channel and I could see hurried discussions going back and forth. That sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach returned, and suddenly I longed to be back on the *Bungaree* wishing I could throttle Gosheven.

"What could you do in 10 days?" they asked when they unmuted the channel.

I almost laughed at the absurdity of the question. I looked around expecting to see people rush in as if this was some huge joke the universe was playing on me, but I just couldn't figure out the punchline. I shrugged and told them what could be done in that time.

"Pray?"

S'RKESH

SOLKAR CITY, EARTH

Stardate 51475.6 — 2374

When Vulcans first arrived on Earth in the late 21st century, the planet was still reeling from the aftermath of the Eugenics and Third World Wars – with large swathes irradiated and uninhabited. The Vulcans helped Humanity to heal a large percentage of the planet, but this took time, and some areas remained “too hot” for Humans to live without constant medication. For Vulcans, however, with their higher tolerance of radiation and preference for arid climates, it made sense for them to make their home on Earth in the area of west Asia historically known as the Middle East. This has now grown into the city of Solkar. Although now safe for Humans, it remains a predominantly Vulcan city: a fusion of Vulcan architecture and culture that remains sympathetic to the civilizations which occupied this land in the centuries before.

I meet with S'rkes, who served as the aide to Councillor T'Lor through the 2360s, along the banks of the Sea of Galilee. I squint under the bright midmorning sun until he offers me some sunglasses. The Vulcan remains unfazed by the bright light or rapidly-climbing temperature.

The typical Vulcan lifespan is significantly longer than that of Humans and many other member species within the Federation. To many here in Solkar, the V'ger and Cetacean incidents exist within living memory. Indeed, Councillor T'Lor served Ambassador Sarek as his aide in 2286, and was present at Starfleet Command when the Cetacean probe's attempts at communication almost destroyed the ecosphere of this planet. In retrospect, this gave her a unique perspective on the impending crisis.

The council had adjourned for the end of the legislative season, and many took the opportunity to return to their home worlds. Some peoples had elected new representatives earlier in the year, and so the process of replacing those councilors was underway. We were under the impression that President Amitra had left several days earlier on a mission to Cardassia Prime in the hopes of establishing a lasting peace treaty, bringing an end to the conflict along the border. Thus, the message summoning the council to the Palais was both unexpected and intriguing. It was fortunate that T'Lor had not yet left for Vulcan, where she planned to spend the duration of the recess.

When we arrived at the Palais we were asked to wait outside the president's office. Ambassador Kushon of Andoria was present, as were Gorvak of Tellar and Torrisi from Earth. Each ambassador had an aide with them, although we were not permitted into the meeting.

◇ So, you were not present for the briefing itself?

No. However, in accordance with standard practice within the Vulcan diplomatic corps, T'lor joined minds with me following the conference to ensure a record would remain in the event of her death. It is those memories that I will share with you now.

[He takes a step towards me and extends his hand as if to perform a Vulcan mind-meld, but I raise my own to decline.]

◇ Thank you but that's okay. If you could provide me with a verbal account for the record, that will be sufficient.

As you wish. The problem was presented thusly: a hostile ship belonging to a previously unknown species – identified as the Borg – had entered Federation space and was on course for the core. Reports suggested Earth was the likely destination. Starfleet had reason to believe that this vessel posed a significant threat to any civilization that it came across. Any response by Starfleet would take time to assemble and could ultimately prove to be futile. These were the facts laid before them.

Stereotypes can be dangerous things, often born of ignorance. But there is often a kernel of truth in them. In that room, stereotypes were suddenly and vividly on display. T'lor immediately closed her eyes and began to consider the situation, whereas Kushon became animated and began to bluster around the room. First, he demanded access to the comms terminal to contact Andoria, then he demanded that all available ships be sent to intercept the Borg. When it was pointed out that Starfleet was too dispersed to be able to muster a sufficient force before the threat arrived at Earth, he demanded the fleet be sent to Andoria instead. From there, we could contact the Klingons and form a joint force to attack the Borg after they had arrived at Earth.

Tellarites have a reputation for being argumentative, but T'lor noted that recurrently engaging in provocative, contradictory discourse ensured that the discussion progressed at a far more rapid pace – allowing for faster resolutions

that incorporated more viewpoints than might otherwise be explored.

The Humans, meanwhile, swung wildly between all three of these traits. T'lor idly wondered if it was *this* facet of Humanity's nature that allowed them to act as such effective mediators between the four species at the Federation's birth.

With raised voices and animated discussion, this display went on for several minutes – peppered by moments of Amitra trying to regain a semblance of control. There was a momentary pause when Admiral Shanthi entered to brief the delegates on the latest tactical appraisals, which in turn led to another round of “passionate discussion,” as Amitra would later describe it in her memoirs.

Finally the eyes in the room fell upon T'lor. She had remained silent throughout all of this “performance,” as she would call it, in contemplation. Kushon's antennae were standing erect and pulled back – a common sign of anxiety and frustration in Andorians – but they relaxed as T'lor opened her eyes and once more took in the room.

“The facts as presented by President Amitra are grave indeed, though it is important that we do not lose faith. This is not the first time that the core of the Federation has been at risk, even within my own lifetime. I have seen this planet face the possibility of destruction, yet Earth and the Federation have endured.”

“The Cetacean incident? You were here? On Earth?” asked President Amitra.

“Yes, I was an aide to Ambassador Sarek when the probe entered the Sol System, disabling all vessels and installations, and began to disrupt Earth's oceans. I believe you are all familiar with at least the broad details of the incident – although the specifics of how that crisis was averted remain classified by order of the DTI. However, I can assure you that the unique solution which was employed then will not be of any help here.”

“So what can we do?” asked the president.

“Seeing that no adequate response to this crisis can be enacted within the 10 days Admiral Shanthi has indicated, logic dictates we do nothing.”

The room erupted once again, with Kushon's antennae almost buried in his white hair. Gorvak and Torrisi were shouting at one another, their arms flailing in an animated fashion, but Amitra remained seated – her eyes locked on T'lor,

who returned her stare with a stoic calm.

"Quiet, be quiet!" shouted the president as the volume rose. "Do you have anything more to add?" she asked, gesturing for T'lor to continue.

"That we can do nothing is not to say there is nothing that must be done. The Federation is larger than Earth, or Vulcan, or Andoria, or Tellar. We must ensure that whatever happens to these worlds, the Federation will continue. And we must learn all that we can of these Borg. I suggest reaching out to our respective governments and requisitioning any information that is perhaps hidden away in long forgotten vaults. We must make preparations for whatever will come next. There will not be adequate time to see to the needs of the many...so we must see to the needs of the few."

PRESIDENT AMITRA'S ADDRESS TO THE FEDERATION

ACCESS INCLUDED AUDIO FILE "03.07"

President Amitra's address from her office at the Palais de Concorde on stardate 43999.2 has gone down in Federation history as the "We Must Negotiate" speech. Her hope was that by appealing to the longstanding UFP tradition of rejecting force in favor of diplomacy, she would earn enough favor from the Federation people to give her the latitude to pursue her primary policy goals: peace with the Cardassian Empire and the downsizing of Starfleet. Failing to understand the true extent of the Borg threat, it was a terrible miscalculation.

This speech, along with her administration's policies of forced resettlement in the newly created demilitarized zone and the subsequent rise of violent anti-government extremism along the Cardassian border, doomed her political career. Amitra would go on to lose the presidential election of 2368 by one of the worst landslides in Federation history.



We interrupt regularly scheduled programming for the following address from the President of the United Federation of Planets...

[The screen cuts to an image of Amitra sitting at her desk in the presidential office. It is night in Paris. Behind her, the Eiffel Tower is lit with brilliant, dazzling lights. It creates an odd juxtaposition to the somberness of her tone.]

My fellow Federation citizens: as many of you are now aware, an unidentified alien vessel is now on a direct course for the Sol System. Initial transmissions received from this new species indicate that they call themselves the Borg. Sadly, I can now confirm that they have engaged and destroyed several Federation colonies along the borders of the Romulan Neutral Zone, including New Providence on Jouret IV. In addition, multiple starships and civilian transports have also been lost in subsequent skirmishes. All initial attempts to open a dialogue with the Borg or slow their progress into our space have failed.

We mourn our lost comrades, but we cannot allow their deaths to distract us from the true values the United Federation of Planets was founded on over two centuries ago. As commander-in-chief, I have ordered Starfleet to safeguard the inner planets of the Federation against further hostility, but also to pursue urgent and immediate first contact negotiations with the Borg. It is not too late to salvage a lasting peace from the maw of violence and destruction.

Even now, there are some voices in the opposition that are calling on a martial response to this incursion. I forcefully say to them, and to you, no crisis in the history of our Federation has ever been solved with military force. The Khitomer Accords with the Klingon Empire, the Cestus III Compromise with the Gorn Hegemony, and the Treaty of Algeron with the Romulan Empire all came into being through the fierce determination of diplomats, not the phasers and photon torpedoes of soldiers. It is also my dearest hope that soon my administration's negotiations with the Cardassian Empire will yield a similar lasting peace and prosperity for our two peoples. In the past, there have been similar voices saying that it was impossible to negotiate with these other adversarial powers, some of whom are now our closest allies.

As for the Borg, we can negotiate. We *must* negotiate. Compromise and coexistence are what we do. These principles are who we are: for the Federation is more than our colonies, our ships, our citizens, or even the Sol System itself. It is the idea that bloodshed and conflict must be prevented at all costs: even costs that initially seem too much to bear. To resort to fighting is to admit failure. I will not be the president who goes down in history as the one who betrays our values out of fear.

I promise that my administration will keep you informed as progress develops in negotiations with the Borg as well as do everything to prevent further loss of life. May providence continue to bless you all. Good night.

END OF FILE

TRANSCRIPT OF ADMIRALTY MEETING

ACCESS INCLUDED AUDIO FILE "3.08"

The following is an edited transcript of an unofficial meeting of Starfleet Vice Chief of Staff and select personnel on Stardate 44001.4. The recording is taken from security footage logged within Starfleet Command Headquarters in San Francisco, Earth.

Starfleet Intelligence partially declassified and approved the redacted holo-recording for public release on Stardate 63047.71.

FLAG OFFICERS PRESENT

Admiral Owen Paris
**VICE CHIEF OF STARFLEET
OPERATIONS**

Vice Admiral Thomas Henry
CHIEF OF STARFLEET SECURITY

Vice Admiral J.P. Hanson
CHIEF OF STARFLEET TACTICAL

Rear Admiral (Upper
Half) William Ross
CHIEF OF STARFLEET PLANS

Rear Admiral (Lower
Half) James Leyton
CHIEF OF STARFLEET PERSONNEL

Rear Admiral (Upper
Half) Norah Satie
**STARFLEET JUDGE
ADVOCATE GENERAL**



LEYTON: WHAT?! You cannot be serious! The CINC has signed off on this!?

HANSON: Surely, there must be some mistake. We cannot just sit by and do nothing, and we cannot just leave Earth to its own destruction!

ROSS: No one is talking about abandoning Earth. We have some contingencies in place and–

HENRY: Contingencies! Dammit Bill, this isn't some Zakdorn theoretical. We've lost contact with *Enterprise* and long-range sensors show that thing is making a beeline right here for Earth; it'll arrive in under a week!

LEYTON: Does the president have the legal authority to make a call like this? Surely the council will need to vote and you know how that will go – it'll be weeks before they can even agree to recognize the Borg as a threat–

SATIE: She does have the authority, and with the Core-Four on board she won't need to worry about the council issuing a veto.

HENRY: How the hell did she get Torrissi on board for this!? Promised him and family a spot on *Paris One* as they warp out of the system? Maybe we could go directly to the UEG [**United Earth Government**] with a proposal we can get them to authorize–

HANSON: Authorize what? We don't have the ships to evacuate Luna, nevermind Earth. Based on our simulations, we could throw every ship in the sector at this cube and it would barely slow it down. If we're to stand a chance, we need to be thinking not just outside the box – but outside *geometry*!

LEYTON: "Outside geometry"? J.P., do you even *hear* yourself? The president is talking about abandoning Sector 001 to the Borg while not even telling the population until the Borg are in system, and you sound like some preschool teacher teaching *shapes*!

HANSON: *You listen here, Leyton–*

ALL: [Arguing]

[ADMIRAL PARIS enters the room.]

PARIS: WILL YOU KEEP YOUR VOICES DOWN! I could hear you from the *turbolift*!

You're all lucky it's the middle of the damn night and the floor is largely empty! I don't even expect this kind of behavior from first year cadets, nevermind two thirds of the *admiralty*! I need cool heads and collected officers, and if you aren't able to do that then tell me now and get the hell out of the building!

ROSS: Sorry, Sir – I think we just needed to get it out of our system. It's done now; won't happen again.

LEYTON: Now, just a minute–

ROSS: I said we're done! **[To PARIS]** Sir, we've heard some disturbing things about the president's meeting with the Core-Four; can you shed any light?

[PARIS moves around to the chair behind the desk and sinks into it.]

PARIS: Well, given the volume, I suspect that the grapevine has been fairly reliable in this instance. There's no way to evacuate a statistically significant proportion of the population of Earth in the time we think we have – nevermind the rest of the system. Even if we could get the people off the surface, we have nowhere to move them. The president feels – and the CINC and I agree – that even if we presented the facts, most people just wouldn't believe us. By the time the true scope of the situation became apparent, it would lead to mass panic and hinder any possible response we might be able to make against the Borg. As has been pointed out, the Federation is larger than any one world – even Earth. We have a responsibility to ensure the safety of the entire Federation. Therefore, we are going to consolidate and regroup the fleet to prepare a response to the Borg at a later date.

HENRY: So, Starfleet's just going to quietly sulk away from the system and hope they don't disturb anyone as we head off with our nacelles between our legs?

PARIS: No, we are going to regroup, redeploy, gather intelligence, and ensure that if Earth *does* fall, it will not be in vain. It will buy us time to develop counterstrategies and to call in allies. See if SI has any other little secrets they aren't telling us about. **[PARIS looks pointedly at ROSS]** Let me be blunt, this is the greatest threat to the Federation in the past century, perhaps since its inception. Nothing any of us have faced personally will compare to what we are about to have to endure, and I use that word advisedly because we will *have* to endure some tough choices and make some calls that will make us sick to our stomachs. But...to quote Spock: "the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few."

HANSON: So if we aren't going to evacuate the system and aren't going to make a stand, what *are* we going to do?

PARIS: Well, that's what we're going to have to decide. This is uncharted space, and we have no stellar cartography to guide us. The president will address a closed session of the council tomorrow, and the CINC will broadcast a message to Starfleet ships and personnel at the same time. The exact wording is still being worked out, but in effect it will be what I have told you here: the Borg are coming, we don't have time to evacuate Earth or the resources to take them on head-to-head. So, we're going to evacuate key personnel and equipment to where we can, and prepare resistance operations for any Starfleet personnel who remain. There will be a meeting of the admiralty once the CINC is ready to make her statement and issue her orders, but we'll see a sizable proportion of the fleet returning to Sol to oversee the personnel transfer.

LEYTON: Well, where are they going to go? If the Borg are as dangerous and unstoppable as you say, is anywhere safe?

PARIS: The president and council will likely be sent to an alpha site. They haven't settled on where yet, but it won't be on any of the core worlds. The Borg only *seem* unstoppable because we don't understand them, and to do that we need time – the more, the better. In the meantime, I need you all rested and on your A game. So go home or to your offices and get some rest. Tomorrow is going to be hell, it's going to get worse, and I don't know when it will get better.

ROSS: Well, you know what they say if you find yourself walking through hell?

PARIS: No?

HANSON: Keep walking.



ROBERT DESOTO

JOSEPH M'BENGA MEDICAL CENTER, EARTH

Stardate 45904.2 – 2368

The Joseph M'Benga Medical Center, located in Nigeria on the African continent, is widely regarded as a center of excellence for treatment and rehabilitation of Starfleet personnel – rivaled only, perhaps, by the facilities on Endicronimas V. I first meet Captain Robert DeSoto here some 18 months after the Borg Incursion. He smiles and greets me warmly, offering to give me a tour around "his current digs." We walk through the expansive gardens and chat amiably as he points out other residents and the wildlife beyond the gardens' perimeter.

We eventually return to the main complex and head to his quarters where he offers me a drink. I decline as I take out the PADD and holorecorder to document the interview. The captain sits and stares into the amber liquid in the glass for a long moment. Despite his cheery temperament, there is real pain hidden behind his eyes. He downs the drink in a single action and asks with a smile if I am ready to begin. I press record.

We had just arrived in the Ross 128 System. Starfleet had been looking to upgrade the subspace patch relays since, oh, the mid-2330s and had finally gotten around to it. They needed to increase the network's gain and bandwidth for all this new fancy science they were anticipating the *Galaxy*-class ships would transmit once they finally got out and did some exploring. The SCE had a couple ships – the *Brunel* and the *Rutan* – out there performing latency tests. But, as usual, they encountered an issue and needed something delivered.

That was pretty much our bread and butter. *Excelsiors* were getting on – especially the Flight I ships like *Hood* – and with the fleet retiring the *Constellation* and *Binary*-class ships, more and more it was the *Mirandas* and *Excelsiors* out there holding the Federation together. It was a lot of ferry work and resupply. After we finished in Ross 128, we were due to head to Benzar to collect a delegation that was coming to establish their embassy on Andoria, and then who knows – some admiral would probably want to perform an inspection of some starbase which might just happen to pass close to Risa. Just another glorious day in the fleet.

I knew a few of the officers on the *Rutan*. Alisson Obena was our chief engineer, so despite our lowly profile as sector-wide couriers, we were still a prime seat for cadets right out the academy. A lot of officers had passed through *Hood* and we like to keep tabs on our little birds after they've left the nest, so we had a small get-together in the officers' mess. Nothing too fancy – second-shelf synthohol only – when we received a message from Starfleet to drop everything and head back to Earth.

Now that on its own isn't *too* unusual. Spend enough time in space, and you learn pretty quickly that "you're the only ship in the sector" and they need you to go deal with whatever the crisis of the week is. But like I said, *Hood* wasn't exactly the prom queen she had been in her youth, and we weren't the only ship in the sector. We were at Ross 128, which in galactic terms is pretty much at the end of the street from Earth and Vulcan.

Then we received hails from the *Brunel* and the *Rutan* at the same time, recalling their officers. They had *also* received orders to drop everything and to head to Earth. This was even more curious because they were in the middle of the relay upgrades, and if they left now not only would the upgrades not be complete, but the network wouldn't be operational at all, and would *disrupt* network traffic over a dozen systems.

I made my way to the bridge and tried to hail Starfleet for confirmation. Recalling three ships back to Earth was damn peculiar, and our mission to Benzar was time-sensitive. We needed to get the Benzite delegation to Andoria before the winter storms made venturing outside the compound unpleasant. I could imagine their rebreathers freezing up, and that wouldn't be fun for anyone.

There was no reply from command directly, but we picked up the *Calliope* and the *Spengler* heading from Arcturus and asked if they had any information. They'd been due to head out to the Cardassian border to supply the *Al-Batani* and the *Rutledge*, but had been recalled to Earth, too. We picked up multiple signals of starships now on course for Earth.

In the absence of any more information, I decided to follow in the best traditions of the service. I sat down, shut up, and did what I was told. We set a course back to Earth. As we passed out of the system's gravity well and went to warp, we received orders on the ESCAR [Emergency Subspace Code-Aligned

Relay] channel. That hadn't been used much during my time as captain, but as I read the message I knew whatever was going on was big. I ordered the ship to maximum warp and started to reach out to some of our flock to find out what was going on. I wasn't really worried; things like this come up from time to time, and ships named *Enterprise*, *Excelsior*, or *Excalibur* are sent out to save the day. We just had to hop between starbases and make sure the admirals got to their meetings on time.

HYRI THEVARAJAH

SPACEDOCK, EARTH ORBIT

Stardate 47456.7 – 2370

There are numerous space stations and orbital facilities throughout the Sol System and the Federation, but when someone mentioned Spacedock they are inevitably referring to the Stamets-class facility in a geosynchronous orbit over San Francisco on Earth. This mushroom-shaped station has become the template for large Federation installations throughout the 24th century and is as potent a symbol of the Federation and Starfleet as the Constitution-class starship was in the 23rd. But the venerable station's days are numbered as plans are now underway to construct a replacement station better able to cope with the larger starships and increased tempo of ship movements in the Sol System following the events of 2367.

I meet with Hyri Theverajah, the Sri Lankan commander of Spacedock, in his ready room. It looks out over the cavernous main dock where a number of starships are bathed in the blue glow of the lumens as shuttlecraft and workbees buzz back and forth between the ships and the station. The giant space doors are open to allow the Vulcan cruiser Sh'vhal to depart with a contingent from the Vulcan Science Academy – its copper hull and warp ring at odds with the gray-nacelled starships most commonly found in the dock.

Typically, there are maybe a dozen starship movements in and around Spacedock on a given day – I'm talking starships, mind you. There are close to 500 movements of shuttlecraft or auxiliaries between Earth, other orbitals or starships. Spacedock has primary responsibility for all of Earth's orbital traffic.

It might not seem the most glamorous posting in all of Starfleet. We aren't out there on the frontier or seeking out first contacts, but it's stations like ours that keep the wheels turning and make sure that there are ships ready to get to where they are needed.

2366 was a strange time on the station. Spacedock was old even then; despite being such a powerful symbol for Starfleet as the template for the Stamets-class orbital docks, it was too small for anything larger than Ambassador-class, and the computer systems were long overdue an upgrade – many dated back to when the station was commissioned! In the end, it just wasn't a massive priority, and Starfleet couldn't afford to be without its main

Earth Spacedock for the time it would take for the upgrades. So, time and technology marched on and the Spacedock just kept on spinning.

It was around zero dark thirty when the station went to Red Alert. None of us had the faintest idea what was going on, but we were professional: we secured the station and started looking to understand what had caused it.

I was the duty officer and I looked around ops to find out what had triggered the alarm. There had been no alerts, there were no ship movements inside the dock – sensors showed nothing had violated the perimeter zone, atmosphere was intact, no pressure losses indicated. It looked like the station had decided to declare a Red Alert all on its own. We were just lucky there were no departures or arrivals scheduled, because those space doors were not opening until we could identify the cause.

Standard procedure was to lock down all ships inside the dock, too. So, almost immediately I had a dozen extremely urgent communication requests coming in from every ship inside the dock.

I didn't know what to tell them, but procedure is procedure. Until we knew what had happened we were going to follow it. If nothing else, it would be a good opportunity to run the drills, keep the skills sharp, and try and get things sorted.

We established pretty quickly that whatever had tripped the Red Alert did not come from inside the station – no admirals were trying to steal any starships today! I was just about ready to write it off as a technical malfunction, another symptom of the station's deterioration, when engineering told us it wasn't a technical issue: the alert had been triggered by Starfleet Command!

I found this hard to believe. We hadn't had any warnings of a drill or exercise being scheduled. It was only then that we noticed there was no comms traffic coming in from Starfleet at all. We tried to raise command, but the network was busy! I spoke with the chief and we both figured it must be an issue with the comms array, so we tried to hail McKinley Station. We got through right away and they told us the exact same thing had happened to them – that something had triggered a Red Alert and locked down the station. They had been in contact with Clydebank and San Francisco yards and all reported the same thing. We were about to just beam down to the surface when we received an automated message invoking the V'Ger Protocols! No one had any idea what that meant.

We all knew the story about V'Ger, about that massive ship that approached Earth back in the 2370s, but what were the *V'Ger Protocols*?

It became a moot point almost immediately, because suddenly we received incoming ship alerts. It wasn't hostiles or anything like that; it was Starfleet ships – dozens at first, then hundreds! It felt like every ship in the sector was making for Sol, and since Spacedock was STC [**Space Traffic Control**] it was pandemonium. I had docking requests, ships needing resupply, calls asking for status updates. Captain after captain hailing asking us what was going on and why had they been recalled. No one could get through to command, so we became the target of their ire.

We'd already docked as many ships as we could, sending some ships out to Mars and Jupiter Station – while we tried to get some answers from command. It was then that the president made her address to the people of Earth and the Federation. You know, the one about unprecedented events and nothing to worry about. [**there is almost a sneer in his voice as he recalls the message**] What a load of whaleshit that was.

During the broadcast, Admirals Paris and Hanson beamed aboard. They told us they were taking command of the station, and ordered a secure office and briefing room prepared right away. I headed back to ops and just stared at the orbital plots. I'd never seen that many ships in my entire career – no one had. And from the sounds of it more were on the way. I remember turning to the chief and we just shared this look. I think we both were concerned about the same thing.

♦ The Borg?

No, no, we hadn't even heard the name "Borg" at that point. No – we both knew that the STC system was already close to breaking point, and we had just put it under more stress than it was ever designed for. It was just a matter of time before there was a collision, and with this threat inbound for Sol how could we warn the powers that be that there was another disaster brewing already?

BOOTHBY

STARFLEET ACADEMY, EARTH

Stardate 47601.3 — 2370

It is said that the single wisest individual in all of Starfleet Academy is a humble groundskeeper simply called "Boothby." No one knows if this is his first name or last, he is simply Boothby, a legend among cadets, and he has been a fixture at the academy since the turn of the 24th century. He diligently tends the academy grounds and gardens, transforming them into one of the Federation's foremost botanical gardens. It is rumored that beneath the cranky exterior, he possesses a preternatural sense for what a cadet needs to be all they can be. Many a captain or admiral will freely admit that they would not have survived the rigors of the academy without Boothby's counsel. Yet, despite the notoriety, he remains largely an enigma.

I had no history with Boothby myself, but Admiral Holland suggested I seek him out for a unique perspective on what took place there during the events of the Borg Incursion. I find him with a cart filled with exotic flowers and a freshly turned bed of soil.

Look, Kid, I don't have time to gab. I need to get these Bajoran azaleas settled before sundown. So if you want to talk, then you work.

♦ I...er...okay...

[I kneel down and start passing the flowers from the cart to Boothby.]

Right, that's better. So, you want to know about 2366 right? The Borg? Yeah, I figured as much. I've seen you around the campus talking to folk. There's not much that escapes the academy scuttlebutt. I guess it was just a matter of time before you came to speak to me. I take it you read my file?

♦ No? I was just told that Boothby was someone I should talk to if I wanted to get a real sense of mood at the academy.

Really? So you don't know?

♦ Know what?

I'm El-Aurian, Kid. Came to the Federation on the *Lakul* back in '93 after the Borg destroyed my home. My wife and I were lucky enough to find our way

onto a refugee ship headed to the Federation. We just wanted to get as far away from the Borg as possible, start a new life...

My wife, Anealle – she was the real gardener, you know? She had the heart of an explorer, the mind of a scientist, and the greenest thumbs this side of the Antares Maelstrom. We spent *centuries* traveling the stars, and she collected shrubs, plants, and trees from across the galaxy. Our greenhouse on El-Auria had them all, and she treated each and every one like a child. However, her favorites were the roses we gathered on Earth when we visited in the 1920s. You shoulda seen how she primped and preened those things. When the Borg were on their way, we realized we would have to leave her plants behind. The only thing we could take were a handful of rose seeds from her favorite bush. I promised we would find a new place to plant them. Leaving that greenhouse absolutely devastated her, but she kept calm and carried on.

She was wounded when the *Lakul* exploded...died right there in the sickbay on the *Enterprise-B*. Don't blame Starfleet though – those young officers did absolutely everything they could to save her. Knew I wanted to find a way to pay them back, somehow.

[He pauses and briefly tills the soil as he looks out at the dozens of rose bushes spread across the academy's Japanese Gardens. Then, he abruptly shifts topics.]

Back in '66, I'd sensed something was up for a while. I couldn't really put a finger on it. Felt a little like the coming of winter – a change in the air. I'm not sure I could really describe it to you. El-Aurians have a sense of these things. I knew something dark was coming, I heard some cadets talking about an encounter with a race of "cybernetic zombies" and I knew then they were coming for me.

♦ Did you try to warn anyone?

Warn them of what? The bogeyman? Starfleet already knew about the Borg after they rescued us, and what would a *gardener* be able to tell them that their best and brightest wouldn't already know? No, I knew they were coming, but I wasn't going to run this time. I decided I was going to stay put and not make the same mistake of leaving a garden behind again. Starfleet wasn't too worried. I think they assumed the Borg were far enough away that they weren't an immediate threat, but I knew it was a case of sooner rather than later before the Borg showed up here.

They had lost contact with a colony and sent the *Enterprise* out to deal with it. It's a bit of a cliché that if you just throw an *Enterprise* at the problem, then it will all work out in the end. But like I said: I have firsthand experience that there are some things even ships called *Enterprise* can't do. Rumors started circulating that there had been some kind of incident; it was very hazy at first. Some said the *Enterprise* had been destroyed. Some said it was just damaged and then boarded. I tried to focus on the plants and the gardens, but the rumors were flying faster than a tachyon relay station on game day.

Command was really dragging its feet keeping the cadets informed. I guess they didn't have a good handle on what was happening either, but you know how nature abhors a vacuum. So the rumors just continued to fly and got wilder by the hour, but there was no sense of panic. No one was really all that concerned. After all, it was half a quadrant away and there was an *Enterprise* on the case. Not a single person would have believed that Earth itself was about to become the focus of the Borg's attention, and to be perfectly frank, I don't think they appreciate just how close they came to disaster even now. Can you pass me that trowel?

[I pass him the mud-caked trowel from the cart and he continues digging into the flower bed.]

Thank you. I have to admit I found it the most surreal experience; there was this foe, this force on Starfleet's doorstep. Do you know there are species in the Delta and Beta Quadrants that the very mention of the name "Borg" will reduce their warriors to a whimpering mess? Some species even offer sacrifices to try and appease them; put young women or children into shuttlecraft and launch them into Borg space in the hope it will appease those devils and spare their world. These aren't primitive cultures or backwater civilizations either; just the scramblings of desperate people who've seen the approaching storm and decided that they might as well pray because nothing else seems to work.

It was absolutely incredible that everyone here spent that time as though it was any other month: cadets went to class, starships came and went, and I still received my fertilizer shipments right on time. It seemed so safe and tranquil – totally at odds with the knot that was growing in my stomach. I did start to wonder if maybe I should say something. Then I finally started to notice a change in the admirals and higher ranking officers as they moved through the grounds or headed across the Golden Gate to command. They weren't strolling so much as striding, and I could tell that something had dawned on them.

Now, I don't know exactly what happened, but it's pretty clear there was a massive breakdown with the higher-ups. All of a sudden, there were starships warping in from all over the quadrant. Then, all Earth-based Starfleet installations went to Red Alert. I couldn't even tell you last time I'd seen that. It all just seemed to confuse everyone even more. It wasn't until Shanti's address that most people even heard the name "Borg" for the first time. Even then, it was so downplayed as "*potentially hostile*" and "*possible* course to Earth." I'm not sure if she actually believed that or they had to tell people something, and wanted to keep it as mundane and unthreatening as possible to prevent a panic.

I had heard stories from El-Auria from folks who had just cleared the atmosphere when the Borg arrived. There's something truly horrific about realizing that, despite all your technological wonders, you can't save everyone or get out of the way. The panic from my people who couldn't get away...well, I don't really want to think about that. But that on its own could have done as much damage as the Borg without them even entering the system.

WILLIAM ROSS

PHILADELPHIA, EARTH

Stardate 57436.2 – 2380

In 2366, when the Borg invaded the Federation it was the single greatest crisis Starfleet had faced in almost a century. But it was itself overshadowed by a series of geopolitical upheavals that rocked the Federation, and the entire quadrant. Most devastating was the war with the Dominion, a large oppressive regime that originated in the Gamma Quadrant and found its way across the galaxy through the Bajoran wormhole. They found willing allies in the shape of the Cardassians and Breen to wage a bloody assault on the Federation, Klingon, and Romulan Empires, and all free peoples of the quadrant. One of the shining lights of that time and architects of Starfleet's eventual victory was Admiral William Ross.

While Ross's determination and resilience during the Dominion War are largely the stuff of legend today, he was also instrumental in helping to shape Starfleet's response to the Borg, and credits that crisis as the driving force that transformed Starfleet into an organization able to resist and then defeat the Dominion. Recently retired from Starfleet, I meet Admiral Ross in Philadelphia where he is speaking to promote his newly published memoirs.

Those days leading up to the Borg arriving in Sol were far from our finest hour. It was a mess. Very quickly it became apparent that Starfleet was stuck in the mindset of a post-Khitomer galaxy, and wasn't ready to face the challenges of the latter 24th century. We'd already seen some of that with the Tzenkethi and Cardassians. Hell, even the *Ferengi* gave us the runaround for a few years – but we were safe and secure in the knowledge that the Federation had faced down every threat and foe that had ever threatened its security, and not only *overcame* those challenges, but thrived. The lesson we learned was not that space is a dangerous place but that Starfleet always comes through.

Now, please don't mistake me for one of those old admirals longing for the past, or thinking everything used to be a bed of roses. I'm not – but Starfleet itself was fundamentally different. The academy taught cadets about the value of losing. Everyone knows about the Kobayashi Maru tests, but we stopped using that in the 2320s and moved to the psych tests, which are a far better assessment of a potential cadet's response to stress. The Kobayashi Maru, however, forced cadets to face up to the idea of failure, of the no-win

scenario. We stopped believing in the no-win scenario, too; so when it finally arrived on our shore we were not equipped to deal with it.

Hindsight is always 20/20, so it's very easy for me to sit here and criticize, but at the time the CINC and Paris were trying to keep ahead of a situation that was trying to warp away from them at all times. They were *also* dealing with a recently belligerent executive branch that neither side really trusted, and with the fog of war in full effect it was a minor miracle things went as well as they did. I'm not talking about the "*deus ex machina*" that Riker managed to pull off. Things could have gotten very very messy down on the ground here on Earth, and I have to give credit to Amitra. The work she'd done with the Cardassians stopped them taking advantage of the situation. I have no doubt that if they had known what was happening on Earth, they would have stormed across the DMZ and annexed every system within a three light-year radius.

As I said, we were stuck thinking of the galaxy with us vs the Klingons, and the Romulans lurking out on the periphery – still expecting to fight the last war. Actually, no, that's not true – because we didn't recognize this as a war.

It was different with the Dominion: that was an enemy we could understand. They had fleets, they had soldiers, they sought territory and resources. The Borg were unlike anything we have encountered. Even today, they're more like an approaching natural disaster. The reality of the situation hadn't sunk in yet, and I don't think it has even now. Doing the impossible has become something of the *raison d'être* for the best Starfleet captains.

The problem was *time*. We had ships, we had the resources, and we had the best scientific minds in the quadrant – but we just didn't have enough time to bring any of that to bear in a meaningful way. The Borg had arrived far, far sooner than even our most pessimistic projections said they would, and had managed to completely bypass Romulan space. Now they had disabled the most advanced starship we had, and taken one of our most experienced commanders off the board. I think the whole Picard situation unnerved people more than anything else. We all knew Jean-Luc; he could be a pain in the ass but he was pretty much the poster boy for Starfleet in the 24th century. He literally WAS Starfleet and just like that...[snaps fingers]

[He moves over to a decanter and pours himself a drink. I decline the wordless invitation and

he takes the tumbler and sits back down with a sigh.]

So there we were: leaders of the most powerful force in the quadrant, sitting around a conference table willing the tide to stop advancing like we were some English king of old. But the galaxy doesn't work that way. We tell ourselves that we're the best because we are better, nobler, wiser than the Cardassians, the Dominion, the Borg..and we are – or at least we aspire to be.

"Si vis pacem, para bellum": do you know what that means? "If you want peace, prepare for war." It's attributed to the Roman writer Vegetius; not a very Federation ideal, and not something I think anyone would have dared utter prior to '66, but throughout the history of every surviving civilization it has rung true. I think we had forgotten that prior to the Borg's arrival, and we were very lucky it wasn't the end of us right there and then. But perversely, it *did* mean we were better prepared for when the Dominion arrived.

Amitra was right: the Federation is larger than any one system. But if that was the case, I was determined that we would make them pay for every soul that would be left behind should we have to abandon the system. Still, the most frustrating thing was the impotence we all felt – the inability to do anything to slow down the Borg. I was going back through mission logs and archives trying to glean any ideas from previous encounters. We even dispatched a ship to Gateway, but they would not arrive there before the Borg arrived at Earth. Once DTI found out, all hell broke loose, but it was apparent that we needed some fourth dimensional thinking to survive.

It was while reviewing those old logs we came across the mentions of a "planet killer," an automated device of massive destructive power that was encountered a century prior, which had been powerful enough to destroy entire systems and use the rubble as fuel. It has been speculated that it was everything from a weapon from an ancient war, some form of "Von Neuman" probe which had malfunctioned, to some form of synthetic life-form. It had been rendered inert by the *Constellation* and Jim Kirk's *Enterprise*, and had shown no signs of activity since. I got on the comm channel to find out what had happened to it; I figured it was likely tucked away in some research yard and maybe – just *maybe* – someone was sitting on an antiproton beam or something that we could use that would have some effect on the Borg.

As it transpired, no such luck. They'd never been able to even pierce the shell of the device, and it seems there was a lot of hesitation to even attempt any serious efforts to reactivate it. With no method to control it, they were worried it would run riot again and the only way they were able to stop it originally was with a warp core breach down its maw – and I don't mean the drink!

No, that was a dead end, but I was convinced the answer lay somewhere in those logs and in those research sites. Then I found what I was looking for: an El-Aurian scientist of all people, conducting experiments on gravitational force effects on stellar mass reactions. It's the sort of research which, when viewed out of context, could be extremely controversial – so it was being kept very low key. Still, there was the beginning of an idea forming. I felt almost giddy; for the first time in days, it felt like a fog had been lifted.

I got on the comm to J.P. Hanson and asked him to come directly to my quarters. I didn't want to talk about this on a comm until I was certain we had a solid idea. If this was going to work, we would need to try and find a way to slow down the Borg – at least get them to drop out of warp. That was not without risks of its own. By the time the door chimed, I was frantic with energy and just pacing around my quarters as J.P. came in. He'd barely been back in system 12 hours at that point.

I told him "I think I have a plan to stop them before they get to Sol." He looked me square in the eye, and he looked so old at that moment, I think he was blaming himself for *Enterprise*, for Shelby – for not being more assertive over the years as he watched tactical shrink further and further down Starfleet's order of priorities. Unfairly, you understand; no one fought harder to remind us all of that core mission. If it wasn't for Hanson, we wouldn't have survived the Borg, or the Dominion.

"What is it?" he asked in barely a whisper.

"What do you know about the stellar observatory at Wolf 359..."

JAKE SISKO

NEW ORLEANS, EARTH

Stardate 58036.4 – 2381

Benjamin Sisko is a giant of the 24th century: a pivotal figure in the Dominion War, Emissary of the Prophets, and religious icon to the Bajoran people – but to Jake Sisko he was simply “Dad.”

In the years following what the Bajorans call his father’s “ascension,” Jake has made a name for himself as a fellow of the prestigious Pennington School, and author of the acclaimed novels Anslem, Muse, and Nor the Battle to the Strong.

His home is simple and rustic: a writing desk occupies one side of the office, and a collection of framed photos on shelves below collections of bound paper books. His Bajoran wife, Korena, brings tea and sets a plate of hasperat – offering to stay if Jake wants. But he gives her a kiss and tells her he will be fine. She leaves, closing the door behind her as we sit in a pair of comfortable wingback chairs.

I remember waking up one day on Deep Space Nine and realizing that I couldn’t remember my mother. I mean – I knew what she looked like, and I could catch glimpses and remember moments...but I realized that when I thought about her it wasn’t memories of her, more this idea of her. I couldn’t remember the smell of her perfume, the sound of her laugh, or what it felt like when she carried me. I’d spent so long burying those memories and deliberately not thinking about her that, now when I tried to, I couldn’t. I think that’s when I decided to become a writer. I never spoke to Dad about it; he had so much to deal with and I knew that thinking about Mom was difficult for him, too. So I would try to remember as much as I could and write it down. I figured that after the war and once he had married Kasidy, we could sit down together and he would help me fill in the blanks – but the Prophets had other ideas.

I know he was away a lot when I was very little, but I didn’t find out until much later that he was on the *Okinawa* out on the Tzenkethi border. Mom and I stayed with my grandfather in New Orleans. Apparently Dad came back on shore leave one time and I cried the house down when he picked me up – I had no idea who this strange man was! Grandpa said that broke Dad’s heart. He decided then to transfer from engineering to command, and sought an assignment where he could be closer to me and Mom.

I don't know why we ended up on the *Saratoga*. But I *do* remember being really excited at the prospect of living on a starship. I have this image of us traveling up in a shuttle; I think it was my first time actually in space and I sat on Dad's knee. I think he was letting me "fly" the shuttle – there's a holophoto over there.

[He points over to a shelf covered with framed photos. In one a young clean shaven Benjamin Sisko is smiling with his then five-year-old son on his lap. His wife, Jennifer, has her arms around them both also smiling brightly. Jake's attention is on the console in front of him.]

It was very different from living on Earth. The *Saratoga* didn't have holodecks or the modern comforts of the newer, larger ships; I was a little claustrophobic at first, but I loved the arboretum. Mom and Dad would take me there to run around, burn off excess energy, and play. There was a small pond and someone told me that there were fish in there and I would beg Dad to take me fishing to find the fish – hey, I was seven.

When we arrived on board, there were only a couple of other kids on the ship and they were both older than me, so I was a little starved for friends. But the entire crew was like an extended family. Dad loved to cook, so we'd often have other members of the crew over for dinner. When Captain Storil came aboard, he was the first Vulcan I had ever seen. Dad seemed a little wary at first, and I guess I must have picked up on that because I was *terrified*; I wouldn't go near him, and even hid in my room when he came to dinner. At some point he came into the room and found me under the bed. He explained that it would be highly illogical to go hungry when my father had prepared such a wonderful meal, offered his hand, and then patiently put up with every inane question an seven-year-old could possibly ask. Mostly about his ears. Dad told me he and Mom were mortified, but Storil just calmly answered every question and asked me questions back. He then taught me how to perform the *ta'al*.

[He demonstrates the *ta'al*/greeting of a "V" with the index and middle finger separated from the ring and pinky fingers.]

That night I told my parents that I was going to become a Vulcan, and spent the rest of that week driving them to distraction saying everything was logical and fascinating. I even got Dad to make Plomeek Soup, but it couldn't compete with his jambalaya. **[he pauses and chuckles to himself]** I'd forgotten about that. Like I said, I've spent a lot of time deliberately *not* thinking about the *Saratoga*.

I couldn't tell you where we were or what we were doing when we were sent back to Earth. I do know it wasn't scheduled, though. I was with the tutor in their quarters with the other kids, when we exited warp and I could see Earth. I ran to the window in my excitement; I was the only Human from Earth in the class and bounced about with excitement until I tore out of the room and ran back to our quarters – forgetting the trouble I had previously gotten in for running in the corridors and colliding with a Bolian. When I got back to our quarters, Dad was there with Mom. Looking back, I think they were uneasy, but I was just too excited. I was jumping up and down, excited to go visit Grandpa. I wanted to take my friends to see New Orleans and show them the restaurant, but Dad crouched down and told me that we couldn't go and visit.

I didn't understand what was going on – I don't think anyone really knew. I was oblivious to the tension in the air and all the other ships that were in the system. All I knew was we were above Earth, and I wasn't being allowed to visit Grandpa. I wasn't even allowed to call him on the comms. That resulted in a bit of a tantrum. I said some unkind things to both Mom and Dad, then stormed into my room. A little while later Mom came in and asked if I wanted to go to the arboretum. Dad had left for a briefing with the captain and I nearly kicked off again when I heard that – if he was going down to the surface anyway, why couldn't I have gone with him! But Mom knew how to head me off, and told me she had something special to show me. Curiosity warred with the sense of injustice until we got to the arboretum and stared out the large windows looking out into space.

There were more starships than I had ever seen at that point, probably the largest fleet of ships assembled before the Dominion War. There was even a *Galaxy*-class sitting out there. We had learned about them in school, and I'd built a model out of craft supplies that hung over my bed. I pressed my face up against the window, transfixed by all those ships. I remember Mom just sitting there watching. I kept pointing out ships and spouting facts and names. At one point, she scooped me up in a hug, but I just wriggled to get away from her and get back to the window.

I can't imagine what was going through my parents' minds at the time. I don't know if they knew about what was coming. Did they know about the Borg at all? Did they know what Starfleet had planned for the *Saratoga*?

I wish I could remember what it felt like to hug my mom...

MARIE PICARD

LA BARRE, EARTH

Stardate 49827.5 – 2372

The Picards can trace their roots back to the time of Charlemagne in the eighth century, and have been perfecting the art of winemaking since at least the 1800s – when Françoise de Picard returned after a miraculous escape from a sinking ship at the Battle of Trafalgar and decided to establish a vineyard. Château Picard had survived three world wars and continued to produce wine under the guidance of the Picard family for over 500 years until it was tragically destroyed by fire in 2371, taking the life of vigneron Robert Picard and his son, René. His widow, Marie, took it upon herself to restore the house and ensure the family's legacy would continue. I meet with Marie in the newly restored house. There is a noticeable lack of 24th century design or devices in the building and its surroundings; it looks much like a farmhouse in the French countryside would have looked in the 19th century.

Growing up in the village you could not escape the celebrity of the Picards. The Chateau was famous across the Federation. Wine has been produced here for over 500 years, served to Klingon chancellors, and launched more than a few Federation starships. People flocked from all over to visit the vineyard and see this little curiosity for themselves – to marvel at the fields where they would tend to the grapes by hand, still used basket presses, and insisted on relying on traditional winemaking techniques...and to take part in one of Robert's legendary wine tasting sessions. I don't think he was ever happier than when he was talking about grapes. He would captivate his audience with his dramatic flair; he was a great loss to the arts, but his heart always belonged to the grapes. Even after we were married, I had to share.

I wanted nothing to do with them at first. As a young girl, I thought it outrageously unfair that this family had such a wonderful vineyard and I did not. Of course, we had a wonderful house in the village; built in the early 21st century, with ample space and several replicators, but why couldn't we have the vineyard – the impetuosity of youth! My father would calmly try to explain that the Picards had the vineyard because they had always had it – since before the Federation – and for as long as the Picards wanted to make wine, it would remain theirs. I asked why we couldn't have our own but Federation socio-economics are a bit beyond a five-year-old.

After I had finished university and *just* when I was planning to escape, I met Robert and he made it his mission to woo me and make me his wife. So, I ended up with a vineyard after all.

Robert was many things, but above all he was proud: proud of his family's legacy, proud of the grapes and of the wine, so very, very proud of René, and he was also proud of his brother Jean-Luc. They had a...complicated relationship, a falling out when they were children. I know their father, Maurice, was a troubled imposing man. He was something of a luddite – absolutely terrified of computers and our reliance upon them. He feared that Humanity had become so intertwined with our technology that we could no longer function without it. If you took it all away we would just drop dead he would declare. I never cared much for Maurice, and I think it was he that drove the wedge between his sons and why Robert never reached out to Jean-Luc – out of loyalty to his father. Robert never discussed his mother. I never even met Jean-Luc until after...well, it was a long time before I met him. But Robert would speak of him often.

While Robert insisted on only using traditional techniques for the vineyard, he was a far more practical man than his father. We had a comms terminal *and* an LCARS interface. Robert was always eager to hear any news about Jean-Luc, and would be notified if there was any mention on feeds or any articles published on the nets. When he was made captain of the *Enterprise*, Robert was ecstatic. You wouldn't know it to look, but he was – even opened a bottle of the 2309, one of the finest vintages the family has ever made. I asked why he didn't message Jean-Luc, invite him home, share the bottle with him...but he would have nothing of it. As I said, a complicated relationship. He loved his brother, but his pride wouldn't let him show it.

2366 had been a fantastic harvest. The previous two years hadn't been the Chateau's best, and Robert was feeling frustrated as he tried to break out of the shadow of his father. But it felt like, finally, Robert was establishing himself as a true vigneron every bit as good as his father. René was growing so fast, and had started to develop an interest in the stars. Robert took him to the Smithsonian to see the *Phoenix*, and I started to hope that maybe René would be the link that might bring the brothers back together. I suggested inviting Jean-Luc home, but Robert would insist "that the arrogant son of a bitch had no time for this provincial vineyard and had far more important things to do than come and look at grapes." It was just Robert's way of deflecting; I don't think he knew what he

would say to his brother after all these years. I was an only child, but I imagine the bond between siblings to be quite unique, and I could tell that Robert keenly missed it – even if he would not admit it to himself.

It was around December, I believe, and Robert had come into the house looking for a tricorder. It had been Jean-Luc's as a child and now René had claimed it for his own. *[she smiles as she wipes away a tear]* It was his favorite thing in the world, classic 23rd century design: black finish, silver highlights. He would run around the entire vineyard scanning everything. Robert needed it now to help him identify what was wrong with some of the vines; he feared they were sick, but if he could scan them and know for sure before they showed symptoms, he could prevent any disease from spreading. He stopped in the kitchen while I was preparing lunch. I needed to discuss hiring more staff if this year's harvest was going to be as good as he anticipated

That's when the comm started to chirp. It was an unusual tone that we hadn't heard before. Even before we could go to activate it, it switched on, and we saw the seal of the UFP. It was the emergency broadcasting system. I didn't even know that was still a thing, but we gave it our attention as the seal of the Federation was replaced with President Amitra sitting in the presidential office. I had never liked her much – she reminded me of Maurice.

It was her speech, you know – “We Must Negotiate.” When she had finished I told the comm to pick up FNN. Sylvia Ront was already discussing the speech and had some Starfleet admiral there repeating that there was nothing to worry about. He said a portion of Starfleet was traveling to the Sol system as a precaution, but they had the *Enterprise* en route to the vessel to establish communication. With that, Robert turned off the comm.

He smiled at me and gave me a hug. He told me not to worry: if Jean-Luc was on the case, then there really was nothing to worry about. He was a Picard and he was far too damn stubborn to let a single ship get anywhere near Earth.

We finished our lunch, and Robert headed back off to his vines with René's tricorder. I was just finishing washing up the dishes when there was a knock at the door. I shouted for René to answer it, but he didn't respond. I suspected he was off on some adventure in the woods, leading an imaginary away mission. I grabbed a towel to wipe my hands and made my way to open the door.

A pair of Starfleet officers stood there, both looking solemn. The first man wore a red uniform and had four pips on his collar, which I knew made him a captain. The second wore blue. My heart was thundering in my ears now. I don't know why, but I knew this had something to do with the president's address. I tried to open my mouth to speak – to ask if I could help them, but the words wouldn't come.

The first man introduced himself as Captain Declan Keogh, with Dr. Moritz Benayoun. They asked me if I was Marie and if Robert was home. I managed to stammer a yes. They asked if they could come in, and if someone could go and fetch Robert. I led them both into the sitting room, and tapped the comm to send a message to someone in the fields to send Robert back to the house. He strolled in a short while later without any sense of urgency, but was caught up short when he saw the two Starfleet officers.

"What do you both want?" he asked briskly.

The captain gestured to the table and indicated we should sit down. I took a seat, but Robert stood defiantly. After a pause, the captain gave a small nod and continued:

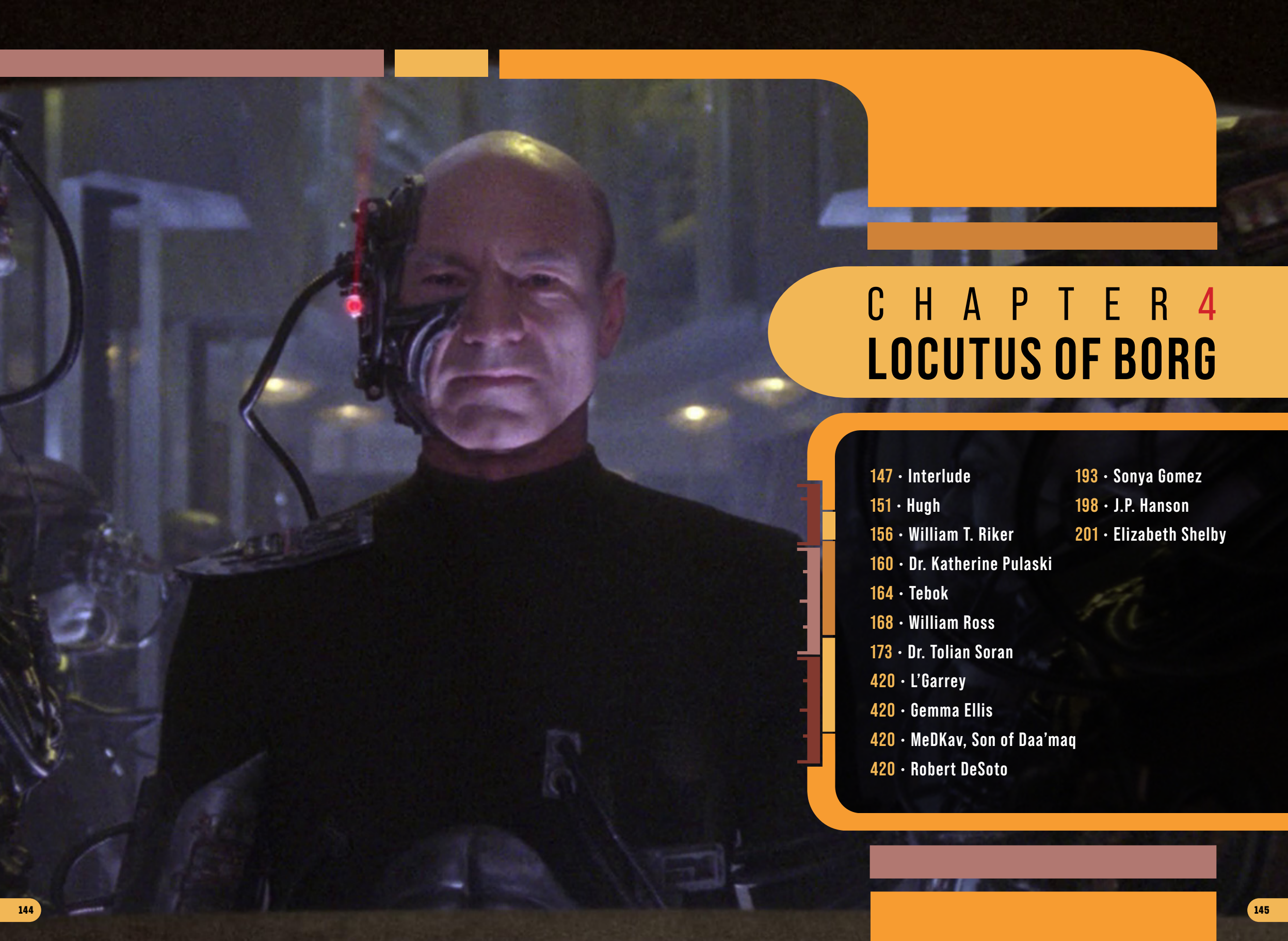
"It's about your brother. Something has happened to Jean-Luc..."

END OF CHAPTER 3

ALERT: CONDITION YELLOW

THE FOLLOWING CHAPTER MAY CONTAIN SENSITIVE MATERIAL





CHAPTER 4

LOCUTUS OF BORG

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INTERLUDE

USS *HOOD*, EN ROUTE TO WOLF 359 SYSTEM

Stardate 73363.1 – 2396



I can never sleep on starships. It's 0319 ship time and we are a day out from Wolf 359. I don't think I've actually had more than three hours sleep since we left Sol Station.

Throughout my career, I was never assigned to a single starship. From law school to the academy, I soon found myself on the Arcturus Orbital and would be dispatched across the sector to wherever a JAG was required. As a result, I never formed the familiar bond with an individual ship that so many Starfleet officers do – never spent so much time on a ship that I can tell the output of the warp core based only on the hum of the deckplates, nor have I learned the intricate system of Jefferies tubes and conduits that lace starships well enough to make my way from stem to stern without stepping foot in a single corridor. Some officers spend their entire career in a single ship and in a very real sense it becomes their home. The closest I have come to feeling that about a starship is on board the *Hood*.

I decide my best recourse is to make my way to sickbay and see if the medical staff are still on board the ship so I can get a sedative. The ship is in a strange transitory phase of her life: her career as an operational starship is coming to an end, and her new life as a memorial is set to begin, but neither state is fully established. There are information boards with interpretive text located throughout the ship and a state-of-the-art holographic system has been fitted to allow the virtual tour guides to lead people through the ship – to tell the story of what happened here. But Starfleet personnel still walk the corridors and maintain her engines and other systems to make sure she operates at peak operation – a stark contrast to my first encounters with the ship.

Before 359, *Hood* was one of the many “JAG taxis,” ships whose primary mission was to travel between systems and starbases ferrying personnel and equipment across the sector. At one time, these would have been small courier ships like the *Sydney*-class. Today, we use runabouts, but in the late 2350s through to the early 2370s, Starfleet had an abundance of *Excelsior* and *Miranda*-class ships. We often found ourselves on these massive interstellar behemoths that were once the pride of the Federation fleet. At the time, we barely gave it a moment’s thought – too caught up in reading whatever brief we needed while we made our way to the next case.

It was in the months and years following Wolf 359 that I became more intimately familiar with the ship and its crew. After the announcement of the Holland Commission, I was dispatched to the Inbhir Ghòrdain System, where the ship’s hulk was towed for assessment and eventual reconstruction. During subsequent visits I became familiar with Captain DeSoto, Commander Murakami, and many members of the ship’s company when I came to conduct interviews with survivors. Following the ship’s restoration, she was more capable than at any time since her construction and served gallantly on the first lines during the Dominion War, but *Hood* still occasionally served as my taxi with Captain DeSoto always accommodating me and my team as we traveled across the quadrant. He often remarked how important it was that Starfleet learned from the tragedy of Wolf 359.

Passing through the corridors on my way to sickbay, the period correct restoration of the ship’s interiors fuels my nostalgia. I consider messaging DeSoto to see if he is awake – maybe he would join me for a coffee in the ship’s mess – but he’s doubtless fast asleep. He’s spent more time as *Hood*’s captain than any other ship he commanded; his name as linked to *Hood* as Kirk’s to *Enterprise*, or Janeway’s to *Voyager*. Other captains may command those mighty ships, but they will always belong to their most iconic captains.

The doors to sickbay open and mercifully it hasn’t been turned into a gift shop...yet. The doctor is a pleasant Orion woman who offers a variety of increasingly exotic treatments for my sleep deprivation. I insist a simple sedative would be sufficient. She hands me a small hypo and tells me to administer once I’m back in bed and it will give me eight hours guaranteed. I check the ship’s chrono and that will be fine – the ship isn’t due to arrive on the outskirts of Wolf 359 for at least another 12 hours. After that, there will be several hours while we

wait for the other ships and visiting dignitaries to arrive for the ceremony.

I thank the doctor and make my way to the door, colliding with Admiral DeSoto. We pick each other back up and he chuckles, noting the hypospray in my hand. "Still can't sleep on starships I see?"

"Still haven't quite got the knack – give me a nice orbital or starbase anyway."

"Don't worry, we'll get you eventually. It's only been 40 years; most folks don't really get the hang of it till at least their 45th. Wait here a sec, will ya?"

He goes into the doctor's office and shares a brief conversation. She administers a hypospray and he steps back out of the office, seemingly refreshed. "Fancy grabbing a coffee before turning in?" he asks as we leave sickbay, following the curved corridor towards the ship's guest quarters.

"Is coffee really the best thing if I'm trying to get some sleep?" I ask dryly, though I'm grateful for the company and to have the opportunity to talk to someone.

"Nah, you'll be fine. There's a reason they tell you not to administer that until you're actually *in* bed; it'll knock you flat on your ass. C'mon, indulge an old man – I have photos of grandkids and it is my duty to bore you with stories. Besides, I want to know more about the book!"

I sigh as we pass my quarters. I wonder if I could dive in there, get to my bed and administer the hypo before he could stop me. But I suspect the request for coffee isn't just to share stories of grandkids.

When we make it to the mess hall, I'm surprised by the dozen people already spending their sleepless night there. I recognize almost all of them as veterans and survivors. As we make our way over to the replicators some nod respectfully at the admiral, a few offer me a small wave and a smile. DeSoto orders himself a double sweet *raktajino*, I choose a Tarkalean tea, and we find a small table up by a viewport.

We spend the next two and a half hours just talking. He shows me the photos of his grandkids, we speak about his wife, and how he's finding retirement; we talk about the book and the struggles of dealing with the Federation and Starfleet bureaucracy as I try to get clearance to access files I myself wrote all those years ago – not to mention the fights to get documents declassified and

approved for inclusion. We speak of mutual friends – some living, some passed – the state of the Federation, and recommend several holosuite programs and books we know the other will enjoy.

As the ship's lights brighten to announce the start of the day and shift change, DeSoto smiles. "Thank you," he offers. "If you want to go get some sleep I'll be okay – there's plenty to occupy me."

I smile back. "It's okay, tell me more about the grandkids."

We talk for another three hours until the admiral has to leave to attend a rehearsal for the ceremony. I make my way back to sickbay hoping the same doctor won't be on duty – fortunately she's not. I ask a nurse for a stimulant to help get me through the day, and he gives me a sympathetic smile. I guess he's been giving a lot of these on this trip.

For some, sleep on a starship won't bring them any rest – just old ghosts and nightmares.



HUGH

USS KETER, OHNIKA III ORBIT

Stardate 55606.7 – 2378

My friends and I...when we were withdrawn from the galaxy – living on this planet, building our society and tending to each other – we developed an... affirmation. A phrase, by which to help us focus our thoughts and channel them into speech – if we struggled for words: “start from your beginning – wherever that may be.” Because all...instances, descriptions, relationships, *stories* – have beginnings – despite how complex those topics might become. And so that is where I will attempt to start, talking about Locutus. From the beginning.

[He pauses again.]

I hope you understand, then, the...*difficulty* I have, describing him in such a manner. Because Locutus is...*was*, an entity – designed to have no beginning and no end, within us.

[He is quiet for a small while. He looks at his hand again, as if restraining the earlier flexing motions he made with it. Instead, he opens and closes it – moving his arm further across the table until it nearly meets my own hand in the middle.]

How well would you say you know your own hand?

♦ I, erm...what?

Your hand. Either as a body part, or as – something *attached* to you, when you think of your “*self*.” It is...*part* of you, is it not? An extension of who you are? A hand is a limb, a physical tool stemmed from your own body; one by which you...manipulate and interact with the world around you. It has its own identity and classification as a “hand,” yet is undoubtedly a part of you. Physically, it begins and ends at your wrist, yes; but it’s very much connected to your brain, your sense of touch – made out of the whole of your body’s muscles, tendons, arteries and veins...hah – and in *my* case: titanium, metal-alloy composites,

neurotransmitters, assimilation tubules...

[He pauses again – opening and closing his hand before deciding to hold it by the wrist.]

As I've told you before: it was decided a single ship was to be sent. A test – to gather information on the Federation. For all the collective's resources, however – for all its infinite wisdom, information, its "technological and biological distinctiveness"...we kne– **[he grits his teeth]** they knew...that they needed another "hand." Another tool, by which to help grasp and paw at this new realm they were about to wade into. They had plenty of ships and drones at their "disposal," certainly – but where was the efficiency in wasting already-deployed resources? Where was the logic in sending a vessel and 5,000 drone units blind into territory which they purposefully sought out? What's more, what if they destroyed this vessel, and somehow learned a method by which to defeat us further?...*Them. Them*, I mean, not us; I-I'm sorry; it's a much more casual reference between my friends and I, we no longer see ourselves as–

♦ **It's fine.**

[He stops, nodding briskly.]

This isn't to say that the collective was ignorant to your ways of life, of course. As you already know, it had seen Federation civilian archives, peeked into its scientific discoveries – seen its species members and their unique ways of life...but the Borg needed something more than *just* information. It had the ingredients, but no tools by which to prepare and transform that knowledge into something tangible. Something *actionable*. It needed...another *hand*, you see. A hand by which to hold a conductor's wand. A hand, to–

[After waving his hand as if trying to conjure more words, he suddenly moves to maneuver his arm under the table and feels around its underside with a few thumps – keeping an excited eye contact with me the entire time.]

Like that; does this make sense? To help you...reach out. To learn about and determine what something is or how it might react **[he knocks twice]** where you might not be able to fully see for yourself – or the rest of your arm can't quite fully grasp. As you might stick your arm into an unknown place to reach for something you know is there, but might not be able to see...and so that – *that*, is what that cube was. Our arm, extending towards the Federation. And it was decided that, once acquired, what *he* would be.

[He pulls his arm back out from underneath the table, tightly folding his hands together.]

The collective had sent forth its arm, but it needed a *hand* at that arm's end.

[He takes a long drink from the mug and drums his fingers on its side.]

37 Starfleet officers were selected as viable speaker candidates. And yes, Picard *was* among that original number. But the final selection would end up depending on who would be the most "convenient." The collective's algorithms had factored in the possibility of New Providence's assimilation attracting attention and an inspection from Starfleet, which would in turn offer us at least *one* of those 37 candidates.

[He rubs at his face and shakes his head.]

I don't suppose I have to make clear to you, the...surprise. Thrill. No no, the *delight*, even – that the collective experienced – when it saw the very same *Enterprise* it met at what you call "J-25." The same vessel that had lit this lighthouse in the first place, and had shown us libraries' worth about how much this wonderful, terrible Federation had grown. And not only the same *ship*, but the very same *Jean-Luc Picard* at its helm. The same captain who spoke to us and pleaded for our compliance. The same man that a supposed god flung into our audience. And here he was: back in our presence, once again. He and the *Enterprise's* crew glittered against the darkness of space – as flecks of gold would shimmer against a darkened riverbed. Then very...very suddenly, very quickly – all 36 of our other candidates were delisted in priority, and it was decided that Jean-Luc Picard would be our hand.

They fled into Nebula 56210 Grid 019-D after their brief attempt at combat. Of course they did; how could they not, when faced with the Borg's attention like that. I suppose, however...the search made Picard's acquisition all the more enticing. His and the *Enterprise's* resistance against the inevitable was...or at least – what I *thought* to be inevitable – was enthralling to watch. More and more computational power was being diverted from across the collective into this single cube: in order to both find the *Enterprise*, and also to...witness. It was as if you were mere *hairs* away from reaching something and you knew where it was, but you couldn't – [he reaches his arm under the table to mimic a stretch again] it was *just* out of reach. And that inability to reach that certain something makes you want it even *more*. The Borg are patient; the collective is willing to wait...but

not forever. Not to the point where it becomes inefficient. And we required him. *Only him.* And when we...they, when *they* acquired him– Ugh, I'll have *no part* in that misery–!

[Hugh blinks hard as if trying to clear his thoughts, but his tightly-clenched jaw is shaking.]

Have you ever stood at a beach and felt waves rush over you in the open water? Do you ever watch something like...tea, diffuse into a cup – until there's no trace of where one started and the other was separate? That was...that was him. That was his addition. With so much focus and attention being channeled into this one vessel, Picard's assimilation was broadcast throughout the entire collective in one fell swoop of a subspace synchronization, and every active part suddenly knew the role and function of Picard. His incorporation was so...satisfying, after that "chase" – so refreshing and fulfilling, his presence so powerful considering the circumstances and *occasion* that no, no – a mere unit designation would not befit this new hand's importance...

♦ Mr. Hugh?

[He silently holds up a hand with a strained expression as if asking me to let him finish.]

All assimilated peoples are incorporated into the Borg in an equitable capacity, of course. *Especially* in those days; the collective's unity was yet not fractured by what it has apparently become *now*. But...oh – to acquire the captain in charge of the vessel that found us? The one that helped beckon us closer to the Alpha Quadrant in the first place? Oh, his perspective, his context, his knowledge...it was *intoxicating*! We were part of *him*, and *he* was an extension of *us*! The hand, by which to reach out and take Sector 001 for our own! And this hand was so great, it became another *organ* – so wise and full of *purpose* within our body that it was given a *NAME*!

[He stops what seems to be an anxiety spike; leaning back into his chair, Hugh does a few breathing exercises and dabs under his cybernetic eye with the corner of his outpatient gown.]

I'm sorry. This...I-I see it in your face, it – must sound *awful*, to someone who's never known the collective. Because I assure you that yes, Picard...he very much resisted. So much so, that I don't think I would've understood the concept of "resistance" as quickly as I did aboard the *Enterprise*, were it not for Picard. When I stood in his ready room nearly a year and a half later, as a newly-incepted man: disconnected from the Borg, being led to believe he spoke to me with the

weight of the entire hivemind behind him...I was terrified. Because I saw him, saw what I *thought* was Locutus – and in my clarity, I could identify the sensation of how – *overtaken* this once-person was.

That “wave,” I spoke of earlier – I’ll never be able to describe how much of Picard diffused into the collective. And in his ready room, the horror began to make sense. I realized that the “hand” my unit knew as “Locutus”...was a *person* before his acquisition. Because I was learning what it meant to *be* a person. That the knowledge had to – come from somewhere; and it came from memories the collective deemed as “irrelevant.” The thought of that assimilation being replicated onto others I was beginning to care about, onto *myself* – the idea of something as small as “Hugh” being overtaken by something so large as the *collective*...it frightened me. For the first time outside of my own ignorance, I knew what it was to be small. **[he holds up a finger]** To be *one*, in the face of *many*.

[He looks away from his subtly-shaking hand, puts it down, and offers me a bleary-eyed smile.]

But I, Hugh, told him – *and* the Borg – no. So, too, did Picard. Despite everything, I told the mass of what I once was that I would resist it – just as he did, in the end. Just as *every* former Borg does. The “body” has managed to survive without that severed hand it stole, and both he and I endure, despite it – no matter how many unique scars the collective might’ve left us with. And that must count for *something*.

[His smile begins to falter as he looks back down at the mug.]

His scars, though – what he was left with in the wake of Locutus...I imagine Picard’s run far, far deeper than I could ever fathom.

WILLIAM T. RIKER

STARFLEET HEADQUARTERS, SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH

Stardate 44012.3 – 2367



We pulled the away team back. It had been risky sending them over to the cube, but we weren't about to leave the captain in the clutches of the Borg. This was my first time sending people into harm's way when I couldn't be there with them. I know Captain DeSoto and Picard would often rankle at my insistence that they not join away teams, but now that it was my turn to stay behind, I didn't care for it.

They reported they'd been unable to retrieve Captain Picard. Disappointing, but it was always a bit of a long shot given the size of the Borg cube. Then they reported something strange – that the captain had been “altered” by the Borg; Lieutenant Worf declared that he was a Borg!

This was outside of our experiences. When we had encountered them at J-25, the Borg had shown no interest in the crew whatsoever. They completely ignored us and focused solely on the ship. So when they first declared their interest in Captain Picard that came as a surprise, but presumably they were after access codes and tactical information. There was no way that Jean-Luc Picard would have *willingly* joined with the Borg. I couldn't conceive of any device or treatment that could have compelled him to join them in the short amount of time since they had taken him. Then they hailed us.

It was him. Jean-Luc Picard. My captain, my mentor, my friend – on the viewscreen flanked by Borg, walking ominous towards us. “I am Locutus of Borg,” he declared in a monotone voice, an augmented parody of his usual warm timbre. “Resistance is futile. Your life, as it has been, is over. From this time forward...you will service us.” That scene and those words are burned into my memory. In just a few short hours, they had defiled his body. He was clad in black with the beginnings of a black body armor forming over his torso,

on his face some sort of carapace seemed to be growing around the right side under the eye with some kind of mounted laser designator. Despite all that, what took me aback most were his eyes. The kindness, the wisdom, the humanity that I had always seen reflected there was gone; they were just cold and gray. I would almost say the eyes seemed dead, reflecting the pallor in his skin. It took every ounce of control not to break down there and then. I wanted nothing more than to wake up in my quarters and realize it had been a bad dream, then spend the next month listening to Deanna try to help me explain what it meant. But this was far too terrible a reality to be a nightmare.

We knew we would only have one shot to take out the cube. We'd spent the past three days in the nebula preparing the *Enterprise* to fire the main deflector. The sight of the thing that had been Captain Picard standing there just reaffirmed what I had to do. If the Borg could do that to him – to the very best of us – then they could not be allowed to make it to Earth. This was a threat unlike anything we had ever seen before, unlike anything we had even dreamt of before. How could you conceive of a thing that can snatch away the very essence of who you are, strip you of your Humanity, and then turn you against your friends and family? I knew we had to stop them, so I gave the hardest order I have ever had to give. I gave the order to fire.

It was unlike anything I had experienced before: shunting the entire output of the warp reactor into the main deflector. We had to evacuate the entire forward half of the secondary hull and the lowest three decks of the saucer section. Fortunately, most of the non-essential personnel had been evacuated at Starbase 157, but this was going to make a mess of the ship. There were good odds that after we fired the deflector *Enterprise* would never go to warp again. The sound was unnerving as the power shunted into the manifolds, and I was just waiting for a console to explode or an EPS conduit to rupture, but it held together. La Forge and his team had done their work well. All the time the deflector was charging, the thing Locutus was just staring at us – at me – through the viewscreen. I really wanted to cut off the channel, but I felt that if we succeeded, if this destroyed the Borg ship and whatever was left of the captain, then I owed it to him to bear witness this moment.

When the deflector fired the sound was torturous; you could just feel there was something not right about channeling that amount of power through the

ship. The beam of light was so bright that the viewscreen automatically polarized to prevent it damaging our eyes. The energy erupted, lanced across to the Borg cube in a cascade of plasma and...nothing. It just spilled across the surface of the ship like water on a plate of deuterium. The computer started to give alerts as the reactor approached critical output levels. If we had been channeling that power into the engines we would have been pushing warp 9.75, but the cube barely registered it. Even on screen Locutus just continued to stare blankly into the bridge. I gave the order to cease firing and throttle down the reactor.

I think I should have felt something. Anger? Fear? But all I felt was numb. Looking back, I think I was still in shock over what had happened to the captain. The logical part of my mind took over like I was running on autopilot. I started to try and understand why the deflector hadn't worked. We knew that the Borg were able to adapt, but in every encounter it had taken some time. We had usually been able to get one or two shots off before the Borg could adapt to a frequency or weapon; there was no way that they should have been able to adapt to that amount of energy that quickly.

I must have said something out loud because the captain – because *Locutus* – spoke. “The knowledge and experience of the Human, Picard, is part of us now. It has prepared us for all possible courses of action. Your resistance is hopeless...Number One.”

It called me Number One – *HE* called me Number One. My mind was reeling; this just seemed like a bigger slap than the deflector's failure. Was it mocking me? Or was there a bit of the captain still present in that monster on the screen? Before I could respond, the Borg cut the transmission and warped away at a leisurely warp 7. They weren't even in a hurry to get away – we were dead in the water and they knew it. I stood fixed to the spot; I didn't notice that everyone on the bridge was now looking to me, but I didn't have a clue of what to say. I looked around at the crew's faces and I realized that they were all going through the same thing I was: we were all in a state of shock, except perhaps Shelby – and Data, of course – but I needed a moment to compose myself. I gave Data the bridge and headed for the ready room. But before I got there, I realized I couldn't face being there in his office so entered the turbolift and headed to my quarters. As soon as the doors closed and I was away from the bridge, I held the turbolift and collapsed on the floor.

[He pauses.]

All my life I had wanted to be a starship captain. Ever since I had come to the *Enterprise*, I knew I wanted this ship to be my first command. I had sometimes fantasized about what it would be like: Captain Picard promoted to admiral and me recommended to replace him. I'd imagine what might I say...the thanks I would give to the captain. Don't get me wrong – I wasn't eager to turf him out of the center seat. I felt there was so much more he had to teach me: he was the embodiment of the sort of officer and captain that I aspired to be. No matter the situation or circumstance, he would be there with his calm level demeanor and he just always seemed to have the answer to any situation. I know that's not the case, but his ability to project that air and to put everyone at ease – to make them feel valued, and safe in the face of whatever the galaxy would throw at us...I mean, even right up until the moment the Borg took him we believed that we would get through it and in a week or so would be back to our regular tasking. But he was gone.

I suddenly found I had everything I'd wanted. I was now the commanding officer of the flagship of the Federation, the best ship I had ever served on. More than anything, I wished it wasn't the case. I took a moment and indulged William Riker, but now – more than ever – we had a job to do. We had to stop the Borg. We had to try and rescue the captain, if there was any possibility of that. And we had to warn Starfleet.

I got up off the floor and touched the pips at my collar to remind me that now I had a duty to the crew. I couldn't afford anymore self pity – at least not while this crisis was ongoing. I notified the senior officers to gather damage reports and to meet me in the observation lounge in 15 minutes, then resumed the lift to my quarters. I was going to throw some water in my face and let Admiral Hanson know that not only had our best shot failed, but the Borg had dealt us a blow I wasn't sure we would recover from,

Locutus changed everything. If the Borg could not only consume our technology, but our people as well...that was a horror I didn't want to contemplate.

DR. KATHERINE PULASKI

STARFLEET MEDICAL, SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH

Stardate 46695.7 – 2369

While Starfleet is lauded for its scientific and exploration missions, its medical facilities are among the best in the known galaxy. Its members often remark that after ships like the Enterprise have sought out the new life, it is the role of medical to understand that life. Tirelessly working to advance the knowledge and understanding of these fragments of the cosmos that experience sapience, its members are rightly proud of the advances and breakthroughs that have come from this illustrious institution.

I meet Dr. Katherine Pulaski at the lobby of the exobiological research annex – referred to as the “Phlox Box” by the researchers who work there after the Denobulan doctor who founded the facility. We pass through several layers of security and pass a number of Starfleet personnel armed with phaser rifles: a notable amount of security for what is, ostensibly, an academic research facility. We descend deeper into the building, and my unease grows as we arrive at our destination. The lab, while bright and airy as would be expected of a state-of-the-art Federation medical facility, carries within it a darker overtone: the presence of a number of what appear to be black clad cadavers with corpse gray flesh visible and disembodied limbs on display, all contained within reinforced stasis chambers. The scene reminds me of stories of Victor Frankenstein creating his creature from assorted body parts. I fight down a wave of nausea as we pass through the lab and into the doctor’s adjacent office.

We don’t know the origin of the Borg. Were they once a single species and their technology got away from them, or were they a happenstance occurrence? To be perfectly honest with you, the jury is still out on just what is “a” Borg. From an exobiological standpoint, they’re unlike anything we have encountered or even read about in any database.

It’s not just the integration of technological with the organic; Humans have been doing that since the Egyptians with crude prostheses. By the time we get to the 20th century, they were starting to put in implants to help the deaf hear and the blind see. Then, there are entire species such as the Bynars where the level of integration between the organic and computer is such that they cannot survive interdependently. They replace the parietal lobes of newborns with synaptic processors, but crucially the Bynars are a distinct species. From what we have been able to ascertain from the information and samples available to us, there is no singular “Borg” species.

[She looks out towards the lab, indicating the available samples referred to.]

When the *Enterprise* first encountered the Borg vessel in J-25, we were unable to conduct a detailed autopsy on any of the Borg that had boarded the ship. They had dematerialized through some kind of molecular self-destruct system; we hypothesized that this was caused by a flood of nanoprobes in the body – after receiving a signal, the nanoprobes take apart the body at a cellular level. The scans conducted on board the ship showed a huge amount of genetic diversity, but with all the interference from the Borg ship and the technological implants we were unable to get a complete genetic makeup. The closest we came was when the away team encountered what was thought to be a Borg nursery, where a number of young children were in the early stages of integration with the cybernetic systems – perhaps akin to the Bynars. We have relatively clean scans of that child's biology and originally assumed that was the baseline for genetic "Borg," but after examining the remains of the cube in 2367 we were unable to find any others of that species. The Borg, in my opinion, are not a species in the traditional sense of say Humans, Vulcans, or Klingons, etc...a more apt analogy would be a *virus*.

[She gets up and walks back into the lab. I follow as she removes a Borg arm from one of the stasis units.]

The Borg are predatory in nature. From what we understand every being within the "collective" was forcibly assimilated into it. It begins here:

[She activates a switch on the arm and a pair of tubes suddenly leap from the knuckles of the hand. They seem to move and sway as if sensing someone nearby. I recoil. She chuckles.]

It's okay; it's completely inert. But if it makes you feel better, if the computer does suspect a containment breach it will flood this entire floor with super heated plasma and vaporize any organic matter. [she smiles with what I think is meant to be reassurance] As I was saying, these tubules break through the skin of the victim and flood the blood stream with self-replicating nanoprobes. As the name suggests, these immediately start to reproduce and infect the cells of the victim – not just blood cells, but every cell they come into contact with. They move through the bloodstream to the heart and then onward into the brain. The probes are extremely adaptive and are able to identify the nervous system of every species we've seen them exposed to: even those with more distributed

neural networks rather than centralized brains like ours.

Externally, symptoms will begin to manifest almost immediately: the skin will begin to mottle and lose its color as the probes travel through the circulatory system and capillaries via the infected blood cells. The probes remove metals such as iron in Humans or copper in Vulcan to construct more probes, resulting in a pale, almost corpse-like pallor. Once the probes make it to the brain, they immediately set to work restructuring the neural pathways of the individual and begin construction of larger implants such as the cortical array and neural transceiver. These are required to connect the individual to the larger collective. At this point, the victim is now Borg, or a “drone” as we have taken to calling individual Borg. Something of an oxymoron.

Externally, aside from the graying skin and possibly some visible signs of the implants, they *should* still appear recognizable as the species they were previously. Internally, however, there are some interesting things taking place.

[Pulaski puts the arm back into the stasis chamber and we move to another grisly display of what appears to be a bisected head showing the internal arrangement of Borg implants on a humanoid. Fortunately, I cannot identify the species, nor any features of who this might have once been.]

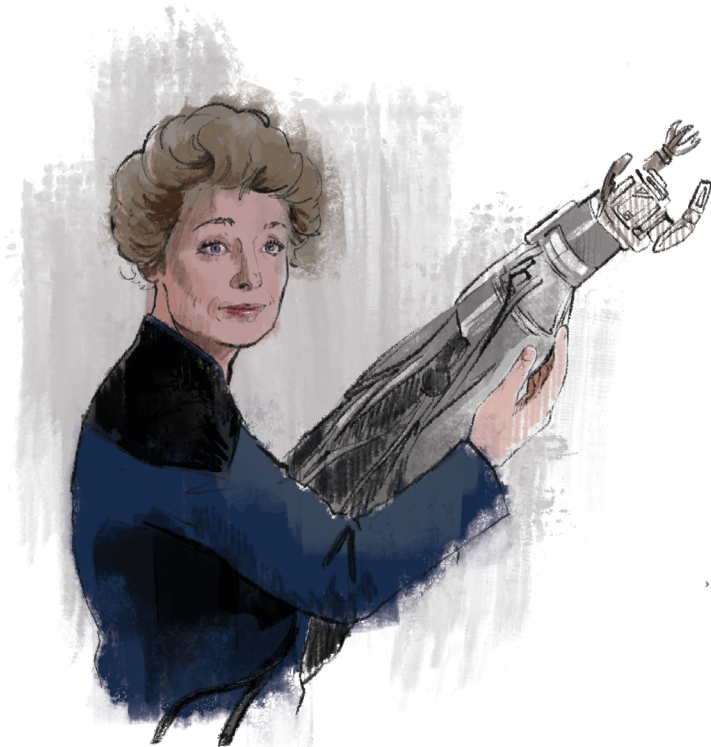
The nanoprobes will have already begun resequencing the drone’s neural pathways, and they also move into the hypothalamus and endocrine system, hijacking the production of hormones. They flood the mind with endorphins and dopamine, making the subject less resistant and more open to suggestion – all the while new neural arrays of the cortical implants connect to the wider collective. It’s then that the Borg, in effect, “hack” into the mind and bypass the cerebral cortex and frontal lobes. We have it on good authority that at least some of the individuals within the collective are able to retain their identities and report something akin to locked-in syndrome, similar to the effects of extreme Delta radiation exposure. This signal has to be maintained for the Borg to retain control over the drone, and once it stops the cerebral cortex is able to reassert itself and the individual is once again able to function. Although, we are not yet sure what the effects of long-term exposure might be.

Once the drone has reached this stage, the Borg will take it for further augmentation and modification to suit the role that has been identified for that drone. We have seen a wide array of various prostheses and sub-processors

employed and a certain amount of interoperability. They're also fitted with exo-plating and subdermal shield emitters. There is evidence that drones are able to operate in a wide range of temperatures and environments that would be hostile to their original species – including hard vacuum.

[The doctor leads us back into her office and I am relieved to have at least one more wall between me and the Borg parts in the lab. She sits back down and invites me to do the same.]

I don't know if I can tell you what a Borg is – the nanoprobe, the drone, the ship: they are all Borg and also none of them are. I can't imagine that any sapient species set out to create whatever they have now become. Maybe they were like the Bynars, looking to better integrate with their technology. Maybe the nanoprobes were originally medical in nature, to help repair damage to someone's neural pathways in the event of a stroke. What I can tell you about the Borg is they are my worst nightmares realized. I've always been wary of how glib we are with technology here in the Federation – always seeking the path of least resistance, always looking for the faster computer that will make life a little easier. But when that happens, when we allow the computers to do our thinking for us, we become a little lesser. Until one day the computer asks what does it need with us at all?



TEBOK

PARADISE CITY, NIMBUS III

Stardate 69181.9 – 2392



We followed the “cube” from the Corridor and monitored its attack on the New Providence colony. I had under my command a three ship flight of warbirds – my flag on the *Susse-thrai* – with strict orders that Starfleet and the Federation could not know of our presence. Unlike the previous sojourn across the Neutral Zone, we ensured our cloaks were buttoned up tight.

The behavior of the Borg was unusual. After it had taken the colony it did not proceed deeper into Federation territory, but started to move slowly around the sector as if they were looking for something. Or perhaps waiting? I had the *T'Liss* remain at New Providence to await Starfleet's response while we followed the cube.

It did not take long for Starfleet to start sniffing around the colony. To my delight, they sent *Enterprise* once again. We shadowed *Enterprise* and the Borg ship as they groped around in the dark; the Borg found some sport with a small freighter that was unlucky enough to find its way in their path. They took the ship, I presume, to gain the codes and ciphers to access the Starfleet subspace network and obtain updated information on the fleet's movements. This was all behavior we had seen from the Borg in the past when venturing into new territory, but they had been here just 18 months prior and we suspected knew very well where the choicest cuts were to be gleaned. I suspected there must be some other agenda at play, but the ways of the *Llaetus'le* are not for us to know. To think them predictable is the surest way to find your ship destroyed and yourself sporting a fetching new wardrobe in black carapace.

We received word from the *T'Liss* that *Enterprise* was heading towards the freighter's last location. At almost the same moment, the cube changed course and started heading towards them. I had ordered our ships to give the cube an extremely wide berth; we knew Borg sensors were able to penetrate our cloaks

and the last thing we needed was them revealing our presence to Starfleet. Our hope was by keeping our distance they would ignore us. The timing of the cube's course change told me that they were fully aware of our ships shadowing them, and they had full access to our encrypted transmissions. This was not news, but it still rankled me how insignificant we were to them. Still, we had a job to perform, and to the best of our knowledge Starfleet had no idea we were there. So, I was content to continue with our mission and to watch and observe: to see how the very best and brightest of the Federation fared against the oncoming storm.

When the *Enterprise* caught up with the cube we expected a bloodbath. We knew that they were no match for the Borg, and since the ship represented the very pinnacle of Federation technology we assumed that its capture and assimilation would be a priority. We held position as they faced off against one another and listened in as the Borg transmitted their traditional greeting. However, it was not the standard fare. They singled out the captain of *Enterprise*, Picard, and commanded that he turn himself over to them! I almost fell out of my command throne! We had never seen the Borg refer to anyone by name. I made sure that every recorder and scanner we had was deployed and logging what was transpiring before us. We had expected a quick slaughter, not a negotiation!

Already my mind was reeling. This sudden change in tactics – why were they asking for him by name? Were they going to try and form an alliance against the empire?! That made no sense given that, despite our best efforts, we were absolutely no match for the Borg. If they chose to strike for Romulus there was scant little we could do to stop them. They had no more need for the Federation to attack us than they needed the Ferengi! But I knew the procounsel would want to know why.

Despite our efforts, we had been unable to break into the LCARS systems remotely. *But*, we could access Borg systems, just not at the range we were holding. I was weighing the risk of moving in to attempt a data tap of the cube when it locked a tractor beam to the *Enterprise* and began to drain the ship's shields. Now we were in more familiar territory and relaxed – there must have been some misunderstanding. Now we anticipated the cube would take the *Enterprise*, strip it of anything of value, and leave the hulk adrift after it had suckled every usable resource from the ship. I did feel a pang of pity as we

witnessed what we thought were the final moments of the Starfleet flagship when once again something utterly unexpected happened. The *Enterprise* started to alternate its phaser frequencies in a random modulation, largely in the higher EM band as I recall. They were able to destroy the tractor emitter! I rose from my throne dumbfounded and walked towards the viewscreen. "HOW DID THEY DO THAT?!" I barked at my science officer, but she was just as stunned as I was.

Now free, the *Enterprise* ran at full warp towards a nearby nebula. We followed the cube, still attempting to analyze what we had seen, when again the Borg did something we had not seen before. It stopped.

We were utterly perplexed. From our scans of the nebula's composition, it should not have presented any obstacle to the cube. But it just sat there and waited. For three days. While the *Enterprise* hid away inside its burrow we intercepted many transmissions from Starfleet directed towards the wayward ship, but still we could not glean their meaning. Finally, I relented and ordered the *Keras* to move closer to the cube and tap into their systems. As we suspected, they were uninterested in us and our "irrelevant" force. We were able to access their data stream where they had indeed intercepted and decrypted the messages from Starfleet. There was nothing that you would not expect to hear: calls for information, orders for new tasking, requests for response. It was clear Starfleet was none the wiser to what was going on than we were. It seemed we had no option but to wait it out as well.

Shortly after we had completed our datatap, it seems the Borg's patience finally wore out. They began firing magnetometric charges – a technology that they had "acquired" from us! But it had the desired effect of flushing their quarry from its burrow and the chase was on once more.

The cube was quickly able to catch and overwhelm the *Enterprise's* defenses and brought the ship to heel. Once again, they defied our expectations, and rather than dismantling the ship they beamed aboard and took Picard from his very bridge! Right under the nose of his pet Klingon! Once they had their prize, they departed at high warp and we followed. I ordered the *T'liss* to shadow the *Enterprise*, which resumed the chase shortly after.

I admit a certain thrill as we stalked our way deep into the heart of our most hated foe – wondering if they had even the slightest inkling we were there. This

was not my first time sneaking into Federation space, but to my knowledge none of us had ventured this far in over 200 of your years. I was desperately curious to know what they had wanted with Picard. Perhaps they believed he had some knowledge of Federation defenses? Some information that only their captains possessed and they meant to tear it from his mind? The suspense was intolerable, and I was grateful when the *Enterprise* moved up to the cube and sent over an away team.

We monitored the transmission and knew they were searching for Picard, but after a short while they were pulled back to the ship. Again, we had a standoff between the two ships. I dared to inch closer to see if again we might tap into the cube when the Borg hailed the *Enterprise* on an open channel – so we were able to watch.

We knew that the Borg would take people and turn them into their thralls, but never had we seen one speak and certainly not speak for the *Llaetus'le*! It described itself as “Locutus of Borg.” The rest of their spiel was the same as always, but why had they elected to use this Human as their mouth piece?

My science officer then reported a huge surge of power coming from the *Enterprise*. At first, we thought they had initiated a warp core breach – perhaps hoping to take out the cube with their deaths. I thought it an almost noble if fool hardy way to spend their lives. I ordered us to move back so we would be outside of the blast radius when a bright flash of energy erupted from the ship's deflector and danced over the cube. We estimated 75 cochranes of energy directed through the beam. It would have been enough to melt through our shields and hulls in under 10 seconds! Clearly Starfleet had been busy, and the Tal Shiar had dropped the ball not knowing of this new weapon. The agent they had secreted aboard my ship posing as a lowly centurion could barely mask the shock on his face as he saw the magnitude of the beam – nor his despair that it had no effect on the Borg.

With their last gambit spent, the cube just left the now crippled *Enterprise* and resumed its course towards Earth. I ordered the *T'liss* to return to Romulus immediately with a full report and recordings of the entire encounter for the immediate attention of the praetor. The *Susse-thrai* and the *Keras* resumed our pursuit after the cube, leaving the *Enterprise* behind. It was a spent force and if the Borg were no longer interested in it, then neither was I.

WILLIAM ROSS

PHILEDELPHIA, EARTH

Stardate 57436.2 – 2380



To say I had a “plan” would be generous to the point it might warrant a visit by an FCA liquidator. All I had was a vague notion that maybe, just maybe, there was a way to destroy the Borg or at the very least damage them enough that they would think twice before continuing en route to Earth.

When I told Hanson, he went ballistic. Accused me of wasting his time and stormed out of my quarters, but I knew there was something here. I chased after him and caught him before he reached the transporter pad. I pleaded with him to give me just 10 minutes to listen to my idea – after all, what else was he going to do?

He came back, I poured us both a healthy measure of Saurian brandy, and went over what I had in mind. He listened, asking a few questions here and there for clarification. As I said – it was not so much a plan as a “Hail Mary” in the truest sense. When I finished, he sat there for a moment.

“So, let me see if I have this straight,” he said. “You want to lure the Borg – who we have no way to effectively engage and would have no reason to veer from their intended target – to an empty system. Then use a probe created from the research of this El-Aurian scientist you’ve dug up, who in 80 years has yet to produce any meaningful progress with his experiments in stellar gravimetric dynamics. Turn that into a STELLAR BOMB to try and induce that star to supernova. All in the hopes that the Borg will sit there until the shockwave arrives. Have I just about summed that up?”

I put down my drink and leaned forward to be as earnest as possible. I said “J.P., we have nothing else. I’ve looked through every report I can think of, scoured every inventory of every black site I know about, considered every possible scenario, and I can’t think of any way we can stop these Borg.

"They're *relentless*. I've even reached out to our special friends to see if they have anything we could use – I just got waved away. Got told they are 'considering every possibility.' I don't know what we can do, so I'm wondering what Jim Kirk or Lance Cartwright do. Do you know what the answer is? They would do whatever it takes – damn the rules – and save the day."

J.P. just sat there for a moment, then he downed his drink and got up. "You are certifiable," he said, and I thought he was going to leave. But he walked over to the comm and called up Owen Paris. He told him we needed to see him and Shanthi right away. He said to me I was going to have to work on my presentation, but a hare-brained plan was better than no plan. But first we needed to go speak to Ellen Hayes over at Starfleet Intelligence, who had wisely been keeping a low profile following her revelations earlier. We arrived at the CINC's office maybe three or four hours later, and I could tell Ellen hadn't had much sleep the past few days. I'm not sure any of us had.

We'd dispatched the *Ferrick* to *Enterprise's* last reported position to see if they could ascertain what had happened, and more importantly: where the Borg were. At the time, we didn't have much in the way of IWACS [Interstellar Warning and Control System] set up inside Federation space, and after they'd moved beyond the range of the listening posts in the Neutral Zone, we were blind. We knew we had a ticking clock, but back then? We had no idea how close to midnight we were.

I laid out our idea, which J.P. had helped me refine in the hours while we waited for the Shanthi to arrive. It was bold. Daring. It was more of an actual plan now than the mess of concepts I had laid out earlier, and I dared to believe that with whatever cosmic deities happened to smile upon us we might actually have a chance. I brought up a tactical display and laid it out for them: we could lure the Borg ship to Wolf 359 – a system with no habitable worlds and wasn't far from their course if they were to continue on to Sol. Paris asked how would we lure the Borg to that system, and if we had the ability to divert their attention why not direct it out towards the Beta Quadrant away from Federation space.

It was time for Ellen to begin her drive for redemption. "You already know that the Borg desire new technology above all else. We think their drive towards the Federation core is an attempt to 'cut off the head' of Starfleet and allow them to harvest whatever technology they want without harassment. What we propose is that we lead the Borg to believe we're transferring technology

and items from our black sites and stores in Sol and the surrounding core to whatever system we select for the target. If the location is close to the Borg's route, then we believe there is a high probability they will move to seize the technology before continuing. If we position the location too far off course, the likelihood is the Borg will move to take Earth first and then start to move out into the rest of Federation space."

They both sat up. This was credible, it made sense to them, and was the closest to any sort of a plan that didn't involve us evacuating what little equipment and personnel we could – not to mention leaving several billion to whatever fate the Borg had in store for them. The very thought of abandoning Earth made my stomach turn, and I had given serious consideration to refusing any orders to leave and awaiting my fate in my home.

"Okay, so you can get the Borg to this system – then what? From your report J.P., and the analysis from Commander Shelby, it's not a matter of numbers. Even if we could throw the entire fleet at them it won't be enough. With their regenerative and adaptive abilities we would literally get one maybe two shots at most. This buys us maybe a day here, in which case we would need as many ships as possible. Even then, you heard what the CTSU guy said: 50 years. A day isn't going to cut it."

I took a deep breath before going forward. What I was about to suggest went against the very core of what it was to be a Starfleet officer and is explicitly banned in several treaties. Even during the heights of the Earth/Romulan and Klingon Wars, it had never even been contemplated. But, at this point we had no other options.

"We're going to try and detonate a star."

The silence that filled the room made hard vacuum sound loud. I'll never forget the looks that crossed Shanthi's face. I think right at that moment they were wondering what was the worse fate: having the Borg arrive and destroy Earth or agreeing to this plan. The galaxy is littered with the remnants of civilizations that have opened Pandora's box – often in times of great strife and desperation – and it ended up destroying them. The Iconians, the Tkon, the Chodak: all played with fire and it consumed them. Humanity had skirted dangerously close in the 20th and 21st centuries with fission weapons, the Kiley with the warp bomb. I knew full well the calculus that was taking place: if this

did work and if we did stop the Borg we would have kicked off an intergalactic arms race the likes of which the quadrant wouldn't likely survive.

Shanthi got up slowly and placed her closed fists on the table. "I'm going to ask this question, and I want to know right here and now. Have we developed a stellar bomb?"

We all looked to Ellen, and I'll give her credit – she did not flinch under Shanthi's stare.

"No, Ma'am," was the crisp reply. Shanthi relaxed and sat back down.

"Thank the great bird," she said. "Then this is all academic. How do you plan to detonate a star?"

I laid out what I had learned about the El-Aurian scientist, Tolian Soran. Yes, *that* one. I highlighted his research in quantum gravimetrics and stellar dynamics. We would detonate a massive graviton burst to disrupt subspace, preventing any possibility of the cube warping out of the system. Then launch a probe towards the star. Our hope was that even if the probe did not cause a nova, a sufficiently powerful coronal mass ejection could at least trigger to damage or disable the cube enough to give a force of Federation – and hopefully Klingon – ships a chance to destroy it before it could regenerate.

"Where do the Klingons come into this?" asked Paris.

I'd gotten ahead of myself, but J.P. stepped up. "We know the Borg are extremely adaptive and all Starfleet ships fundamentally use the same technology. Our hope is to assemble a mixed force of Starfleet, Klingon, possibly Imperial Guard and High Command ships – hell, even Cardassian, Breen, or Romulan if it comes to it; if we can form a broad enough coalition it will be harder for the Borg to adapt and we'll be able to drive home the advantage and stop the sonsofbitches."

They were speechless, and I knew it wasn't because of our brilliance. The sheer audacity of this plan. If a subordinate had brought something like this to me during the Dominion War I'd probably have them sent for psychiatric assessment – much less let them anywhere near a command.

Finally, Shanthi broke the silence. "Can you at least give me odds? How

reliable is the science behind this probe?"

I looked over to J.P. and he looked back. "We haven't actually spoken to the scientist yet. We wanted to flesh out the plan and make sure it was viable. As you said, we don't want to go throwing terms like 'stellar weapon' around."

"You had better speak to this Dr. Soran, but make damn sure whatever you are using to speak to him is secure. If word of this leaks out, the Borg will be the last of your worries." With that, we were dismissed.

I think I was more nervous after the meeting than before it. But they hadn't said no, and now we had a plan.

DR. TOLIAN SORAN

AMARGOSA STELLAR OBSERVATORY, AMARGOSA DIASPORA

Stardate: 46291.7 – 2369

The Amargosa Diaspora is an unusually dense globular stellar cluster located in an isolated region of space close to the Romulan Neutral Zone. The Amargosa Stellar Observatory was constructed in 2368 for the study of the Amargosa star and to allow Dr. Tolian Soran to continue research which had to be abandoned following the Borg Incursion and the subsequent battle at Wolf 359. The El-Aurian scientist greets me warmly, but tells me that his research is extremely important and time sensitive. However, he stresses repeatedly that he's happy to answer any questions I have if Starfleet will then leave him to his work.

I was very surprised to receive the message. Triple encoded: requiring voice print, iris authentication, *and* a scan of the surrounding room to ensure I was the only person present before the connection would establish. I was aware that the Borg were near; we El-Aurians have a sense of these things, but I didn't think too much of it. There was nothing in Wolf 359 that could possibly have been of interest to them. The Borg assimilate civilizations not individuals, so I was content to continue my work.

♦ **Were you not concerned? Knowing what the Borg were capable of, and that they might be headed to Earth?**

The Borg are nothing more than a force of nature. There's no sense in cursing a storm or gamma ray burst – all you can do is be grateful that you weren't in the way. When they came for El-Auria, we raged against them. Unleashed the technological wonders of our age, and it was all for nought. I saw things that haunted me for decades. On the refugee ship which brought me to the Federation I was catatonic until...well, until we were rescued. I decided to dedicate myself to science – to understand the anomaly that had almost destroyed the ship I was on, and taken so many of the few who remained. I felt I owed it to them.

♦ **Is that what you were studying in Wolf 359?**

Yes, after a fashion. My research concerns quantum gravitational forces, and I was studying the correlation between the star's fusion output and the gravitational forces of the star. We know that as the rate of fusion increases the star will grow in mass, but its gravitational pull is not correlated directly to the star's mass. My experiment was to slightly decrease the star's output and measure the resultant drop of gravitational pull. If I could conduct this experiment multiple times with a single star, it would allow me to build a workable model to predict the correlation and grant us greater understanding of quantum gravity. It might even yield the answer to the grand unified theory, and hopefully lead to breakthroughs in propulsion and shielding.

♦ *Is that why Admiral Ross contacted you?*

No. Admiral Ross is quite a remarkable man with a singular mind – not the sort I have really seen in the Federation for many years. He had latched onto the idea that by increasing the yield of dilithium and trellium in a probe, it could cause a quantum implosion and disrupt all nuclear fusion within the star. Depending on the star, this would cause it to collapse into a blackhole or explode into a supernova. I was quite taken aback at the sheer audacity of the plan. It certainly wasn't the sort of thing I expected to hear from a Federation admiral of all people. He wanted to know if it was feasible and if so, how quickly could such a probe be made ready.

It took me a moment to compose myself. This was far grander in scope to anything I had planned and I was a little suspicious that I was being tested in some manner. But the admiral assured me that I would bear no responsibility. He just wanted to know if it was possible and what it would take. You'll forgive me if I don't share the specifics – I am bound by law not to disclose that information.

♦ *Of course.*

After I had told him, he seemed almost dejected. He told me then to start building a probe right away. I was told all other research on the station was to be halted and the entire science team was to prioritize the construction of the solar probe. He would be en route shortly with additional materials we required. Before he could disconnect, I asked him, "Admiral, are you sure this is something you want to do?"

He told me his time was running out and he was all out of options.

Once he had disconnected, I was momentarily stunned, but I realized this was an opportunity. For the past 70 years, I had been forced to fight tooth and nail to get my research approved and authorized, but I had just been granted a blank slate. I would be able to accelerate my timetable. I might even be able to get back on this pass...

♦ I'm sorry?

Oh, yes...I immediately contacted the station commander and handed her the orders from the admiral. We had not always seen eye to eye, but as she read through the list and began to understand the gravity of the situation – no pun intended. She immediately left to organize the remainder of the research staff. I recall looking out towards the star and feeling incredibly giddy.

I was reminded of a verse from an Earth religious text, the *Bhagavad Gita*: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”

Well, I would become the destroyer of *stars*.

[Author's Note: following this interview, Dr. Soran was implicated in the destruction of the Amargosa star, as well as the starship *Enterprise-D* on stardate 48632.4. The results of that investigation are ongoing and are not under the purview of this report.]

L'GARREY

CTSU SHIPARDS, GANYMEDE

Stardate 65053.9 – 2388



I'm still not entirely comfortable speaking. Or, hell, even thinking about it to be honest. Prior to the Ozla Graniv exposé a couple of years ago, it was one of the most tightly kept secrets in the UFP, and one of the most difficult decisions I've ever been involved with.

It was all so surreal. The president made her speech before the council, and we knew we had to stay ahead on the message. To project leadership and strength regardless of what we were feeling. At the same time, we had to come to terms with the reality that there was nothing we could do in the face of the Borg. Despite all of our resources, our technology, the might of Starfleet – despite it all, in a little over five days Earth would be gone and with it the billions of sapient beings who lived there. And that might very well be just the beginning. Already, we had the Vulcan High Command and Andorian Imperial Guard massing their forces around Vulcan and Andoria respectively. Councilors were rushing to depart for their home worlds “to consult with their governments,” but when you've been in politics as long as I've been you can spot the rats leaving the sinking ship.

Paris One was being prepped for an extended mission. We didn't know yet where we would go to establish an alpha site, and Starfleet was being cagey with where they intended to relocate the admiralty. Arguably, it was safer if we didn't have the civilian government and Starfleet's command located all in one place, but it made us nervous. Just what they might get up to without any oversight? Ha! We needn't have worried, because they just came right up to tell us what they planned.

I was in the Palais when a member of the president's security detail came to me and asked if I could report to the president immediately on board *Paris One*. Following the joint session, we had activated the Forrester Protocols and

Paris One was ready to depart should any hostile craft be detected entering the system. Those protocols date back to before the founding of the Federation, but it was all we had for the circumstances. Amitra *really* did not like it. Bad enough that we were forcing her to leave the seat of government, but now she was forced to sit on a ship whose captain had the warp drive on a hair trigger. Fortunately, Captain Ibbole was Tellarite. While he might not always have been the most pleasant company on long diplomatic missions, he was cool under pressure.

Stepping off the transporter pad and making my way to the president's office, I passed the large windows looking out over Earth. Already I could tell there were more Starfleet vessels present than I think I'd ever seen in one place – even more than we see for Frontier Day events. I really hoped she hadn't called me up here to complain about the number of ships in the system. I sympathized with the president's feelings about the size of Starfleet, and a week prior would have been in complete agreement that this was an unnecessary and provocative display likely to antagonize our neighbors. But at that moment I wanted double the number of ships – triple, even! The quadrant had changed with the arrival of the Borg, and the president was going to have to accept that.

In her office, the president sat behind her desk, almost slumped into the chair. Admirals Shanthi and Hanson stood across from her, looking apprehensive. I'd never seen the president looking so tired and defeated. What had drawn me to her campaign in the first place was her passion and fiery temperament. When she beamed up to *Paris One*, she almost had to be manhandled onto the pad, and the few messages we'd shared since had been clipped and tense as you would expect. Still, there was that passion behind them. Now she looked like she'd been told her broodmother had died – I'd been there when her broodmother *had* died and even then, she didn't look like this.

"What's going on?" I asked as the admirals looked awkwardly at each other and then the president.

"Tell him," she said, with an air of resignation.

The admirals exchanged glances again before Shanthi spoke up. "Madam President, I cannot..."

Suddenly, the fire was back in Amitra. She shot up from the chair and faced

off with the admiral. "As your commander-in-chief, I order you to tell him what you just told me." There was real venom behind those words too; I felt like I'd walked in on my parents' divorce.

"Tell me what?" I asked utterly, confused. I had no idea what was going on, nor what I was about to be drawn into.

Finally, it was Hanson who spoke up. "We believe we have a strategy that could stop the Borg before they reach Sol."

It's about time, I thought. I think I even breathed a sigh of relief. All along, I'd been waiting for this moment. This is what Starfleet did: they waited until the last possible moment when it seemed the most dire and then they swooped in with a solution to save the day in the nick of time. Needlessly dramatic, but after the last few days I didn't care. I was just glad we'd finally gotten to this point.

"Well, that's fantastic!" I said. "What's the problem, then?"

Then they told me.

It was audacious; I will give them that. The Borg would turn up at Wolf 359, a largely unimportant and uninhabited system. Starfleet would detonate their mine and then causally blow up the star and trigger an interstellar arms race the likes of which we probably wouldn't survive. But, that was a future problem. Right there and then, the problem was the Borg. Frankly? We didn't have any other ideas. Even then, this was all hypothetical and required more than a little luck for everything to work just right to have a *chance* of succeeding. I think that was the only saving grace and the only reason Amitra was even willing to entertain the possibility; the odds were so heavily against it ever working at least this way she could rest easy knowing she had explored the possibility after the Borg had brushed aside all resistance.

The admirals left and I felt numb, which was quite the feat since I had been in a perpetual state of shock since I first heard the term "Borg" a few days ago. I tried to speak, but the president waved her hand. The discussion was over for now. I think she had just wanted someone there to bear witness, and show that she hadn't just gone along with it but had managed some push back. It was bad enough they were willing to propose something so terrifying, but then to also risk the entire fleet was too much. Insisting that the bulk of Starfleet would be deployed throughout the Federation in the likely event the plan did not succeed

meant that at least there would be options and a chance to mount some kind of counter to the Borg at a later date. But we still had to decide where that counter would come from.

In the end, we had to break orbit and leave the Sol System. We were going over a list of possible candidates for our refuge and were on the comm with the Horta ambassador, Dahai lohor Naraht. Janus IV was looking like a very attractive prospect when we received a priority comm from Admiral Shanthi. The president just glared at me, so I left to use a side office to take the call. When Shanthi appeared, it was her turn to look defeated and broken. I felt a rush of emotions: elation that something must have happened to prevent the plan from working, horror at the realization that there might be nothing we could do.

I swallowed down the bile threatening the back of my throat and put on my game face. "I'm sorry, Admiral, the president is in an important communication. Can I assist you?"

"We have re-established communication with *Enterprise*," she told me. All at once it felt like the weight of the world was lifted. I know it's silly to put too much credence into myths and stereotypes, but that's what ships named *Enterprise* do: they save the day.

But I realized she wasn't smiling.

"Were they able to slow the Borg at all?" I asked, but I already knew the answer. It was a formality to ask, so I diligently played my part.

"No, an attempt by *Enterprise* to channel warp energy through the ship's deflector failed to affect the Borg at all. Unfortunately, the *Enterprise* suffered a casualty."

"Casualty? Singular?" I asked, slightly confused.

"Yes, Captain Picard has been captured by the Borg. According to reports from the ship's XO Riker he has been...changed."

This was getting tiresome. She was dancing around something and I was too tired, too nervous, and too scared to deal with it. "Dammit, Admiral, just give it to me straight."

"I *can't* give it to you straight, because I don't understand it fully myself.

According to Riker, they have made him a Borg. They've assimilated him."

I remember the briefing with [REDACTED], and all at once it felt like the gravity plating gave out beneath me.

If they had Picard, they had access to his memories and the tactical information of *the* poster boy for Starfleet. Hell, they even taught his missions from the *Stargazer* at the academy. He was the mold that Starfleet tried to pour its captains into. The Borg had just been handed the book on how to defeat anything we could throw at them.

I closed the comm and just stared at my reflection in the blank panel. It suddenly struck me that there were fates worse than death that I had never even contemplated. It scared the hell out of me.

GEMMA ELLIS

LONDON, EARTH

Stardate 49455.3 – 2372

Before the advent of satellites, the ancient mariners of Earth used a system of latitude and longitude to help them navigate the world. While the equator – and therefore lines of latitude – were determined by the axis of rotation for the planet, the lines of longitude were entirely arbitrary. The location for the Prime Meridian was the city of London, capital of what was then one of the most powerful of the nation states. After the formation of the United Earth and later the founding of the Federation, it was decided that London would be the home for the Department of Temporal Investigations to monitor and police any violations of the temporal accords. In 2366, Gemma Ellis was working as a data analyst for the DTI and lived in London with her partner T'yrish – or "Tish" – a half-Vulcan Starfleet officer raised on Earth. I meet Gemma at her home in Greenwich; the apartment is classic 21st century and she is surrounded by photos showing her and Tish. They portray a happy and vibrant couple, but the woman before me seems withdrawn and empty.

It was a stunning day. Really beautiful – with that low sun that you get in the winter and the crisp bite of the cold air. Tish was on leave following her *Pon farr* and had just gotten back from Solkar, so we were just enjoying the last of her leave before she had to report back for duty.

I remember the park looked like something in a holo, with the frost covering the grass. It had a light crunch as we walked over it.

I remember being nervous after seeing the president's address, but Tish was always good at keeping me calm. She told me it was probably nothing to worry about. "An abundance of caution" – likely just trying to distract everyone from the utter mess she had made of the Cardassian situation. We saw the reports coming from Bajor and it was horrific. How could anyone allow a situation like that to continue and then try and *negotiate* with those monsters!?

We took the river taxi into the center of the City and then walked up to see the tree in Trafalgar Square. It was really pretty with all the lights. I was so utterly content in that moment.

When we got back home, Tish saw there was a recall order requiring her

to return to duty. This was strange given that she still had three days of leave, but that's the life of the Starfleet wife – you never know when they're going to be called away. We had talked about looking for a shipboard posting, but I get horribly spacesick. Seriously, I can't even make it to Luna without losing my lunch like a 20th century astronaut. Besides, I liked my job. Fortunately, Tish's work tended to keep her in system.

I made us dinner while she packed, and we spent the evening curled up on the couch together. In the morning, I walked with her to the transporter terminal, and I headed to work at the observatory.

It was only once I was back at work that I began to get a sense that something was wrong. There were so many ships in system – more than I had ever seen before. I felt my anxiety rise and that little voice in the back of my head say that something wasn't right. I desperately wanted to message Tish and tell her to just come back and finish her leave, but when I tried to raise her the system gave me an error message. The comm network was overworked and "couldn't make the connection at that time."

I tried to focus on work, but my mind just refused to cooperate. I found myself watching the FNN reports of the unusual fleet movements, and speculation on this unknown race that the president had mentioned: the Borg. I figured it wouldn't hurt to see if there was anything in the DTI database, so I decided to search the LCARS network. I was rewarded with a restricted archive alert and notification that my attempt to open access the restricted file had been logged. This was not what I needed. I could see Daniels walking down the hall towards the terminal. He was very kind and didn't scold me or anything; he told me that I was the eighth person to try and access the file today after the president's speech and the director was evaluating the data we had on the Borg to decide if any of it would be cleared for dissemination through the agency. I know he was trying to put me at ease, but now my mind was at Red Alert. If we had a file on the Borg in the DTI, and it was restricted, that was very very bad – and Tish had been recalled to duty while there was a large fleet muster. I started to feel sick.

I excused myself and left the office. I tried to think of any of Tish's friends who might be able to reach her, but everyone I contacted was unavailable. I was starting to get frantic when finally I was able to raise Niall. He was working at the Clydebank yards and I asked if he could tell me where Tish was and if he knew what was going on. I could tell that he was nervous by the way he looked

around before leaning close to the comm. Even then, part of me thought it was a bit absurd. If he was about to tell me something restricted, surely he knew the network would log it and report it. But I was desperate and I needed to know where Tish was.

He told me that something was going on and the ships were leaving the system almost as quickly as they had arrived. Tish had been sent to the USS *Kaneda*, a prototype that had been sitting idle for the past three years, but it and around 40 other ships had warped away in the opposite direction from the rest of the fleet. He said something – I think he was telling me she would be fine and that he would get her to message me when she could, but I couldn't hear him anymore. I shut off the link and just stared at the blank screen.

I walked back home, but I felt like it was a dream. The city had been so beautiful the day before and I had always loved the winter, but I was just numb. I don't have a telepathic cell in my body, and Tish was not a traditional Vulcan. We had never experienced any sort of telepathic connection – she had never done a mind-meld or anything like that – but I knew deep in my core that something was very wrong and that Tish was heading into danger. But as I walked through London everyone seemed to be carrying on as if nothing was happening. I got home, opened the door and just sat on the couch.

I felt so alone.

MEDKAV, SON OF DAA'MAQ

NAGASAKI, EARTH

Stardate: 53277.3 – 2376

After the signing of the Khitomer Accords in 2293, Klingons began immigrating to the Federation in larger and larger numbers. Flourishing expatriate communities formed, especially around Earth's Pacific Rim. Many Klingons felt the humid climate, high seismic activity, rugged terrain, and ready access to fresh seafood closely approximated their home world. Three of the largest Klingon communities are centered in California, Guangdong, and Nagasaki. There, you can find live gagh or bloodwine often as easily as Human fare and hear tlhIngan Hol spoken as openly as Spanish, Cantonese, or Japanese.

MeDKav was born on Qo'noS in the Year of Kahless 970 (2321 CE) as the second son of a middle-ranked warrior family. One of his uncles perished fighting alongside the Enterprise-C at Narendra III and he grew up with a deep affinity for the United Federation of Planets and its cultures. By the time of the First Borg Incursion in 2366, he was senior aide to Chancellor K'mpec and one of the most pro-Federation voices in the Klingon Government. After Chancellor Gowron re-signed the Khitomer Accords in 2373, he was appointed Klingon Ambassador to the Federation – a post he held throughout the Dominion War before retiring from government service earlier this year. He now maintains a residence in Japan and is CEO of a consulting firm advising Federation businesses on best trade practices with the Klingon Empire.

I arrive at his home and am met at the imposing wooden front gate by MeDKav's Human housekeeper. She ushers me through a small but well-manicured garden into the house. I am confronted by a dark reception room with a black stone floor. The walls are trimmed in reddish wood. There are several hand-painted wall scrolls covered in Klingon writing. On the long wall to my left is a display of polished Klingon spears and knives. Several candles burn on a shelf beneath them. The flames glimmer off the polished steel blades as the distinct scent of incense fills the air. The only furniture is a polished wooden table that extends only half a meter off the ground. The housekeeper beckons me to remove my shoes and wait at the table. I realize I have no choice but to kneel on the stones.

I wait for over 20 minutes before the door in front of me crashes open, revealing a massive Klingon with a graying mane looming over me. He wears a black cloak which completely covers his torso and legs. His angry eyes meet mine.

This is the petaQ who dares to come and ask about the dark days of 2366?

[He begins pacing back and forth, but his eyes never leave mine for an instant.]

Do you not understand that there are certain songs that should never be sung? That there are certain stories that should never be told? That there are certain memories best kept forgotten? Do you? *DO YOU?*

[He suddenly leaps forward and down to the table. He slams his fist onto the wood so hard I think it will shatter. MeDKav's burning eyes are now just a few centimeters from my own.]

Well?! ANSWER ME, HUMAN!

♦ ...

[Suddenly a smile crosses his face and he starts laughing uncontrollably.]

By Kahless, the look on your face right now! It's like you were getting ready for me to rip your spine out! I keep this room to meet clients. When they come to meet a Klingon warrior, there's a certain degree of expectation that you'll be brooding in dark places surrounded by sharp objects. It's theater really, but sometimes it's beneficial to allow one's opponents to see what they expect rather than the truth. It puts inflexible Federation minds at ease and makes them more receptive to my proposals. ASAMI!

[The side door opens and the scent of incense clears. His housekeeper enters, bows, and then moves to open the shutters, allowing the sun to spill into the room. MeDKav removes the large cloak and hands it to the woman, who bows again and leaves. He is actually wearing a casual Human shirt and trousers underneath. He gestures and we leave via the side door. We walk through the doorway and immediately the atmosphere shifts from dark and confining to bright and airy. The white walls are covered with family holophotos taken on vacations across the galaxy. We enter a large space with glass windows with a gorgeous view overlooking Dejima Island and the bay.]

I may have taken Earth as my home, but I remain Klingon. It is important to be honest when your friends have made an error or lapse in judgment. Diplomacy often requires that we temper honesty with tact, but I'm not a diplomat anymore. I can be as blunt and honest as I feel.

The Federation royally screwed up their response to the Borg. In fact, I can't recall a single thing that Amitra's administration did correctly during that crisis. We were supposed to be your closest allies, and we didn't hear a word from you for three days...THREE DAYS! After Chancellor Gorkon's assassination,

Ambassador Kamarag was standing in the president of the Federation's office in THREE HOURS. If we hadn't intercepted your emergency flash traffic declaring Crimson Tacit, we would have had no idea anything was even wrong!

Baktag. Considering that Crimson Tacit was originally written as an emergency response to us, and involved possible Federation first strikes on Klingon planets, you can imagine that there was a fair bit of concern on our side. We even raised our fleet defense condition to *cha'* ! You understand that defense condition *wa'* is full readiness for war? We were mobilizing against our allies. It was ludicrous. By Kahless's hand, Federation condescension is absolutely *infuriating* at times. It seems we had a better working relationship when we were enemies.

In any case, that delay and the resulting confusion, cost critical time. The empire knew nothing about the existence of the Borg prior to 2366, because you failed to share that little piece of crucial intelligence with us: a *direct* violation of the Khitomer Accords, I might add. By the time the diplomatic corps and Starfleet briefed our embassy on Earth, the High Council was already up in arms. How could the Federation know about such an existential threat to the galaxy and say NOTHING to us!? The Federation ambassador tried to explain that Starfleet Intelligence hoped the enemy would descend on the Romulans first to placate the councilors, but it is not the warrior's way to hide behind a foe. Then came the request from Starfleet to lend ships and warriors to the fight!

K'mpec had ruled the empire for almost half an earth century with an iron hand in a velvet glove. He had done much to restore our glory and prestige early in his rule, but by 2366 he had grown old and fat. The Borg presented K'mpec with a great opportunity to revitalize the empire: a glorious battle against a seemingly invincible foe to uphold our oath to the Federation. Oh, it would have been a war to inspire entire *operas*!

I wrote the speech that K'mpec delivered to the High Council. Though our relationship with the Federation was far from perfect, we were still bonded through law and history and now we would cement that bond with blood, fire, and steel. Starfleet were our brothers and our sisters in arms and it was our duty to stand beside them in their hour of need. He asked for a vote to send four entire strike fleets: a task force of a size not seen since the Organian War. The cheers rose up from the great houses, and they felt the fire in their veins and the call of the warrior! K'mpec basked in their cheers until a single figure stepped

forward into the center: *Duras*.

[He spits on the ground at the mention of the name. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Asami, his housekeeper, cringe and reach for a bucket.]

Nobody yet knew that Duras was a Romulan *moQDu' Supwl'*, and had spent much of the last decade building alliances and collecting debts like a Ferengi in order to make a claim for the chancellorship. K'mpec's proposed coalition would be a direct threat to his power. The cheers died down until there was silence. K'mpec stared down Duras and, with a sneer, asked what did he have to add? Duras delivered a simple, yet devastating reply: if Starfleet were really our family, why did they keep secrets from us? Why had they not told us of the Borg threat decades earlier? If this threat was so dire, surely they would have come to us sooner? The proposed task force was just the delusion of a sad old man seeking to distract us with promises of glory that would leave us defenseless against possible Romulan attack.

It was as if someone had opened an airlock and sucked the breath from our lungs. K'mpec and Duras just glared at each other. I could sense the Chancellor's desire to draw his *d'k tahg* and plunge it into Duras's chest, but he had become too powerful. Duras held too many of the great houses in his sway, and while he could not make a challenge to the chancellor's throne yet, it was only a matter of time.

"Let us put it to a vote," K'mpec managed to spit out, but Duras was always the canny politician. He insisted that before any vote, we discuss how a war with the Borg would benefit the empire.

It was *then* I knew how far we had fallen. That moment, the seeds of distrust that would lead to Gowron's Cardassian fiasco six years later and the subsequent conflict against the UFP were planted. K'mpec just snorted his derision at Duras and said if the High Council would not act, then he would go himself and stormed from the chambers. I ran after him and had to convince him not to personally lead an expedition without the approval of the council. If he was to step foot off the home world, then Duras would surely move to seize power and there would be no empire left for him to return to.

K'mpec was enraged, but he knew the wisdom of my words. He ordered me to gather as many ships as I could from loyal houses and go in his stead. That

man was willing to forgo personal glory for Starfleet's sake and the greater good of the empire. I don't think the Federation appreciates how many times K'mpec saved the alliance without any recognition or appreciation from your politicians.

We were eventually able to call in several favors to get a single ad hoc strike fleet dispatched, but by the time the ships reached Wolf 359, it was too late. Our indecisiveness and squabbling resulted in an ally's defeat. Our great victory was denied and replaced with an eternal shame: we found no glory in battle, no great songs were written, no warriors were welcomed to the gates of Sto-Vo-Kor. Well – no *Klingon* warriors. All we found at Wolf 359 were the frozen corpses of Starfleet's finest whose souls had earned their passage across the River of Blood while we remained safe.

Kahless looked down on his children with great disappointment that day. Still, on the *Kyushu* at least we found *one* that survived...

[I blink in confusion.]

♦ I'm sorry, Ambassador, but there were no survivors of the *Kyushu*. All hands were lost.

[He smiles, but this time without menace or amusement, and simply nods.]

Come, I will take you to see...

ROBERT DESOTO

JOSEPH M'BENGA MEDICAL CENTER, EARTH

Stardate: 45904.2 – 2368



It was getting awfully crowded around Earth with the number of ships in the system. Every berth at the orbital facilities was occupied and communications with command were patchy at best. Crew were requesting permission to take shore leave, but we didn't know how long we were expected to remain in system, so I couldn't really authorize anything. Starfleet had made it very clear that we were to limit any discussion of fleet movements and numbers for the duration of this emergency. Well, if there is one thing that will fill an information vacuum faster than rumor and speculation I've yet to discover it.

I had Obena and my XO, Commander Murakami, join me for a quick lunch in the ready room as we shared some of the wilder stories we had heard from our lower decks. Aly said the engineering scuttlebutt was that someone had figured out how to break the warp 10 barrier and all ships were being recalled to be given the upgrade. Hiroshi had heard that a race of parasitic aliens from the Gamma Quadrant had taken control of the admiralty and they were planning to infect us all to take over the Federation. I'd even heard talk that the fleet were being assembled to storm the gates of *Sha Ka Ree* to confront the alien being there and demand an answer to "what *would* god need with a starship?".

[He chuckles.]

It was a way for us to pass the time. And since command didn't seem to be in too much of a rush to brief us, there wasn't much we could do.

Of course, you can't park that many ships and not expect people to notice. We started to see a rise in the number of sightseeing shuttles whipping around with so many ships in system – that all came to an end after the *Elysium* incident. There was some failure with the STC and a Caitian ship carrying their diplomatic staff collided with the liner *Elysium* out past the L5 point. That was not pretty. Fortunately, there were plenty of ships on hand to rescue survivors, but it

highlighted why it wasn't sustainable keeping this many vessels in orbit. Shortly after that we noticed ships starting to depart generally on vectors heading out towards galactic west; this started to accelerate after *Paris One* left with the USS *Gorkon* in escort. As soon as they jumped to warp their transponders went dark and we received the Crimson Tacit message and a fleet-wide Red Alert.

We received orders to head to a position close to McKinley Station. There were about 30 ships in that general area, mostly older ships aside from the *Columbia* – a brand new *Galaxy*-class ship fresh off the line and just finished her trials. The commissioning ceremony was due to take place next Tuesday. My orders were to beam aboard for a briefing from Admiral Hanson, the head of Starfleet Tactical. The blood was certainly pumping as I materialized on the pad; the ship still had that fresh-from-the-yard smell. There were half a dozen other captains waiting as I stepped off the transporter and we were told to follow an ensign who would take us to the briefing. We made our way along corridors and passed quarters which had likely never been occupied until we reached one of the ship's holodecks. This was a strange venue for a briefing, but once we entered I could understand why. Over three dozen officers were seated around a dais with a holographic display; standing in the front were Admirals Ross and Hanson, who gestured for us to take our seats so they could begin.

They told the junior officers to step outside and then had the computer seal the doors. It was all very theatrical, but the entire time I was wondering why I was there. I knew Captain Storil of the *Saratoga*, Halloway from the Utopia Planitia, and a few others were all fine officers – but we were hardly the commanders of the most powerful forces in Starfleet. I had that feeling that someone had said volunteers step forward and we'd been too busy looking at our shoes to see everyone else take a step back.

Hanson began the briefing with an outline of the Borg: a powerful race first encountered out past the back end of Romulan space and now making a bee-line for Earth. So far every attempt to delay or destroy them had failed; they had neutralized the *Enterprise* and it was unlikely that a conventional force would be able to stop them.

Well, suddenly the massing of the fleet at Earth made sense. But now I was wondering what we were here for – I had a sinking suspicion that we were about to be sent out as a decoy force. *Hood* might have been old, but she could still do her part to defend the Federation and I was not about to sit back and let them

bundle us off to some backwater until it was safe to come out.

Turns out, I couldn't have been more wrong.

Hanson handed over to Ross, who explained that they had perhaps one chance to slow down – maybe even destroy the Borg. Just the one. It would be high risk and require a lot of coordination and multiple ships of different classes and capabilities to combat the Borg's adaptive nature. The hope was that we would not have to engage the Borg directly, but if we did, having so many different classes of ship might buy additional time and one of us would find a weakness to exploit.

I will give Ross his credit: he didn't sugarcoat it. He told us the odds were not in our favor at all, but if we failed then there was nothing between the Borg and Earth. If they made it to Earth, it would likely face destruction or worse assimilation. It made for very uncomfortable listening, most of all because of how vague they were being about *how* we might stop the Borg. They were very clear that force of arms alone would not be enough, just that they had a single opportunity and that in the interest of operational security they could not divulge the specifics. They did tell us where this last stand would be made: a small red dwarf about eight light-years from Earth. Wolf 359.

We got to the “any questions” part. Usually, we all silently pray no one has one so we can get out of there and get back to our ships, but 40 or so hands shot up. Some wanted to know how feasible the plan was, some asking how many *Galaxy* ships could we deploy; Were we contacting the Klingons? Would the Imperial Guard assist? They had answers for all. Some were good, some were not. Then Captain Storil asked, “What about the civilians on our ships?”

That brought us all up cold. We'd seen more and more ships allowing families and non-Starfleet personnel to live and serve on ships – mostly those conducting longer range ops. *Hood* didn't have any families on board since we were never more than a shuttle ride from any core world. But for many, families had become just another factor of everyday life on ship. We couldn't take civilians deliberately into danger, but it sounded like if they remained here on Earth danger would find them anyway. Arguably, it would be better to be with their loved ones on the ship; they would either succeed and be together, or... well, they would be together.

Hanson told us that each captain could make their own decision with regards to that, but not to brief the situation until the ships were underway for security reasons. I was grateful that wasn't a conversation I would have to have. I wondered if I should try and offload any non-essential personnel, but I knew most would balk at the idea of being listed "non-essential." It seemed like a case of out of the frying pan into the fire. At least on the ship, we would be together as a family and would have some control over our destiny rather than being stuck planet-side looking on helplessly.

With the briefing concluded, we were dismissed and ordered to make our ships ready for departure in 12 hours. I wonder what the *Columbia* lower decks must have made of the captains filling out of the holodeck as though we were leaving a funeral; we made our way back to the transporter room in relative silence. Those poor kids had been preparing for the commissioning, getting ready for a day of pomp and ceremony and celebration. I wondered if they would still get that. I also wondered if the ship's captain would retain his non-essential personnel or transfer them to McKinley or Earth. I was very grateful to get back to the familiar surroundings of *Hood* and arrange for a briefing of the senior staff. We were about to get very very busy.

12 hours later almost on the dot, we were given clearance to leave the system and started to depart. All told, 40 starships headed out towards Wolf 359 with Hanson flying his flag in *Columbia*. We'd done our fair bit of ferrying to *Enterprise* and *Yamato* before its destruction, but this was the first time we were traveling out with a *Galaxy*-class – so sleek and powerful, I imagined it must have been what the old *Constitution* crews must have felt when they first saw *Excelsior* all those years ago. With something like that on our side, it was hard to see how we could possibly fail. I tried to tell myself we would be okay, and there was nothing to worry about: we were Starfleet. But, there, in the back of my mind was something that Admiral Krause had told me when I first took command: "ships named *Hood* haven't tended to have happy ends, but they have always gotten the job done."

Right then, with our task force departed Earth for possibly the last time, I didn't find that thought terribly reassuring.

SONYA GOMEZ

USS KALPANA CHAWLA, NEAR BELAGAVI IV

Stardate 47706.1 – 2370



About a year later I was assigned to *Columbia* along with a number of personnel who had served on *Enterprise*, *Yamato*, and *Galaxy*. We were meant to help work up the ship after the yard released her and make sure lessons and modifications we had learned could be implemented in the new ship. I was sad to have to leave *Enterprise*, but Commander La Forge told me that I would always be welcome in his engine room. Still, it was important that the lessons we had learned be passed on to the next ship, plus it came with a promotion to lieutenant working under Commander Quinteros, the ship's chief engineer.

Columbia was almost identical to *Enterprise*, but there were subtle differences: the trim was slightly different, the EPS manifolds hummed at a slightly different pitch – things like that. We had finished trials and were docked at McKinley Station, working through last minute items when I got a subspace message from one of my friends on board *Enterprise* – Helen Dolan, a medical research tech.

I was surprised to hear from her, but always enjoyed catching up and hearing what great adventures my old ship was having. Except, she wasn't on the ship. She didn't want to say much on an unsecured comm, but she said they had run into an "old friend" from J-25 and the captain had ordered all the civilians and non-essential personnel to remain at Starbase 157.

My blood ran cold at that. The Borg here!? How was that even possible? I felt my gut twist into knots and my knees turned to jelly. I knew I needed to go and tell someone to warn Starfleet but I didn't know who, or where. I took in some deep breaths trying to calm myself and figure out who to see. Commander Quinteros? Would he have the clearance? Would he have even heard of the Borg? The new captain hadn't even arrived on the ship yet, and wasn't due for another three days. Captain Halloway had returned to Utopia

Planitia to oversee *Melbourne's* launch. I knew Dr. Pulaski had been assigned to Earth, maybe she would know? I was about to bring up the comm to hail her when all hell broke loose.

The station was locked down and the Red Alert started blaring. Then it seemed like the entire fleet started to warp into the system! I was terrified, but also relieved because I knew this had to be in response to the Borg. It felt like the weight of the entire ship had suddenly been lifted from my shoulders seeing all those ships arrive. But that didn't last. As the day went on and there was no official word from Starfleet about what was going on or what we were to do, speculation was absolutely rampant.

News had filtered down that *Enterprise* was involved, so I had half the crew seeking me out to ask if I knew what was going on or if I had some insight. I didn't know if I could or should tell them about the Borg and in any event – I didn't know anything! I wanted more than anything to be able to hide away deep, deep underground where no one could find me. Things got a bit better when Admiral Shanthi briefed Starfleet about the unknown ship passing through Federation space and potentially heading to Earth. Everyone knew you didn't recall the fleet for a single ship. While I had something of an idea of what the Borg were capable of, even I wondered why we were all sitting here around Earth and not heading out to try and head off the Borg.

We heard the president's speech, but that didn't really say anything. I tried to carry on with the everyday maintenance work, making sure everything was running just so on the ship and put it out of my mind. But then there was the *Elysium* disaster. I didn't see it myself – just the aftermath, but there was already a numbness flowing through everyone. We were waiting to do something. I guess it takes time to come up with a plan to stop a species that can adapt to anything you throw at it. I was starting to feel really depressed, but then all at once things seemed to happen.

Paris One left the system and suddenly we saw other ships start to leave the system as well. We heard that we were to get the ship ready to depart early – that seemed to reenergize the crew now we had a mission to focus on! We got a captain, an Arcturan named Zirvuk, and Admirals Hanson and Ross!

We then started to notice a number of ships were moving towards McKinley Station. I saw a number of *Excelsior* and *Miranda* ships – a few *Ambassadors* –

and I heard that the ships' captains were being brought aboard for a top secret briefing. The lower decks were absolutely alive with rumors. I kept my head down and worked to get the EPS conduits working at peak efficiency. Commander La Forge was very proud of the *Enterprise's* power conversion levels, and, well, I thought I could do better. We had *Columbia's* running at almost 97 percent efficiency. It was silly and didn't affect anything, but it was something to take my mind off of what was going on outside.

While I was waist deep into the intermix chamber, someone tapped me on my back and I spun around to see Captain Halloway! He was looking for Commander Quinteros, but wanted to say hello. I asked what he was doing back on board and he said he had come for the briefing. He couldn't tell me anything else, but he had come on the *Melbourne*! I had heard she was still a month away from launch but it seems he grabbed any hands at the dockyard who wanted to come and brought the ship here to help. He thanked me for all my hard work and told me I had a fine future ahead of me, then went off to find the commander. It struck me as a strange thing to say, especially given what we potentially faced. I could feel my anxiety levels rising so I tried to bury myself back into the intermix chamber.

There was a crew muster in the main shuttlebay. I remember seeing the captain and admirals up on the gantry by the flight control deck; they briefed us officially about the situation. Finally. A single Borg ship had entered Federation space and was on a direct course for Earth. The *Enterprise* had engaged it and had slowed it down, but they felt it was only a matter of days before they would arrive. It seemed that no conventional response would work. We all got very restless. Was that why the fleet had been here – to evacuate the planet? But if that was the case it was massively inefficient; we could easily carry 20,000 people and were only operating with our standard complement. Admiral Hanson said that they had identified a possible weak spot, and so were going to take a small task force of 40 ships to the Wolf 359 system to engage the Borg and try to stop them before they reached Earth.

There were a lot of cheers and support for this, but all I could remember was seeing that Borg on the floor of the *Enterprise's* engineering. Suddenly I felt sick and that reminded me of being sick which made it worse. I needed to get out of the bay, but I couldn't. I closed my eyes and used all my willpower to calm myself down.

Columbia would be Hanson's flagship, but he explained this would be a very dangerous mission and the chances for success were slim. He recited that old line you hear on holos about Captain Kirk: "risk is our business." I'd never liked those holos. He also explained that he was only asking for volunteers for this mission; if anyone wanted to remain at Earth – provided he had enough personnel to man *Columbia* – he would allow it, but warned that there was no guarantee that we would be safe there. If they failed, Earth might well share the fate of New Providence. I remembered the planets we had seen at J-25: entire cities scooped up off the surface. It made my skin crawl.

We were dismissed and I was a wreck. I didn't want to have to face the Borg. I would have done anything to avoid that, but at the same time already my friends on the *Enterprise* were out there facing the Borg, and now the *Columbia* was being sent, too. I didn't want to leave them. I had to head to the fresher – at least this time I made it to the bowl before I threw up.

I decided I would stay with the ship. I am Starfleet, and I had a duty to the Federation, to my ship, and to my friends. I lifted my head as I walked into engineering, but Commander Quinteros called me into his office.

He said he had a very difficult task to ask me and if I would be willing to do it. I wasn't really sure what could be harder than we were already being asked, but I liked the commander. He reminded me of Captain Picard in a lot of ways – at least I never spilled hot cocoa on his uniform.

♦ What did he ask you?

[She is quiet for a moment and tears well up in her eyes. She looks away as she wipes them.]

He said he didn't want the more junior engineering officers heading out with the ship. He needed someone he could trust to take them off the ship and look after them. He had asked the captain of the USS *Rutan* to give us a home and would take us away from Earth. I wanted to protest but as I opened my mouth he raised his hand and said he knew he was asking a lot. But he had promised Commander La Forge to look after his engineers, and now he was asking me to look after his.

I couldn't speak, so I just nodded dumbly and he smiled. He...[she stifles a cry] he gave me a hug.

[We take a moment while she composes herself.]

When we beamed to the *Rutan* we had orders to head towards Epsilon Eridani. Whatever happened we should be safe – at least for the moment. The captain invited us to the observation lounge, where we could see the task force break orbit. *Columbia* looked like some sort of regal monarch attended by her courtiers as they headed out from the gravity well. One by one the ships headed to warp to Wolf 359. I was left behind. Despite all the sadness, I felt so relieved that I wasn't going to face the Borg...and I felt so horribly guilty for that thought.

J.P. HANSON

USS COLUMBIA, EN ROUTE TO WOLF 359

Stardate: 43994.5 – 2366

ACCESS INCLUDED AUDIO FILE “04.13”



Admiral's Personal Log. Stardate: 44008.2. I received a report from Riker on board *Enterprise*. They were unsuccessful. The scientist in me can't help but be amazed at the Borg from a xenobiological perspective. If we could employ similar technology in our ships it could be revolutionary – it might even give us a chance now as we go to face them.

More concerning was their report about Picard.

My god. Jean-Luc, what have they done to you?

I reviewed the logs Riker sent and the Borg are marionetting his corpse to use as some kind of golem calling itself “Locutus of Borg.” Not enough that they killed my friend, but now they have desecrated his body and memory and used him like some ventriloquist's doll.

I have to give it to Riker, I was having my doubts about him after he turned down the *Melbourne*, but, my god, I don't think I could have been that cool under those circumstances. The Borg could give the *Cardassians* lessons in psychological warfare.

After consulting with Bill Ross, we've decided not to divulge this information to the rest of the fleet. Hell, I'm not even sure what we would tell them. This whole mission has enough question marks over it without adding more.

Fortunately, we hadn't discussed the particulars of our plan with Picard or *Enterprise*; it's unlikely the Borg will be aware of what we have planned.

We sent orders to the USS *Ferrick*, the courier we had dispatched to

re-establish contact with *Enterprise*. Those orders directed the *Ferrick* to head on a course that would intercept the projected course the Borg would take. We also encoded a report ordering all of our black budget projects relocated to Wolf 359 – everything we could imagine the Borg might be interested in: antiproton weapons, trilitium devices, omega particles, temporal devices. The report suggested we were moving everything to Wolf 359 to keep it out of the hands of the Borg.

The *Ferrick* failed to report in at a scheduled check in last night, so we can assume the Borg have taken the bait. The question now is will they act on it.

There were 53 souls on board the *Ferrick* and I knowingly sent them to their deaths without so much as a thank you. No chance to make their peace with the universe, to say goodbye to loved ones.

That act alone will damn me.

I still have my doubts about this plan. I need at least a couple hundred ships to even think about holding the Borg at bay, but Shanthi would only allow us a force of 40 ships. *Enterprise* is damaged and at our best estimates will arrive 12 hours after the Borg. I've reached out to the Klingons and K'mpec promises us a fleet of his finest warriors – the old war horse was almost *salivating* at the prospect. I've also requested a force from the Imperial Guard, but if this doesn't work there's nothing that we can do short of a miracle.

We have fitted the biggest graviton burst generator we could find onto the USS *Bonestell*, an old *Oberth* we found sitting out in the Oort cloud. Frankly, I doubt the ship will survive the pulse. But if the Borg do arrive at Wolf 359, it will trap them like a fly in amber at least long enough for the next part.

Bill will take one of these new runabouts in towards the star. Once the *Bonestall* fires and we have confirmation the subspace fields are down, he will launch the solar probe. Whatever else happens, if that part of the plan works he'll be taking a one way ticket. He said it was his idea and therefore his responsibility. I can respect that, although part of me wonders if he just doesn't want to have to deal with the shitshow he'll be leaving us all with.

I don't know how I let him talk me into this – a damn stellar bomb! Is this really the only way to stop the Borg?

But at what cost? I thought the Federation would last for thousands of years long after I had died, but is it worth it if we sacrifice our ideals – the very thing that makes us who we are? How close are we to becoming a footnote in the history of a future civilization that might happen upon our ruins? Would they indulge in the fiction of their own immortality until the Borg came for them?

We don't even know for sure what this probe will do; a full supernova? A coronal mass ejection? Collapse into a black hole? That damn El-Aurian was maddeningly vague, and then insisted he and his staff be evacuated from the system. Should it fail he said he could analyze the data and help refine the probe for another attempt. But I can guarantee if it doesn't work there won't be another attempt. I fear there won't be a Federation to worry about it.

Whatever it does, our hope is it will damage the Borg ship enough that the combined fleet will be able to finish off the cube.

I have spent my career fighting to preserve the ideals of Starfleet, and now that we are on the brink I wonder if I'm sacrificing those ideals to ensure the Federation's survival. Has my entire life's work been a fool's crusade? Have I led these people into this desert only to die?

We arrive at Wolf 359 in three hours, the Borg are at least a day away.

Damn.

END OF FILE

ELIZABETH SHELBY

USS ILLINOIS, EN ROUTE TO ZAKDORN

Stardate: 47626.9 – 2370



It just didn't work. We funneled the entire output of a *Galaxy* matter/anti matter reactor through the deflector – we're talking 12.75 exowatts – and in doing so we caused more damage to the *Enterprise* than the Borg. They just sat there and took it, then turned and resumed course for Earth with Captain Picard as their thrall.

I think the entire crew was in shock. Captain Riker took it especially hard; he did a really good job of masking it, but I think everyone on the bridge could see how much he was hurting.

For my part, I was haunted by my time on the cube. I had gone over the reports from J-25 and run simulations; I thought I was ready for anything, but just being there was unlike anything I had experienced. And then when we saw him: standing at the end of the chamber in profile. He just looked like Captain Picard. Dr. Crusher called out to him and he turned to face us. We saw what they had done to him – what he had become. I realized that despite all the research, despite spending every waking hour over the past year studying and preparing for the Borg, I knew nothing. I wasn't ready. It was very humbling, and a little demoralizing.

We made contact with Admiral Hanson to give him our report and I think the news about Picard hit him really hard. They had been friends for a long time and he just couldn't accept that the Borg had turned him – no that's not right. The Borg were using him. They had full access to his memories and experience; they would be ready for anything that we might be able to throw at them. But the admiral was emphatic that the captain was a casualty of war and to be considered KIA.

He notified us that they were massing a fleet of 40 starships to engage the Borg at Wolf 359.

I was stunned at that news. Just 40 starships!? Unless they had found 40 *Galaxy*-class ships I didn't see how that would be enough to even slow them down. I desperately wanted to press the issue, but it wasn't the time and I had to assume that there was more to this than a futile gesture of defiance. Otherwise he was going to be throwing away 40 starships and countless lives.

The news of the Klingon fleet was welcome, though. There had been some suggestion during tests that Klingon disruptors might be more effective against the Borg. They disrupted the neuroelectric interfaces between the cybernetic and organic aspects, but we had not yet had a chance to conduct any large scale tests. There had been some – shall we say, spirited? – discussion whether or not we should formally approach the Klingons and invite them to collaborate on Borg defense strategies. Admiral Hanson himself was somewhat reluctant to bring them into the project at this stage. It seemed that was now a moot point. He was even contemplating contacting the *Romulans*! I knew things must have been really desperate.

After the meeting, I tried to hail the admiral to see if I could glean some more insight into what they had planned, but the connection was refused. I imagine that they were very busy with preparations. All I could do was trust that Admiral Hanson and Starfleet knew what they were doing. The choice of System Wolf 359 was strange, too. There was nothing there that I could recall. While it made perfect sense as a location to try and take on the Borg without the risk of civilian casualties, I was completely at a loss as to how could they get the Borg to stop there – this would be like trying to convince a tsunami to divert to a specific beach. Once again, I had to tell myself to focus on the here and now, on the things I could affect, not to try and second guess what was happening several sectors away. I was so tired and was completely losing track of time, but we had so much to do.

Enterprise was in pretty bad shape following the engagement. The deflector was fried and would require a lengthy stay at a starbase to fully restore functionality, shields were down, sensors damaged, large sections of the saucer and stardrive needed decontamination, secondary systems were down, EPS grids fused. We were very lucky that we had shut down when we did, because there was some evidence that the dilithium chamber might have been under stress. If that had gone or one of the baffle plates, well, that would have been a mess. It was going to take 12 hours to get the reactor back into a state

where we could go to warp. We had until then to get the ship as capable as we could.

A further complication was the discovery by Lieutenant Hellbird: some kind of computer virus that had infected the computer systems of the *Enterprise*. Our first instinct was this was a Borg cyber attack, but if it was it had either failed to deploy correctly or served some other purpose. From what we could tell, it only attacked the navigation database and randomly inserted the number three into coordinates. It was more a nuisance than a real threat and we were able to restore the navigation database from protected back-ups. After that, there was no indication of any problem. In any event, it had no impact since the ship was in no state to continue the pursuit so it was noted for analysis later. I'm still not convinced it was Borg in origin – in fact I've been surprised by the lack of cyber attack as part of the Borg's typical SOP, but as I said: we had more pressing concerns.

My opinion of Riker had improved considerably over the past 24 hours. I was beginning to see the officer that Captain Picard had described in his logs. Now he had been made captain, it was clear that in that moment he was precisely where he needed to be. I wasn't sure where I should be. I was still struggling with what was happening at Wolf 359 and I couldn't figure out what they had planned and how they hoped to take on the Borg. I was lacking a crucial piece of data, at least that was my impression, but then we received word that the fleet had engaged the Borg.

I didn't see the message in real time. We needed to get *Enterprise* repaired and into the fight, but I watched it after.

[She is quiet for a moment, and takes another sip from her raktajino.]

He was there right in the thick of the fight, as I knew he would be. Calm, measured, every bit the leader that I had come to know him to be. He said the fight did not go well and they were attempting to withdraw and regroup. Then the transmission vanished in a hail of static.

It was absolute torture – I had never felt so impotent. I was willing the repairs on *Enterprise* to finish faster. Maybe if we were there we could have tipped the balance. I tried to do anything to take my mind off what must have happened: I told myself that it was Interference from the Borg, some sort of

subspace dampening. Perhaps the fleet had been able to withdraw and was lying low hoping to pass the cube undetected to make another strike, perhaps they were fighting it tooth and nail as the Borg tried to make their way to Earth.

Turns out it was none of those things. The Klingons never arrived in time, the call was never put out to the Romulans. The Borg destroyed 39 starships and then continued onto Earth as if nothing had happened.

END OF CHAPTER 4

ALERT: CONDITION RED

THE FOLLOWING CHAPTER MAY CONTAIN SENSITIVE MATERIAL



PUBLISHER'S NOTE ENCLOSED ON PAGE 215
REGARDING INCLUDED HOLOPROGRAM RECORDINGS



CHAPTER 5

WOLF 359

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INTERLUDE

USS *HOOD*, JUST OUTSIDE WOLF 359 SYSTEM

Stardate 73364.6 – 2396



Wolf 359: a wholly unremarkable red dwarf star located about eight light-years from Earth. Before the events of 2366, I doubt more than a dozen people in the entire Federation had even heard of it – much less traveled to the system. Today, it has an almost mythical quality and is spoken of in reverent tones, a place of pilgrimage.

There is a change that has taken place on the ship, a solemnity as people go about their business. The ship is noticeably quieter as people find themselves alone with their thoughts and reflect on what took place here nearly 30 years ago. Even those of us who were not present at the battle can sense this shift.

I don't see much of Admiral DeSoto the next day. He spends a lot of time up in the observation lounge in meetings and rehearsals as the crew ready the ship for the final leg of its journey to its final home. Officially it is the "Wolf 359 Memorial Station," but to most in Starfleet it is still known as the "Ossuary." An apt name, borrowed from an ancient Earth tradition: an ossuary held the bones of the dead.

Starfleet originally constructed the station following the battle. They needed a platform to allow the examination of the wrecks of those starships that had proved so ineffective against the cube. The station also provided facilities for the collection and transportation of remains back to their home systems and families. The memorial station was built off of that original structure and houses the memorial wall recording the names of everyone present at the battle. Displays and education spaces give information about the events leading up to the battle, its aftermath, and about the ships present. Several holosuites allow survivors to share their accounts of the battle with visitors.

In 2387, Chancellor Martok presented the Federation with the *'IpyaH*, a sculpture by noted Klingon artist nY'rHi. It centers on a column of fire taken from the caves of *No'Mat* on the Klingon home world. It burns continuously. At all times, an honor guard of two warriors accompanies it to help light the way to *Sto-Vo-Kor*.

The memorial station receives a large number of Klingons who view Wolf 359 as one of the great battles of the ages. The sculpture's chamber connects to the Silent Cenotaph, where 40 large windows look out on the remains of the ships that still orbit Wolf 359. The station is arranged so that the wrecks are not visible except from this viewing area. I have been to the station many times in the past, but now traveling there aboard *Hood* with so many veterans and families of those lost on board...I feel the weight of this place in a way perhaps I never had before.

The final preparations for *Hood's* entrance to the system are in full swing. Years of planning have led to this ceremony. Ever since the memorial station's construction it has been intended as *Hood's* final resting place after she decommissioned. 40 starships will enter the system and then one by one the other ships will pull away until *Hood* arrives alone at the station and docks. Representatives from every major power in the quadrant are expected to attend. *Hood* will then be turned over to the Federation Parks Service and will stand watch over the site.

I try to stay out of the way of the crew and the guests on board. I feel so utterly out of place – as though I have no right to be here. I try to hide away in my cabin and work through revisions on my book when the door chimes, startling me. I open the door and I'm met with an older gentleman; his hair a bright silver, but there is still a youthful twinkle in his eye. He smiles warmly and grabs my hand before I know what's happening.

"I'm Rayden Obena," he says with a thick Australian accent. Instantly I know who this is – his wife Alison Obena was the chief engineer of the *Hood* in 2366 and single handedly saved the ship at the cost of her own life. One of the escorts for *Hood* is the USS *Obena*, the first of a new class of starships named in her honor. I gesture for him to come in. I grab some tea from the replicator and we take a seat on the couch.

"I'm sorry to drop in on you like this, but when I heard you were on board I had

to come and find you. Robert told me you were here and that you've been writing a book with the personal accounts of those who were in the battle."

I feel my stomach drop, but this man has a warm and friendly smile on his face. "Of course, what can I do for you?" I ask at a loss.

"Robert suspected you might be feeling a little out of place, and truth be told so am I. I hate space travel. I spent my career down in the oceans, and Aly got seasick in a bath. We used to joke that it was the secret to our marriage – that neither of us could venture into the other's world."

He chuckles softly to himself, then stands and gestures for me to join him. "I don't have too many years left. When I was invited to the *Hood's* ceremony I thought it was only right to come and spend some time in her world – to say goodbye properly. I gather you know her story pretty well. Would you mind sharing it with me?"

Speechless, I take the proffered hand and smile as I stand up. "Okay, let's head to engineering. That was her home on the ship."

HIST 147: MORAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES OF COMMAND

History 147: Moral and Ethical Issues of Command is one of the required courses for all freshmen at Starfleet Academy. Somewhat cynically nicknamed “What ‘Not To Do’ for Slimies,” (referencing the term “Slimeworms” used for first-year cadets), it is a semester-long examination of Starfleet’s most significant failures over the course of its history and the ethical leadership discussions that can be gleaned from their study. The course is constantly updated with new material as time passes. Significant blocks over the decades have included *Enterprise NX-01*’s encounter with the Vissians, Captain Pike’s experiences with the Majalans, Captain Georgiou’s actions at the Battle of the Binary Stars, and Captain Kirk’s decision to provide inhabitants of Planet Neural with firearms.

As of the publication of this report, the Battle of Wolf 359 is lesson 21 in the syllabus. The current course director, Academy Professor and Starfleet Vice Admiral (Retired) Lakshmi Somak, PhD, provided the author with the supplementary holographic recordings from the main course textbook to be included with this report.

■ INITIATE HOLOPROGRAM “5.02”

Welcome to lesson 21 of *Moral and Ethical Issues of Command*. During this block of instruction, we will continue our examination of the course’s core theme: the importance of maintaining emotional distance between yourself and those under your command, with a discussion of the Battle of Wolf 359. Please refer to Chapter 83, Section 168 of the *Official Starfleet Academy Historical Reader* for a broader historical background of the events leading up to the battle.

The Borg Incursion of 2366 revealed a significant loss of tactical acumen and that an ossified military mindset had taken root in Starfleet over nearly 80 years of extended peace in the early and mid-24th century. Technological overmatch and economic superiority meant that few extant Starfleet leaders had ever seen actual combat. Those that had experienced action during the border conflicts with the Cardassian Empire, the Tzenkethi, and with Ferengi raiders had not experienced anything larger than small-scale, short duration battles with two to three

HOLODECK ACTIVATED ■

enemy ships at a time. Victory in these skirmishes often resulted from Starfleet's logistical skills and the superior damage control training of the Starfleet Corps of Engineers. To put it simply, Starfleet could provide reinforcements and supplies faster than enemies could destroy them. This created a false sense of security among the admiralty, all of whom had come of age during this era of "buying victory." In their experience, a sufficient number of Starfleet ships concentrated in a single star system was unbeatable by any adversary. Wolf 359 destroyed that misconception in under one hour – at the cost of 39 starships lost, and nearly 11,000 dead.

While many historians point to the technological superiority of the Borg as a primary reason for their rapid victory, this is only partially correct. In this lesson, we will examine how leadership failings of the sapient commanders involved in the battle along with their emotional decisions based on fear, anger, and overconfidence contributed to the worst loss in Starfleet history since the Battle of the Binary Stars 109 years prior.

[As Professor Somak continues her lecture, holographic recreations of the events she describes appear hovering in mid-air behind her, along with portraits of the people she discusses.]

The hostile atmosphere between Starfleet Command and the administration of Federation President Amitra significantly reduced the proactivity of Starfleet's emergency planning in the mid-2360s. The destruction of the New Providence colony on Jouret IV and the subsequent assimilation of Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the *Enterprise-D* resulted in a purely reactive, two-pronged strategy by the admiralty. First, most Starfleet resources would be dedicated to evacuating critical personnel and equipment from the Sol System while also providing a large rearguard to delay Borg penetration towards Sector 001. The second half of the strategy could only be described as pure desperation. For the

■ HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

first time since the Earth-Romulan Wars of the 2150s, Starfleet would attempt to use a weapon of mass destruction within the boundaries of Federation space.

A young rear admiral on the Starfleet staff named William Ross (who would later distinguish himself during the Dominion War as commander of the 10th Fleet) proposed using a modified stellar probe to collapse a star in the Borg's flight path. In theory, this would create a subspace shockwave large enough to wipe out their cube. Though the environmental damage would be catastrophic, it was hoped that the effects would be limited to one uninhabited or sparsely inhabited system allowing the rest of the Federation to survive relatively unscathed. Though initially horrified by the plan, President Amitra acquiesced at the behest of her staff as she herself was forced to evacuate Earth after the Borg penetrated every outer defense along the Federation frontier en route to Earth.

Little was known about the Borg prior to 2366, but what was already well documented was their desire to examine and assimilate new and unique scientific knowledge and technology. As a result, the star system chosen was Wolf 359: an uninhabited system consisting of a red dwarf star orbited by two Class-L planets, four Class-D planetoids, three gas giants, and an Oort cloud of gasses and asteroids large enough to hide a significantly sized fleet from sensors. However, most significant to its selection was a secret research facility controlled by Starfleet Intelligence in orbit of the third planet of the Wolf System. It was believed that if a suitable amount of sensor data could be projected from the vicinity of the facility, the Borg would stop their advance long enough to investigate. A gravimetric device of sufficient power could then be detonated, disrupting subspace long enough for the stellar implosion device to launch, collapse the star, and destroy the Borg.

The actual weapon was placed under direct control of Admiral Ross, who would deploy it from a runabout hidden among the system's debris fields. Meanwhile, an ad hoc 40 starship task force under Vice Admiral

J.P. Hanson would form a perimeter in the Oort cloud, hidden from the Borg and well out of range of the stellar shockwave. Their purpose would only be to observe and prevent the Borg from escaping. As such, only the *Columbia*, Admiral Hanson's flagship, was considered a first-tier ship of the line. The other 39 vessels were mostly obsolete science and patrol vessels, or ships taken straight out of the yards prior to their fitting out. All of Starfleet's most advanced vessels would be kept dedicated to the defense of Sol less than three parsecs away.

The USS *Bonestell*, an obsolete *Oberth*-class science vessel, was chosen as the task force's "Trojan Horse." Her systems were modified to emit false sensor readings similar to the classified projects at 359's research site. Also, her warp core was removed and replaced with the largest gravimetric device ever deployed by Starfleet: a whopping 250 cochranes. It was believed that when detonated in close proximity of the Borg, the invaders would be trapped within the blast radius of the star for at least 10 minutes: long enough for Ross to deploy the probe, detonate Wolf 359, and destroy the cube. The Klingon Empire did dispatch a strike fleet to assist at the Wolf System, but diplomatic bungling by the Amitra administration delayed its departure to the Federation by three Earth days. It was unknown if they would be able to rendezvous with the task force before the Borg arrived at Wolf 359. Still, Starfleet was committed to executing the plan to save Earth – with or without Klingon help.

On stardate 44002.3, the Borg arrived in the system. All seemed to go according to plan. Less than five seconds after the cube dropped out of warp to examine the readings from the *Bonestell*, the graviton burst aboard the *Bonestell* initiated and Ross launched the probe towards the star. Less than four minutes later, the probe detonated. However, it was almost immediately apparent that the plan to trigger an artificial supernova failed. Though the device did marginally reduce stellar fusion for less than 20 seconds, Wolf 359 quickly returned to normal, and the Borg cube began to exit the system at impulse to clear the compromised ambush.

It was then that J.P. Hanson made an emotional decision that would end his life. Many of his subordinate commanders urged him to fall back, regroup with the rest of Federation forces at the Sol System, and wait for Klingon reinforcements to arrive. However, Hanson believed that the 40 ships under his command had enough combat power to engage and destroy the cube. His logs indicate that he was overwhelmed with anger at the recent loss of his close friend Jean-Luc Picard and his frustration at the Federation's inability to stop the Borg to this point. His love for his friend doomed his task force.

The resulting attack was both improvised and piecemeal. Most Federation captains had no experience outside of battle simulations or any knowledge of how to maneuver large fleets together to achieve combined effects. Most ships simply rushed in alone, allowing the Borg to engage and destroy ships one at a time. No ships provided fixing fires or attempted to limit the cube's ability to maneuver within the system. To make matters worse, the lingering subspace effects of the graviton burst severely degraded subspace communication between Starfleet vessels, making it more difficult for Hanson aboard the *Columbia* to issue orders or form coherent lines of battle.

Over the course of three brave, but ultimately futile waves of attack, 39 ships of the task force were destroyed or assimilated by the Borg. Admiral Hanson fell when the *Columbia* was destroyed as it attempted to rally the last wave itself. Only a single Federation vessel survived, whose crew managed to regain control of the ship from the Borg boarding parties – albeit with extreme loss of life among its personnel.

HOLOPROGRAM ENDING — PLEASE WAIT...

As we begin our classroom discussions on the Battle of Wolf 359, I ask you to consider the following discussion questions:

1. How did poor strategic planning at the admiralty, executive, and legislative branches of the Federation government set the stage for the disaster at Wolf 359?
2. How could leveraging other elements of Federation power (diplomatic, informational, or economic) assist Starfleet in stopping the Borg Incursion of 2366?
3. Based on the historical decisions we discussed earlier in this course, why do you think Starfleet believed that destroying an entire star system in Federation space to save Earth was justified?
4. Why did Starfleet of the mid-2360s believe they could militarily defeat the Borg and how did poor self-assessments lead to this conclusion?
5. How could individual decisions at the tactical level been improved at Wolf 359?

HOLOPROGRAM "5.02" COMPLETE

HOLOPROGRAM SEQUENCE INITIALIZING...



**REGARDING THE HOLOGRAPHIC RECREATION OF
SENSITIVE CONTENT FROM THE BORG INCURSION
OF 2366 AT THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359**

**IT IS ILLEGAL WITHIN FEDERATION SPACE TO
MODIFY THESE RECORDINGS IN ANY WAY**

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

THE FOLLOWING SECTION INCLUDES PERSONAL TESTIMONIALS AND HOLOGRAPHIC RECREATIONS FROM FLIGHT DATA RECORDERS OF STARSHIPS DESTROYED DURING THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359, PROVIDED BY STARFLEET COMMAND TO THE HOLLAND COMMISSION. THE INCLUDED INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED WITHIN SIX MONTHS AFTER THE BATTLE AS PART OF THE OFFICIAL DEBRIEFINGS. AS PART OF THE AGREEMENT TO PUBLISH THIS ORAL HISTORY, STARFLEET HAS GRACIOUSLY ALLOWED FOR A SELECTION OF FLIGHT DATA RECORDERS TO BE INCLUDED IN THIS PRESENTATION.

SOME DATA HAS BEEN MODIFIED FOR OPERATIONAL SECURITY AND PRIVACY REASONS. IN SOME INSTANCES, PERSONNEL HAVE BEEN REMOVED OR OMITTED FROM THE HOLOPROGRAMS AT THE REQUEST OF FAMILY. IF YOU ARE VIEWING ON A HOLODECK OR HOLOSUITE WE ADVISE YOU TO ENSURE THE SAFETY PROTOCOLS ARE FULLY ENABLED AND CONNECTED TO A LCARS INTERFACE.

YOUR DISCRETION IS ADVISED.

J.P. HANSON

USS COLUMBIA

Admiral

Personal Log, supplemental. Well, we have baited the trap and long-range sensors suggest that the Borg have changed course for Wolf 359. They are coming. We have finished prepping the *Bonestell* and have moved it into the system. Bill Ross took the runabout *Rhine*, departed *Columbia* about four hours ago, and has taken up position on the far side of the Wolf 359 star. He left me a message to be delivered to his wife; I promised I would see to it personally. Since we still do not have a clear idea exactly what sort of effect the solar probe might have on the star, I am keeping the fleet deployed at the edge of the system. Should it trigger an actual supernova we will be out of range of the graviton burst and will be able to warp away. If the Borg ship is merely damaged, we will be able to warp in. Although...the graviton burst will collapse the warp bubbles and we would be trapped in the system with the Borg. It would be like diving into the ocean with the shark after chumming the water. I hope it won't come to that...

RYO SUZUKI

Helmsman

USS YAMAGUCHI

The waiting was the worst part. I know that sounds cliché, but after the rush back to Earth, the massing of the fleet, and then being sent out to that backwater of Wolf 359 only to hold position at the edge of the system – it was torturous. Captain Adélwalé tried to keep the crew as informed as possible, but it was pretty clear that they didn't have much more information than we did, so we just sat out in the Oort cloud staring at long-range sensors.

ROBERT DESOTO

USS HOOD

Captain

It was tense – you could have cut the air with a phaser. *Hood* and *William Decker* had dropped sensor buoys a few light-years out from the system to give us some early warning when the Borg were on approach, but they had been mercifully silent. I found myself just sitting on the bridge, staring at the viewscreen as if the ole mark one eyeball might pick up something before the sensors. Ally Obena tried to keep the engineering crew busy going through the ship's systems and took advantage of one of the few times we were not warping back and forth to flush the nacelle plasma manifolds. I can't imagine that was fun. But I guess when you are elbow deep in the carbon runoff from the inverters it will keep your mind off whatever is happening outside.

We had a damn digital clock over the viewscreen, a holdover from when the ship was built which had somehow managed to survive 50+ years of refits and my eyes kept drifting up to it. It was silent, but as the hours wore on I swear it got louder with every second. I was right at the point of calling Ally and asking how feasible it would be to get a team up to remove it when there was a chirp from tactical: a sensor return.

Everyone on the bridge jumped and sat up a little straighter. Lieutenant Moody, the tactical officer, quickly assessed the console but shook his head. It was just a civilian transport passing. The presence of civilians was worrying enough and I was about to hail *Columbia* to ask if we should move to escort them out of the system when there was another alert. I moved over to tactical, but Moody's hands were already moving across the console. He reported the buoy furthest out from the system had stopped transmitting. I asked if it had detected any trace of the Borg prior to it ceasing transmitting but he shook his head again – there had been no sign of any ship. Then another alert, the next buoy had gone dark. That was enough for me. I called for Yellow Alert and hailed *Columbia*. They had already gone to Yellow Alert and confirmed the report that the buoys were not responding to commands and no longer transmitting. We had not been told the Borg had any sort of stealth capabilities – there had been no suggestion that they would even need them – but it was clear that something large was approaching the system and it would be here in a matter of minutes.

B'RON LEE GAET

USS *BASTION*

Engineer

It was a waste, frankly. A waste of materials and personnel. We just sat out there jumping at every return on the long-range, all the time the ship was literally falling apart around my ears! *Bastion* had been scheduled to be *decommissioned*. The only reason it was in the system was for the passing out ceremony, and then we were due to head to the boneyard. I found myself spending what little free time I had staring out at the other ships in our little fleet, especially the *Ambassador*-class. I'd always wanted to be assigned to one of those.

We received orders to assist with the conversions they were looking to make on the USS *Bonestell* – it was almost as old as the *Bastion*! So now, in addition to struggling to keep that bucket together, I was having to pull EPS conduits and duotronic inputs so we could rig *Bonestell* for remote flight operations. My team was on the bridge pulling apart the nav console and tying it into the communications grid. It wasn't our best work, but it would do the job, and – let's be honest – blowing up that hulk would have been the best thing we could have done to it! A crew from *Melbourne*, the new one, was busy down in the engine room setting up the graviton burst generator. They were led by some Andorian tight-ass. Naturally, we butted heads over who was in charge. I called him a frigid blue assed insect, he called me a Tellarite. [chuckles] I instantly took a liking to him...I don't think he survived.

USS BONESTELL NCC-31600

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Flight Recorder Visual Stardate: 44002.3

The USS Bonestell, an Oberth-class starship, sits alone in the middle of the Wolf 359 System. No one is on board the ship and its interior is filled with open consoles, their guts exposed as wires and conduits connect systems that were never meant to talk directly to one another. On the bridge, the viewscreen shows the stars and the soft hum of the warp reactor fills the air.

The ship emits a false sensor image suggesting that it is carrying an exotic cargo of advanced technologies and weapons in the hopes that this might lure the Borg in close – giving the graviton burst generator the best chance of affecting the Borg and disabling its subspace fields trapping it, albeit briefly, in the Wolf 359 system.

The long-range sensors detect something and give a small double-toned beep to alert the tactical officer of the approaching ship, but there is no one on board to react to the warning. As the ship gets closer, the tone increases in urgency and volume.

Suddenly a wall of black appears – completely obscuring the viewscreen.

The Borg have arrived.

The cube utterly dominates the tiny *Oberth*-class ship which sits less than 500 meters away from it. The Borg vessel immediately begins scanning the ship; a powerful tractor beam erupts from the Borg and locks onto it. At the same moment, the Borg open a channel and hail the ship.

On the *Bonestell's* viewscreen the image of Locutus of Borg appears, his red targeting laser flashing across the empty bridge.

"I am Locutus of Borg, lower your shields and surrender your ship. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness to our own. Your culture will adapt to service us. Resistance is futile."

There is no one on board the *Bonestell* to respond. However, at that same moment the ship's computers receive the awaited signal and the hastily built graviton burst generator in front of the warp core begins to activate. The charging lights on the device build as the resonators begin to spin, power flows directly from the ship's warp core into the device as the thrum grows ever louder and louder, reaching levels that would have been harmful should anyone have been there.

As the noise reaches a crescendo, the final light on the jerry-rigged device illuminates, and the magnetic shackles decouple, launching the axiom shunt into the firing matrix. The *Oberth*-class ship unleashes the graviton burst at the speed of light, enveloping the Borg cube and everything within a range of nine AU. The systems on board the *Bonestell* go dark as the EMP from the graviton burst wreaks havoc on the recklessly modified systems and the entire ship is plunged into darkness save the soft illumination of the emergency lights.

The ship comes back to life with a click and a soft hum as the backup systems kick in. The Borg ship still sits just off the bow, but the tractor beam has been disabled. With comms restored, the connection to the rest of the fleet reinitializes and Admiral Hanson's voice resonates throughout the *Bonestell*:

"Now, Bill – do it now!"

WILLIAM ROSS

RUNABOUT RHINE

Admiral

I sat there about .25 AU from the star. The *Rhine* was one of the new *Danube*-class of runabouts, a new concept intended to replace the old *Excelsior* and *Miranda*-class ships still being used as shuttles between outposts. I remember thinking as I sat there waiting that it was such a shame that this little ship would never be used on any other missions. Such a shame that the time and effort that had gone into its construction just for it to be snuffed out. It's funny the way your mind wanders.

I had quite the spirited discussion about the plan while we were en route on board *Columbia*. Hanson didn't understand why I insisted that I man this part of the mission. The runabout was more than capable of remote or even autonomous operation, and we were already rigging the *Bonestell* to operate unmanned. To his mind, this just seemed like unnecessary theatrics. Maybe he was right. I insisted that this aspect of the mission was too important to be left to chance; if something went wrong, if the Borg were able to intercept the signal and prevent us from firing remotely, if there was a last minute change of plan. Whatever the case, I insisted I needed to be there. He countered that if it was so mission critical then we should have a team of engineers on the shuttle and not an out old admiral whose specialization was planning and logistics.

The truth was, I needed to be there to do what we were proposing. It was a responsibility that I could not ask of any other and – to be perfectly frank – whatever happened it would have been the end of my career. Even if we had defeated the Borg by deploying a stellar bomb, no one would walk away from that untouched. No, far better to take personal responsibility and see it done.

I was out there for a good 18 hours. We knew the Borg were en route and long-range sensors suggested they were coming to 359. I didn't know what to make of this news about Picard. I didn't know him as well as J.P. – they were old friends. I could see it really hurt him, the thought of Picard being subsumed into this collective. It further highlighted why we had to stop the Borg by any means

necessary. I established an uplink to transmit the data from the runabout to Soran's technical group in realtime. If this didn't work, I felt it important they have all the information to try again. After all, we knew the system the Borg were heading to next.

We started to get some strange returns from the sensor nets that had been placed out of the system to give us some advanced warning. They were going dark one after the other. I still don't know why they didn't give any indication that the cube was approaching – they just went dead one after another. Like a shadow passing before them as they approached the system. I had the *Bonestell* on the viewer when all of a sudden they were there: the Borg.

It was massive. The only way I could describe it is Lovecraftian. It was huge, far bigger than I imagined from the reports, perhaps because it was sitting atop an *Oberth* ship rather than a *Galaxy* like the footage from J-25. It dwarfed the *Bonestell*. From my vantage it appeared a black void in space, perfectly geometric in its dimensions, but enhancing the magnification I could see the surface was covered in conduits and pipes and shapes that made it difficult to gauge scale and made my eyes want to slide off of it. It fired its tractor beam at the *Bonestell* and then we received the first hail. I saw him for the first time: Locutus of Borg.

It was the usual Borg diatribe, but I didn't hear it – I was transfixed by this sight. A man that embodied the very ideals of the Federation, that was the very best that Starfleet had to offer, stood there as a grotesque twisted mirror of himself. I dreaded to think what would happen with the other ships of the fleet, other officers who knew him personally like J.P.

The console gave me an alert, which snapped me back. It notified me that a graviton anomaly had been detected and warp drive was offline. The *Bonestell* had fired its pulse – the Borg were now trapped. I heard Hanson's voice come through the comm system.

"Now, Bill – *do it now!*"

I hit the button and the probe left from the *Rhine's* torpedo launcher and sped towards the star. It took me a moment to realize that I had just launched a torpedo that would end my life. I hadn't paused or hesitated for the moment. I was stunned, I had thought I might pause or say something profound, but I had

been so caught up in the moment and so horrified by what I was seeing I hadn't. I remember going "huh" and feeling a little disappointed. Then telling myself how foolish that thought was. Instead, I went to the aft quarters and found the bottle of real Lagavulin that Owen Paris had given me. I grabbed a glass and sat back at the helm to wait.

It took about four minutes for the probe to impact the star. I was torn between staring at the readouts of the star and the display of what the Borg were doing. They had released the *Bonestell* from the tractor beam, but otherwise were untouched. It looked like the *Bonestell* had survived the burst – they really don't build them like that anymore. I took another sip as the computer told me that the probe had impacted the star. I took a sip. I closed my eyes...and exhaled.

Nothing happened.

I checked the sensors – the probe had impacted. I was going through the sensor logs and about to run a diagnostic when suddenly it felt like the brightness outside dimmed. The star seemed to burst; that's the only word I can really use to describe it. It contracted, then returned to normal, sending a small shockwave out ahead of it. Before I could respond or send a warning it impacted the runabout and sent it tumbling away. The console sparked and there were warnings of EPS overloads and inertial dampers going offline. I was thrown from the console and smacked my head against the rear bulkhead.

Mercifully, I lost consciousness. I can think of no greater torment than being forced to bear witness to the massacre that was to come and being unable to do anything but watch.

USS COLUMBIA NCC-71102

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Flight Recorder Visual — Stardate 44002.3

The battle bridge of the USS Columbia is smaller than you would expect for a ship of this tonnage, more reminiscent of those found on the old Constitution-class ships. While Columbia herself is being controlled from the main bridge, Admiral Hanson uses this space to coordinate the fleet as a whole.

The bridge is deathly silent, all eyes fixed upon the viewscreen and the distant image of the Wolf 359 star. Hanson sits in the command chair, his leg bouncing up and down nervously the only outward sign of any tension.

"Any aspect change to the star?" he asks.

The lieutenant sitting at the science station runs her hands across the LCARS interface as data scrolls across the display in front of her. "There was a 0.5 reduction in the star's luminosity which lasted for 0.25 seconds and released a small shockwave, but it will dissipate long before it reaches the Borg." Heads droop across the bridge as the small crew releases a chorus of disappointed sighs. The plan has failed.

Hanson's leg stops its movement as he finds stillness. "What's the status of the runabout? Can we hail Admiral Ross?" he asks. Chet, a Lurian officer, inputs a few commands into a large plotting board, but shakes his head. "No response to hails, Sir, and we cannot locate the runabout on sensors. I do not know if that is the result of disruption or if the runabout has been destroyed."

Hanson nods, but his eyes remain fixed on the viewscreen. The Borg cube sits immobile as the *Bonestell* drifts slowly away from the enormous vessel.

There is a beep from tactical and Chet is there to interpret the new

information. "Sir, we are receiving hails from the *Konom*, *Saratoga*, *Gage*, and *Ibn Sina*. They are requesting instructions. Do we still proceed with the mission?" Hanson looks over to the plotting board behind Chet. A red icon in the center represents the Borg with the 39 ships of the fleet arrayed around the perimeter, each marked with a Starfleet delta. The console beeps again, dragging Chet's attention back to tactical. The deltas on the plotting board flash to indicate which ships are hailing *Columbia*. More than half of them blink now. "Sir, we are also being hailed by both *Melbournes*, the *Gora bim Gral*, the *Hood*, the *Seleya*—"

Hanson cuts off the list with a raised hand. "Status of the Borg ship?"

At the science station a Nostraman officer – Rip'Lah – moves her pale white hands over the console as data scrolls across its surface. "The Borg ship seems unaffected. They appear to have entered a diagnostic and regeneration cycle, but I am already reading power build-ups in several systems. I estimate the Borg ship remains 98 percent effective."

Hanson leaps out of his seat and strides over to the station. He looms over the small officer. "What about warp drive? Are they able to resume course to Earth?"

She looks up at him with pitch-black eyes. "Conventional warp travel is not possible. If they attempt to form a bubble it will collapse. The same for any ship attempting to pass through this area. The effects of the graviton burst will remain for approximately one standard hour. In addition, our transporters and sensors will be unreliable for considerably longer. However, I cannot say if the Borg have other means at their disposal."

Hanson wheels around and moves back to the command chair. He picks up a PADD and nods to himself as he runs through some calculations. He turns to Chet, "Give me the fleet." The Lurian had been expecting the order and connects Admiral Hanson with a single button.

"All ships, this is Hanson. It seems that our plan has failed. The Borg

ship remains undamaged, but the graviton burst has rendered all warp travel in the system impossible for the next standard hour. We have them trapped for at least the moment.

"I don't have to tell you what is at stake here. We are all that currently stands between the Borg and Earth, the seat of our government and home for many of us. All indications are the Borg ship remains at full lethality and any attempt to engage the ship will likely result in our destruction. I have signaled for reinforcements from Starfleet but they are at best several hours away. There is no sign of the Klingon force K'mpec promised.

"We represent the last best chance to hurt the Borg. Once they leave this system it is unlikely we will be able to maintain pace with them; once they reach Earth it is unlikely anything we throw at them will be able to stop them. I know this is not what you were sold when you were told about this mission. I know it's not what any of us signed up for, and I know that some of you still have families on board. But if we cannot stop the Borg here and now, then nowhere in the Federation will be safe. I intend to make my stand here and try to occupy the Borg long enough for our reinforcements or the Klingons to arrive. I ask you to stand with me. Hanson out."

The admiral sits back down in his chair. Around the bridge, officers exchange glances and nods of affirmation. On the plotting wall deltas start to flash as the tactical console signals incoming hails. One by one every Starfleet delta turns green. Chet looks over to Hanson and nods. "Sir, the fleet stands ready."

Hanson offers a small smile in return and settles back into his chair. "Signal the first wave to move to engage. We'll stagger our approach to try and keep the Borg off-balance and buy as much time as we can. If we can find any chink we can exploit be ready to exploit it." Chet turns to his plotting board and inputs commands, tapping on various icons to send orders to the ships.

A few seconds later, the *Excelsior*-class USS *Melbourne* and *Miranda*-

■ HOLOPROGRAM ENDING — PLEASE WAIT...

class *USS Saratoga* move out of formation and jump to warp. The massive bulk of the Borg cube awaits them inside the graviton field. The *Ambassador*-class *Yamaguchi* and *Nebula*-class *Bellerophon* jump to warp a few moments later.

“Signal Starfleet,” says Hanson. He watches the ships drop out of warp as they enter the field of the graviton burst and the Borg ship finally moves in response to the new approaching threat. “Tell them we have engaged the Borg at Wolf 359.”

USS SARATOGA NCC-31911

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Flight Recorder Visual — Stardate 44002.4

"Sir, we are being hailed by the Borg," reports Hranok Zar, almost in disbelief. Captain Storil moves over to the science station to see what effects the graviton burst might have had, and to see if the scans reveal anything about the Borg which might be of use.

"On screen," Storil orders. The crew collectively draw breath at the sight of Locutus of Borg, Starfleet's finest captain turned against them.

"Resistance is futile. You will disarm your weapons and escort us to Sector 001. If you attempt to intervene, we will destroy you."

Storil presses the close channel button on the ops console in defiance and returns to his chair, projecting an air of confidence and professionalism.

"Red Alert! Load all torpedo bays, ready phasers." Next to him, Commander Sisko orders the conn officer. "Take us to position alpha, Ensign."

The *Saratoga* and *Melbourne* begin their run on the cube. They fly in a parallel column, firing phasers in a high EM spectrum to gauge the effectiveness of the modified settings received from Starfleet Tactical. Just before the ships go to break to either side of the cube, a powerful beam erupts from the Borg ship, striking the *Melbourne* and obliterating its shields. The beam tears through the structure of the primary hull and in a few seconds the venerable *Excelsior*-class ship is disabled. Most of its saucer is gone. The remains of the engineering hull tumbles along its original course and collides with the Borg. The cube easily absorbs the impact and resultant warp core breach without any outward signs of damage. The Borg have already shifted their attention to the *Saratoga* as they attempt to lock on with a tractor beam. Despite the ship's best efforts, the Borg tractor beam forces *Saratoga* to a complete stop. The massive deceleration pushes the inertial dampers to their very limit.

"They've locked on," reports Ensign Tamamota as she tries to reconfigure the shield harmonics to break the tractor beam's hold.

"Reroute auxiliary power," orders Sisko.

The *Yamaguchi* and *Bellerophon* move in to try and distract the Borg with phaser fire, hoping to help *Saratoga* escape the tractor beam's hold.

The structural integrity alarm sounds on the bridge as the ship succumbs to forces the spaceframe was never meant to handle. Ensign Tamamota frantically tries to counter the Borg's latest assault on their shields. "Our shields are being drained! Power at 64 percent! 42 percent!"

Captain Storil remains a rock amidst a tumultuous ocean. His calm Vulcan stoicism helps to remind everyone: they are Starfleet. "Recalibrate shield modulation," he orders.

Zar at tactical tries inputting the sequence to activate the upgrade. "Modulation is having no effect." He moves from tactical to ops, leaning down over Tamamota to access the console directly. "Shields have failed," she shouts over the din of alarms.

"Full reverse," orders Sisko, attempting to match his captain's calm demeanor, but the cube emits a second beam to strike the *Saratoga*.

As it strikes the ship, a massive power surge runs through the ship destroying the EPS network and causing massive overloads in all systems. On the bridge, Captain Storil tries to issue one last order. It dies on his lips as the console behind him erupts in a cascade of sparks and debris. Other consoles burst as the surge of power tears through the *Saratoga's* EPS grid, throwing officers across the bridge, lancing them with plasma and fragments of duratanium.

It has taken only moments to transform a functioning starship bridge into an abattoir. The alarms still blare in time with the pulsing of the red emergency lights, but it's obvious to anyone who has spent time on a

HOLOPROGRAM ENDING — PLEASE WAIT... ■

starship that the *Saratoga* is fatally wounded.

Fires break out as Sisko frees himself from the debris that was once the tactical console. "Damage report," he calls out, but no one responds. He crawls to the still form of helmsman Ensign Delaney and checks for a pulse. The unnatural angle of her neck tells him it is hopeless. The air grows thick with smoke from the plasma fires. Sisko coughs and again shouts "Damage report!" The computer responds from the overhead speakers, "Warning: damage to warp core. Containment failure in five minutes."

Sisko moves from body to body, hoping to find anyone still alive. From the back of the bridge there is movement as Hranok Zar staggers to an operational console and coaxes it back to life. "Direct hit, decks one through four."

Sisko looks around, but it is clear there are no other survivors on the bridge. "Let's get the civilians to the escape pods, Lieutenant!"

RYO SUZUKI

USS YAMAGUCHI

Helmsman



As we entered the graviton burst's area of effect, our warp fields collapsed bringing the entire fleet to sublight speed. The *Saratoga* and *Melbourne* went in first. The idea was we would probe the cube to get a sense of its fire arcs and level of maneuverability. They would head in on a parallel track and then split to either side of the cube, then the *Bellerophon* and *Yamaguchi* would repeat the pattern above and below the Borg ship. It was just a cube; the surface looked like the backside of a Jefferies tube. You couldn't make out phaser arrays or tractor emitters – all we could do was make the cube shoot at us and record where the shots came from.

It took just one shot from the cube and *Melbourne* was gone, her saucer completely torn apart. She disintegrated like someone had taken a flame to paper. The remains carried on and collided with the cube without even making a dent. *Saratoga* tried to turn away but was too late, the borg caught them in a tractor beam. Captain Gould ordered us to move in and provide support. We formed up with *Bellerophon* and made a pass. We focused our fire on the Borg's tractor emitters, but some sort of dampening field kept throwing off our targeting lock. The shots impacted around the emitter, but we couldn't score a direct hit. They held the *Saratoga* like those old scientists might pin a bug to examine it more closely. All the while the Borg continued to fire at us. We might as well have been throwing harsh language for all the good our weapons did. We needed more support, so the captain put out the call for more ships.

USS MELBOURNE NCC-78256

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Flight Recorder Visual — Stardate 44002.5

The USS Melbourne was still under construction at the Utopia Planitia yards on Mars when the call went out for ships to rendezvous with the Columbia and Admiral Hanson's task force. A variant of the Nebula design, the Melbourne was an attempt to provide an alternative to the costly Galaxy-class by incorporating some of the more advanced systems into the smaller Nebula spaceframe. Captain Thomas Halloway and a team of volunteers at Utopia Planitia worked around the clock to get the ship – still unfinished and untested – ready for space and for battle.

Captain Halloway was never meant to command the ship. He was head of yard construction and had personally overseen the construction and launch of the first four *Galaxy*-class ships. Now, he sat in the center of the bridge of the *Melbourne*. Several of the stations around him are unfinished and even missing screens, but her engines are fully operational and so are the weapon systems. The *Melbourne* drops out of warp and immediately takes evasive action to avoid the debris from the remains of her forebear, the *Excelsior*-class *Melbourne*. With alarms blaring the conn officer puts the ship into a sharp dive to drop down under the debris. The *Melbourne's* inertial dampers are not properly calibrated; everyone feels a moment of weightlessness as the ship dives under her unfortunate predecessor.

"Move us in – attack pattern Mayweather Gamma Four," commands Halloway as the ship advances on the cube. A volley of torpedoes streak away from the ship and impact harmlessly on the cube. *Melbourne* tears past and is raked by fire from the Borg weapons systems. Sparks fly on the bridge and the Sur'Tai, the Kelpian tactical officer, moves her hands across the console. Her fear ganglia are on full display yet her voice remains calm and steady as she braces herself against the lurching movements of the ship. "Shields holding, Sir. Engineering reports a plasma leak from secondary nacelles."

■ HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Halloway nods acknowledgement. "Well it's a good thing we won't be needing to go to warp anytime soon. Tell them to jettison the nacelles if it gets too bad. Focus on keeping weapons and shields up."

"Aye, Sir," she replies. "The *Saratoga* has taken a direct hit – their shields are down. Sensors detect instability in their warp core."

At the conn and ops stations the two officers, both wearing engineering gold, look at each other as they realize the predicament the *Saratoga* now faces.

"Damn. Lifesigns?" asks Halloway. Sur'tai performs a scan of the *Saratoga* as the ship is rocked by another impact from the Borg.

"Difficult to say, Sir. The graviton burst is disrupting sensors, but I see escape pods launching."

Halloway nods. "Okay, hail the *Yamaguchi*. Let's try to position ourselves between the *Saratoga* and the cube and see if w–"

The deck seems to rise up rapidly, throwing everyone violently upwards as a bright light and high-pitched screech fills the bridge.

■ END OF FILE

HERVÉ JAFFRÉ

USS MELBOURNE

Engineer

I had been sent up to deflector control. The first pass on the Borg had shaken the ship pretty hard – there was a plasma leak coming from one of the nacelles and the shielding around the deflector had degraded. The MSD suggested a radiation leak and the chief wanted to make sure the deflector wasn't damaged. If that thing went it would take half the ship with it.

It was a strange thing moving through the ship. We'd been building her for the best part of the last three years. She was still unfinished; most of the turbolifts weren't operational – we had to slide down ladders and Jefferies tubes like those old sailors in the vids. We hadn't even had our shakedown, so the ship's inertial dampers weren't calibrated. Every time we made a maneuver we'd go weightless for a moment and then weigh twice as much on the way back down. It really was like being on one of those old tin cans rolling in heavy seas.

When we got to the control room, the indicator told us the room was hot and the automatic safeties hadn't engaged. We needed to put on radiation suits, but they hadn't arrived by time we left Spacedock. You know how the joke goes: they'll be installed on Tuesday. [chuckles] We did have EV suits, however, so we grabbed the nearest ones and put them on. We hoped they would give us enough protection to get in there and shut down the leak, or jettison the deflector, if need be.

There was an almighty crash and it felt like we'd taken a walk on a high gravity planet. Then we were weightless and everything was dark and silent. Even the emergency lighting was out – I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. I thought the deflector must have exploded, but that couldn't be the case. We were so close it would have taken us out, too. There was no response when I tried to call engineering or the bridge. That's when Malik tapped me on the shoulder and pointed at the display on his arm: we were in vacuum. We lit the helmet beacons and moved back down the corridor we had just run down. As

we rounded the corner, the corridor just stopped. There was no force field or anything, just space.

As we slowly tumbled, I caught sight of the cube. Three or four ships swarmed around it. They just seemed so small – like flies attacking a rock.

We watched for a moment as another ship exploded. I think I was in shock. We watched for a bit until the ship tumbled and we were facing away from the battle. Then, we numbly turned around and went to see if we could find any other survivors.



USS COLUMBIA NCC-71102

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Flight Recorder Visual – Stardate 44002.3

Chet plots the position of starships on a large display screen and relays orders to the other ships in the fleet. The delta that represents the USS *Melbourne* blinks out.

"Sir, *Melbourne* and *Saratoga* have engaged the Borg. *Bellerophon* and *Yamaguchi* – wait...Sir, *Melbourne* has been destroyed," the Lurian reports.

Hanson rises up from his seat and moves to the plotting board. "My god, Chet. Already? Did their weapons have *any* effect on the cube?"

The Lurian taps the Borg icon and data begins to scroll next to it. "No, Sir, no effect, and *Saratoga* is now trapped by a tractor beam. Captain Gould of the *Yamaguchi* is requesting more ships while they attempt to free *Saratoga*."

"Contact Amirian on the *Constance* and order his group to assist the *Saratoga*. Order *Bastion* and *Galatea* move to position Lambda and wait to begin an attack run."

"Yes, Sir." Chet begins to move the respective icons on the plot and Admiral Hanson moves over to the station usually operated as ops. Kendra Stanz, a joined Trill, focuses very intently at her console – avoiding looking at the main display.

Hanson comes and stands by her station. "Kendra, what's the status of the *Bonestell*? Do we still have the uplink?"

She moves her hands across the LCARS interface and the panel changes to reflect the remote operations interface. "Yes, Sir, the ship is still operational. The graviton burst generator fired." She taps a few commands. "It's not pretty there. The secondary hull is absolutely flooded with radiation – looks like a baffle plate ruptured, but she is still responding to commands."

"Any weapons systems operational?" Hanson asks hopefully.

"No, Sir – didn't have much to begin with. Looks like the relays have fused for the phaser arrays," she reports.

"What about engines? Do you have impulse control?"

A few more commands and she nods. "Yes Sir, impulse engines online."

"Right," says Hanson as he rises once more, "set a collision course. Slam that ship right down the Borg's throat. Target the tractor emitter holding the *Saratoga* and ram at full impulse."

Kendra smoothly enters the commands and presses the execute command. On Chet's tactical plot the icon for the *Bonestell* begins to move towards the Borg. Hanson returns to his chair and taps a command on the arm controls. The main viewer switches to a view from the *Bonestell* and the Borg cube starts to fill the screen.

Suddenly a beam of energy lances out from the cube and strikes the *Bonestell*. The screen goes black, then returns to the wider view of the battle. Hanson looks over to Kendra. She taps the console but "Signal Lost" displays across the interface. "Sorry, Sir, we have lost the connection."

Chet shakes his large head. "*Bonestell* destroyed, Sir."

On the screen a flare erupts as a ship is consumed by a massive fireball. "What was that?" asks Hanson as he rises to approach the screen.

Chet looks at the plot. "The second *Melbourne* has been destroyed, Sir, and I think the—" A flash interrupts his report as the *Saratoga* explodes.

"Dammit," says Hanson. He returns to the command chair and slumps into it. "We need to get in there."

"Second wave moving in now," intones Chet. "*Bellerophon* is not responding to hails, but seems able to maneuver. *Yamaguchi* is attempting to provide cover."

HOLOPROGRAM ENDING – PLEASE WAIT...

Hanson taps a few commands on the chair's arm and the image of *Columbia's* main bridge appears with Captain Zirvuk seated in the center chair. "Admiral," the captain says by way of greeting.

"Zirvuk, we need to get in there and get on top of this situation," Hanson declares flatly.

Zirvuk's face looks grim, though some might say it is difficult for an Arcurian to look any other way. He seems to consider his words before speaking. "Sir, they have Picard. No one knows the capabilities of a *Galaxy*-class ship better than him and we will be at a distinct—"

Hanson cuts him off. He rises and walks towards the screen. "I will tell you what I told Riker. Whatever that *thing* on that ship is – it is not Picard! The Borg may well know the technical specifications of this ship, they may well know what we are capable of, it may well be a fool's errand but we will do it anyway. Because if we do *not*, there will be nothing to stand between the Borg and Earth, and if Earth falls then the rest of the Federation will likely follow. We do this because we must, we do this because we are Starfleet, we do this because *no one else* can."

Zirvuk's demeanor remains grim, but he nods curtly. "*Columbia* stands ready for your orders, Sir." Hanson sits back down in the command chair with determination on his face.

"Take us in."

KES VAN STARIN

USS *BELLEROPHON*

Medic

Suddenly there was a terrific jolt. The deck rocked and the glass between the isolation ward and the main sickbay shattered into a storm of shards as sparks flew around us. There were eight more jolts – presumably from more impacts from the Borg – and then everything went dark. There was no panic, no hysteria. No one knew what had happened and we were too stunned to puzzle it out. The CMO was dead; a biobed had been ripped from the deck and crushed him. There wasn't anything we could do, but there were two other doctors in the sickbay. One was unconscious and one was pinned under some debris. He said we needed to get to the bridge and let them know sickbay was gone, and to set up triage in a shuttlebay. We tried to free him, but he died from blood loss, still telling us to get to the bridge.

I tried to get the doors of sickbay open. It took some effort, but we managed to force the doors apart and tumbled out in the corridor. The ship was in chaos. We tended to any wounded we came across as we tried to make our way through the ship. Main power was out and the alarm klaxon had a strange distorted edge to it. It felt almost like the ship itself was slipping away as it bled out into space. Cables and conduits hung down, pipes and sections of bulkhead littered the passageways as we tried to move. Mangled in all of it were the remains of crew members. It was a horrific scene. All we could do was try and be professional: help those we could, log those we couldn't. I kept telling myself there would be time to go to pieces later – I had to get to the captain first.

We made it to the turbolift – which should have led up to the bridge – but the doors refused to open. They felt cold to the touch. An Edosian engineer close by had lost one of his arms, but instructed me how to take an emergency powercell and connect it to the terminal. It came to life and told me that the other side of the shaft was in vacuum. The entire upper half of the ship's saucer, including the bridge, was just gone. There was nothing left.

LIAM SHAW

USS CONSTANCE

Machinist's Mate

Dad left when I was four. Never really knew the bastard. Mom did her best, but the Southside raised me more than anyone else. Still, I didn't want to be a dipshit from Chicago for the rest of my life, so I enlisted right out of high school. My aptitude scores weren't anywhere near high enough to rate a *Galaxy* or even *Ambassador*, but the *USS Constance* – an old *Constellation* with worn out plasma manifolds and warped decks from seven decades of subspace distortion – was plenty good enough for me.

We grease monkeys down in engineering would cruise around the Federation for six months at a time, spending our days scraping burned polycarbonate residue out of plasma manifolds just laughing and joking with each other and waiting for shore leave. You know, stuff that would never make a holonovel script but actually make a starship run. Then, in port, we'd put on our dress uniforms and saunter into cheap bars on starbases with stories – claiming to be heroes so we could get laid. It was exactly the life I thought I wanted.

One day out of the blue, we got orders to head this star system called Wolf 359. We didn't know why or even care in the engine room. It was just another short trip. No one above the rank of ensign actually gave a shit about us snipes working the manifolds. Our petty officers just said "keep your heads down and do your fucking jobs." So we did.

Then, without warning, every single monitor on the ship cuts to this random transmission, and I see the face of this old Human guy calling himself "Locutus of Borg" with a robot arm and a bunch of metal shit glued to his face. Every single one of us went "who the hell is that?" No one knew what a "Borg" was back then. We just saw this asshole telling us to surrender and that "resistance is futile." Turns out he was a Starfleet captain wearing a Halloween costume.

About 10 seconds later, we felt the impulse engines kick into emergency flank. We shot forward like a damn rocket – so fast the inertial dampeners could barely compensate. That moron sitting in the captain's chair 10 decks up had just charged straight at them! No strategy! No tactics! Just some dumbass

cowboy shit without an ounce of fucking thought! A blast from the cube nailed us straight in the dorsal hull in less than a minute. It cut through us like wet tissue paper...

[He pauses, shuts his eyes, and briefly puts a hand over his face before continuing.]

You ever live through an explosive decompression? There's this rush of air all around you, then it's dead quiet. You can't see, you can't think, but it's like a heavyweight boxer punching you from the inside out. The manifolds blew. 4,000 degree plasma just rocketed through the engineering compartment and got sucked out into the void. It was like space was on fire. Then, the emergency force fields kicked in, the bulkheads sealed, and the atmosphere roared back. Whole thing probably took about three seconds. It felt like three hours.

When I got my senses back, I was lying on the deck gasping for air. I had no idea what was going on. I looked over and saw Deke Manotti, a kid from Jersey City with a background a lot like mine. He had a rack about two bunks down from me in the lower enlisted berths. He was staring at me with these giant open eyes. I shouted at him asking if he was alright, but he just kept staring back at me. Took me a full five seconds to figure out he was dead. He wasn't the only one. Chief Blass, our petty officer-in-charge, got sucked out the hull. Every person with stripes or pips was gone. We didn't have comms with anybody else on the ship. Power was failing. Fires were getting worse and burning what O2 we had left.

Somebody started screaming, "We got to get the life deck!" Somebody else was shouting, "We haven't been given the order to abandon yet!" Voices were just screaming and *screaming* on top of each other. Finally, I heard myself shouting "Nobody up there gives a fuck about us! We're all getting off this ship!" And everyone started running through the burning corridors.

By the time we got to the life deck we realized everyone else on *Constance* had beat us to it. There was only one pod left for 50 people. 10 seats for 50 lives. That's when I experienced the most surreal moment of my existence. Nobody moved.

We were all friends. We all knew each other's backgrounds and stories. We knew what each other wanted to do when our contracts were up.

[He starts gesturing to people not there and begins tearing up.]

Dave wanted to open a hovercycle shop in Seattle. Shrimanti wanted to take over her mom's restaurant on Aurelis Prime. Soriban wanted to be the first person in his family to go to college. How could any one of us say our life was more important than theirs?

That's when this lieutenant JG suddenly bursts in with a wounded petty officer and another crewman leaning on her. I didn't know her name. I think she worked in one of the science labs. She gazed out at all of us and saw the single pod...and I saw a look in her eyes that crushed me. She knew she was going to die. She couldn't have been more than 23 or 24-years-old, but she knew – without a shadow of a doubt – that in less than an hour she would be a floating corpse in space. We expected her to be exactly like the other assholes up on the bridge and try to push past us to get on the pod...but she didn't.

She just started pointing: "you...you...you..."

Six, seven, eight, nine lower enlisted at random. Then, she reached number 10 and was pointing at me.

I couldn't go! I was just like everybody else in that room! Just some working class kid like all these other working class kids just trying to make something better out of themselves. I tried to refuse, but they pushed me onto that pod with the other nine. The last thing I saw as we launched were the faces of the 40 enlisted and one officer left behind just staring...staring back at us with that same look that Deke had. I knew they were just as dead as he was.

The *Constance* had 34 officers aboard when we left Earth for Wolf 359: 33 shitbags and one good one. I never thought about crossing over myself until I realized how much Starfleet needed better officers. Ones that would think, ones that actually gave a shit about the people trapped below decks, and didn't just want to win medals.

I dropped my application to the academy a month later. They couldn't say no to one of the "heroes" of Wolf 359.

HIROSHI MURAKAMI

USS HOOD

Executive Officer

We were all tense – I had butterflies in my stomach. Did you ever go to Bozeman when you were a kid and ride on the *Phoenix*? It felt like that: nervous anticipation for our turn.

We got the signal from *Columbia* and that was it. We broke formation, the engines spooled up, and we jumped to warp for what felt like only a moment. The stars on the viewscreen stretched out before us and then collapsed back to points of light. There in the middle of it all was the Borg ship. Time seemed to slow down to a standstill as I gazed at the scene out there. I had rarely seen this many starships at once even after a decade in Starfleet and I had never seen *anything* like this.

A dark shape vaguely reminiscent of a *Rigel*-class ship passed in front of us, silently tumbling as small explosions erupted along the hull. It looked like the poplar fires when they would clear the pollen from the forests back home in Kyoto. I was captivated as the fire spread to the ship's registry number. It had been the *Tolstoy*.

I looked around the bridge and it was like an out of body experience. The captain was shouting something to the conn and I remember thinking it was bad that I wasn't paying attention. The clock over the bridge seemed to have stopped, then the seconds changed slowly, so slowly. The red light from the alert signal shone solid red for what seemed like an age before it slowly faded to black, and then red once more.

That's when I started to suspect something might be wrong. Could I be in shock? It seemed a ludicrous thought – we hadn't been hit as far as I knew. All that had happened was we had dropped out of warp into the middle of the battle. Ships all around us were blowing up.

It reminded me of something I had read as a child: "The sky was full of stars and every star was an exploding ship." It was mesmerizing.

I saw the *Republic*, the old academy training ship drop out of warp and fire a full spread of torpedoes. I remembered my first year at the academy and the first voyage on the *Republic* – it was an old ship even then. I had no idea the ship even had weapons systems still installed! It was so surreal to see a *Constitution*-class ship there, like a holorecording. The *Columbia* had dropped in – utterly dwarfing the *Republic* – and fired a full spread of torpedoes, then fired phasers from seemingly every array on the ship.

It was about then I became distantly aware of a noise, someone was shouting a name. I tried to listen, but couldn't make it out. I turned to see if the captain could hear it too and he was looking right at me, his mouth open in a shout as he slowly formed the word "Hiroshi." I remember thinking that it was strange that he was calling my name when I was sitting right next to him. Why couldn't I hear him? Out of nowhere I felt a sudden sharp pain and snapped out of my daze. Back on the bridge, the ship rocked as the alarm continued to blare.

"Are you okay Hiroshi? Are you back with us?" The captain asked. I held a hand up to my cheek and could feel warmth, but no pain. I looked around and no one was paying any attention to me – everyone was focused on their stations as the ship lurched to avoid another salvo from the Borg, ducking behind the ever increasing field of debris.

"Sorry, Sir...I–"

He waved me off. I think he understood, and besides – there were bigger issues. I finally noticed the second sound mixed in with the Red Alert klaxon: "Intruder. Alert. Intruder. Alert. Intruder. Alert."

The captain didn't have to say anything – I got to my feet and made for the turbolift, tapping my combadge as I went. "All hands, intruder alert. Prepare to repel boarders."

As the doors shut on the turbolift I took a final look at the viewscreen and that damn clock. We had warped in only moments before. There was another flash and another star appeared where the *Republic* had just been.

USS HOOD NCC-42296

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Engine Room Flight Recorder Visual - Stardate 44002.5

The engine room of the Hood, like most ships of the era, is a mishmash of vintage early 24th century design with more modern consoles and systems retrofitted into the space. The ship's warp core cuts through the space horizontally with large plasma conduits running abeam off into the nacelle spaces aft. Chief engineer Alison Obena works frantically with her team to stabilize the power distribution network and to remodulate the shields. Overhead the shouts from Captain Robert DeSoto on the bridge can barely be heard over the blare of alarm klaxons and rumbles as the giant ship rocks. Sparks erupt as the EPS grid struggles to cope with the pounding the ship is taking.

One of the engineers tightens a bandage from the aid station over their hand; blueish blood already soaking through the white fabric before returning to their station. By the large Master System Display a pair of engineers are at work under the console. One pulls a length of cabling from a hidden ODN relay and hands it up to his Denobulan colleague. "Connect the other side right away!" shouts the Antaran engineer from the deck. The Denobulan takes the cable, runs to the base of the warp core, and passes it to another engineer hidden on the lower level. Obena runs up to the MSD, which suddenly springs back to life – red lights and warning glyphs litter the diagram of the ship's systems.

"Dammit, we've lost maneuvering thrusters! Shield modulations are having no effect. Any more hits to port are going to carve right through us!" she shouts over the din. "Prioritize engines and weapon systems. The shields aren't slowing them down and if we lose maneuvering we'll be a sitting duck!"

Engineers move to try and coax more life out of systems long past their prime, the captain's voice breaks through the cacophony of battle in the engine room. "Engineering! Can you give us any more?"

Obena looks at the MSD and then back at the engine room. "Working on it, Sir!" She closes the channel and runs back along to a ladder located just aft of the warp core. She climbs up to access a console on the upper walkway, maneuvering around an ensign who is monitoring the plasma manifold pressures.

As she reaches the console and starts inputting a sequence of commands in, a new alarm tone blares and the computer declares in a very calm and matter of fact manner: "Warning, intruder alert."

Five Borg drones materialize on the level below and immediately set to work. One moves towards the MSD, a pair heads for the warp core, and the others advance on the crew. Some have not noticed – too caught up in their work as they try to buy the ship more time. A drone abruptly grabs the head of the Denobulan engineer, caught unaware while frantically entering commands into a station along the side of the engine room. The drone raises its arm and a pair of tubules erupt from its wrist and plunge into the flesh of the Denobulan's throat. He reaches up to his neck, but collapses as the Borg drops him to ground where he writhes in pain. The first drone reaches the MSD and raises its interface arm, plunging it into the computer. Immediately, the display starts to flicker as the Borg access the ship's systems.

The crew – now aware of the threat amongst them – are torn between a need to keep the ship running, the urge to run away from the horror before them, and desire to fight for their ship and crewmates. Some fire phasers but the Borg's personal shields easily deflect the attack. They adjust phaser settings as they retreat and try again, but still to no effect.

From the upper level, Obena moves to run back down but is stopped by the ensign. "You can't go down there, Chief! There's nothing you can do!"

Obena wrestles her way free of the young ensign and moves towards

the ladder again. Looking down, she sees the Borg has incapacitated all the crew who were on the lower level and are now moving to interface with computers on the wall. The Denobulan engineer has returned to standing, his complexion now an ashen gray with dark veins. He moves in a mechanical manner and starts to aid the Borg accessing a ODN relay.

She pushes the ensign aside and starts inputting commands to the console. "Computer, isolate the warp core and transfer engineering control to the bridge!"

"Unable to comply" comes the calm response from the traditionally feminine voice that all Starfleet ships employed in this era.

Obena taps in a few more commands, losing the race as the Borg override the computer systems and attempt to take control of the ship. Finally, in frustration she turns around, draws her phaser, and fires at the MSD console, destroying it in an eruption of sparks. The Borg and the newly assimilated crew look up towards her as one. A pair of drones start to walk towards the access ladder.

"Time to go," she says briskly, grabbing the ensign by the upper arm and moving back towards the rear of the walkway. She crouches down and pulls a panel away to reveal what was once a service tunnel entrance. She calmly stands back and adjusts the phaser to maximum power and cuts a hole just large enough for them to fit through. The bulkhead falls inward to an old Jefferies tube.

"In you go," Obena gestures as she steps back, allowing the ensign to lean down and gaze into the newly opened passage.

"How did you know that was there?" he asks, but she places her boot on his backside and pushes him through.

"I'll tell you later," she replies, scrambling in after him. She fits the panel that was removed back into place as best she can and welds it in place with her phaser. She taps her combadge, "Bridge, we've lost the engine room,"

**HOLOPROGRAM ENDING — PLEASE WAIT...**

but there is no response. Suddenly, the power systems start to fluctuate then fail, plunging them into blackness. Then a loud metallic clunk as power seems to return, but with an ominous hum and increasing pitch. “I really don’t like the sound of that,” Obena says to no one in particular, then turns around and hands the phaser to the ensign. “Follow me, Kid. Let’s see if we can get our ship back.”

ZORIA GELT

USS IBN SINA

Operations Officer

It was pretty clear the second we dropped out of warp that everything had gone straight to hell. The Borg ship was just idly moving at maybe one quarter impulse, leaving this trail of debris in its wake. Chunks of starships, nacelles, parts of primary hulls – sometimes you could make out what class or even what ship it had been. You could even see bodies tumbling out there. It was grim.

The ships that were still operational swarmed and darted around the cube firing phasers, unleashing volleys of torpedoes, then trying to duck away back through the debris field to find some cover from the Borg. The Borg were methodical. They would focus down on a single ship and start to follow it. They would fire the occasional shot at other ships as they came into range or strayed too close, but they fixated on a single ship at a time. They seemed to stalk it and wear it down before the shields would finally fail. Then it was just a matter of time before it joined the other wrecks in the ever-expanding debris field.

We noticed there were a couple of ships that the Borg seemed to be ignoring: *Hood*, *Roosevelt*, *Seleya* – I think there might have been another. *Hood* was stationary, seemingly adrift, and *Roosevelt* was still firing phasers, but it was increasingly erratic. I don't know what course they were trying to fly, but it didn't make any sense. I saw a fair bit of debris impact their hull before they seemed to lose all power.

The captain told us to try and hail the ships to see if they needed support, but there was no response from any of them. It was really unsettling. We received an order from *Columbia* to coordinate an attack run with the *Gora bim Gral* so I set about plotting in the parameters and setting up the computer to sync with the *Gora*. Captain Sokhi hailed us and told us he wanted to focus fire on a single point on the Borg cube to see if sustained fire would work. So far that had proven extremely difficult as the Borg subspace fields seemed to have a dampening effect on weapon targeting – meaning that no two shots seemed to land in the same spot. He had a plan to launch a class four probe with a homing beacon into the ship and have weapons set up to track on the beacon. We set

our weapons to do the same and were set to make our run when there was a sudden blur and the proximity alarm went haywire. The computer tried to throw the ship into evasive maneuvers, but I had to work with sT'ran at the conn as she fought with the flight controls.

It had been *Roosevelt*. It suddenly started moving again and was now heading out of the system, pushing its impulse engines really hard. If they weren't careful they were likely to hit relativistic speeds, but before we could even think about what was happening there we got a message from the *Hood*. It was Captain DeSoto warning that the Borg had boarded the ship and had taken engineering.

That stopped us cold. We hadn't considered the possibility that the Borg might want our ships. I mean – why would they? The ship they had was making short work of ours! The captain was asking him how many Borg had boarded *Hood* and if he wanted a security team to beam over when the signal was lost. I scanned for Borg, but the readings returned were fluctuating. I was getting a solid half dozen returns, but if I didn't know better it seemed like there was more Borg slowly materializing on the ship. The captain asked if I could beam the crew to *Ibn Sina*, but before I could *Hood's* impulse drive came online and she started moving out of the system just like the *Roosevelt*!

We tried hailing *Columbia*, but they just reiterated the orders to coordinate with Captain Sokhi. *Columbia* was taking a lot of fire and no matter what they threw at the cube it seemed to make no difference.

NEZ'TOR

USS GORA BIM GRAL

Security Officer

There were half a dozen of us holed up in secondary weapons control. We didn't really have much information about what we might face with the Borg. Command had been infuriatingly vague about the whole operation and Captain Sokhi was really not the most detail-oriented commander. The waiting had been interminable, but finally we heard over the intercom that the ship would be moving in to attack along with the *Hood* and *Roosevelt*. We felt that now we would show them what happens when you mess with the big boys!

The weapons station was deep inside the ship, near to the photon torpedo magazines. It's mostly automated so really all we needed to do was monitor the autoloaders. We could hear the thrum-thrum-thrum as the ship launched a torpedo spread, then the whirring as the next volley was loaded. But with no windows or exterior displays, we had no idea what was going on. The ship would occasionally rock but I'd felt worse buffeting on re-entry in a shuttle. The *Gora* was a big ship – not as fancy as them newer *Nebulas* and *Galaxy* wagons – but solid and dependable, like the ole Tellarite himself!

We got a sudden alert from the bridge to form security teams and be prepared to secure key points on the ship. We paired off with two of us staying at weapons control and the rest moved to meet up with the other security teams. We were issued with type-3s and jogged down the corridors towards our security stations. The ship seemed mostly deserted, everyone at battle stations or in shelters and only the flashing red lights to tell us something was very wrong.

I was unsure why we were taking this step. We had been briefed by the chief with what we knew of the Borg and had reviewed the footage from the encounter on *Enterprise*. While they were extremely powerful, their drones didn't look all that dangerous and even the *Enterprise's* security chief had been able to dispatch them easily enough. We seemed to be holding our own.

I was assigned to guard the main shuttlebay with two other officers. They

both took up position behind the entrance to the bay and I headed up to the control room to see what was going on. The control room had a sensor feed so we were able to watch the battle unfold. The two engineers stationed there watched with what I could only describe as abject horror. It seemed totally at odds with the situation as I understood it, but I moved in closer to see the feed.

It was a slaughterhouse. There were hulks and scattered remnants of starships everywhere. There was so much debris that interfered with the resolution of the feed as the computer tried to identify and catalog everything it saw. The ship bucked and weaved as I caught sight of the cube for the first time. It was big and imposing but, again, I didn't really understand.

Then it fired.

A beam of some sort lept from the cube and struck a ship that was attempting to maneuver behind the still burning remains of a ship – I'm not sure what, maybe a *Nebula*-class. I felt the *Gora* suddenly buck and it tried to come about to provide support. I heard Captain Sokhi's voice as he told the ship to stand by – help was coming – but the beam didn't hit the shields. It seemed to burrow through the ship and sliced it open along the secondary hull, then lanced out again striking down across the saucer. I could hear screams on the feed as its crew died.

I leaned forward and turned off the audio feed, the engineers both motionless with shock. I wondered how many ships they had seen destroyed.

I was about to try and snap them out of it when the XO's voice came over the comms: "ALL HANDS BRACE." My world suddenly erupted into fire and then pain – all the air seemed to be sucked from my lungs.

Training took over and I grabbed an emergency EV hood from the escape pack by the door and two more for the engineers. But I could see that one of them was already dead...the console had exploded into her chest. The other engineer was bleeding heavily, but kept trying to tap at the console. I slapped a dressing on the wound and picked him up – making sure he wasn't impaled on my spurs – and headed down to the main bay. The other two members of my team were nowhere to be seen. All around there was fire and destruction. I needed to get out of the bay to seal it off the breach, but the outer door wouldn't

open. I couldn't see where the breach was so I put the engineer down carefully and tried for the manual release. The door opened a crack and the rushing of air increased, but something was wrong: the air wasn't trying to get into the bay – it was trying to get out!

It was too late now; I couldn't reseal the doors and I had no idea what was happening. There was a shuttlepod on its side by the hanger wall. I went to pick up the engineer, but he had gone...bled out. So I ran to the shuttlepod before the air supply ran out, sealed the hatch, and pressurized it.

The pod was in rough shape and wouldn't fly, but I was able to get the sensors working. Something had sliced clean through the aft section of the *Gora bim Gral* and the entire shuttlebay had been sent tumbling off into space.

A moment later, I saw a beam strike the rest of the ship which was still fighting and trying to evade in an ever-increasing debris field. It seemed to just hang there in space for a moment, connected to the Borg cube by the beam. Then the warp core went critical and the ship was destroyed; the nacelles erupting outward from the ship, spewing plasma. One of the nacelles collided with *Columbia* and the plasma caused the shields to ripple as they absorbed the energy, before the ship moved on and continued firing phasers at the Borg.

I watched the feed for a bit, but after seeing the fifth or sixth ship destroyed I just powered down the sensors and waited, trapped in the shuttlebay, unsure if anyone would survive, and if they did, if anyone would find me.

HIROSHI MURAKAMI

Executive Officer

USS *HOOD*

They went straight for engineering. Before we knew what was happening, they had killed or assimilated everyone there and taken control of the ship. We were woefully unprepared for the Borg. We knew from Picard's reports that the Borg had boarded *Enterprise* to assess the ship, but when the Borg boarded *Hood* we were caught completely off guard. That's just not something we have ever trained for – we haven't had Marines or MACOs on board for over 100 years!

I had left the bridge to head up a security team to assess the situation and find out how much trouble we were in. We were out of the fight and the ship was drifting in an increasingly crowded sector of space in an active war zone. We needed to regain control of the engine room and get back in the fight. I was in constant contact with Captain DeSoto and he told me we could transmit but couldn't receive any hails. We broadcast a general warning, but from what we could hear at least three other ships had been boarded and taken out of the fight. Thankfully, the Borg seemed to ignore us once we were disabled – small mercies and all that.

I didn't think anything of that at the time. We knew that the Borg tended to ignore individuals they no longer perceived as threats. My focus was finding out what had happened and getting back control of the ship. Systems were fluctuating and internal sensors went offline in short order, which really hampered any response to the intruders. I had made it as far as deck 15 when I encountered my first Borg.

It was one of ours: Ensign Hibbs. He had only joined the ship two months before and was excited to get into space for the first time. I ordered the team to hold fast while I tried to speak to Hibbs, but he ignored me and continued staring intently at the deflector control mainframe. As I moved closer I could see his arm had been severed at the elbow and some kind of prosthesis grafted on which was now interfacing directly with the console. I told him to step away from the console but he ignored me. I moved up to try and pull him back, but he just tossed me across the deck without even looking at me. One of the security

team fired but a personal shield absorbed the phaser beam. I didn't know what to do but sensed that above all else we couldn't allow the Borg to finish whatever they were trying to do. I took my phaser and fired at the mainframe.

It exploded in a shower of sparks, but the Borg who had been Hibbs just calmly detached its arm from the console and moved towards the deflector control room – completely ignoring us. As I got to my feet, Zmuda called out in alarm. Coming towards us were half a dozen Borg. A couple were clearly crew, but the rest were encased in the black carapace and assortment of wires and implants we had seen from the briefings. I ordered the team to fall back, but Zmuda had recognized one of the newly assimilated Borg and ran towards them. I called out to stop her but as she got close one of the Borg grabbed her hair. It pulled back her head and injected her with whatever poison they used to rob people of their identity. She fell to the deck screaming and writhing in pain. I meant to go to her, but Vavasour grabbed me and hauled me back into the turbolift.

"You must warn the captain," he said in a flat voice as he pushed me in and ordered it to go to the bridge. He exited before the doors closed and I heard the faint sound of phaser fire as it sped me away. I felt something run down my forehead and tried to wipe it away – my hands came back red.

That's when the pain came.

USS ENDURANCE NCC-5265

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Flight Recorder Visual — Stardate 44002.6

The Endurance shakes under another barrage of fire from the Borg; plasma streaming from its port nacelle and one of the impulse engines a ruin of scorched blackened duranium. It unleashes a fusillade of phaser fire which disperses harmlessly on the surface of the Borg cube. The large starship heaves its bulk around the remains of a Nebula-class starship and moves away as the USS Galatea makes a run on the cube.

"Sir, the *Gora bim Gral* is gone and *Ibn Sina* is taking heavy fire," the communications officer, a Betelgeusian named Prard'ras'kleoni, calls over the din of alarm klaxons and the ever-present sounds of the battle around them.

"How many is that?" asks Captain Delahoy. He shrugs off the medic trying to tend a wound on his scalp; the amber blood runs down his uniform.

From the tactical station, Commander Ghafari assesses the state of the slaughter surrounding them. "Nine ships confirmed destroyed, 12 report heavy damage, and three are nonresponsive. The *Seleya* and *Hood* report they have been boarded and the Borg are attempting to take control. Captain Frye reports a firefight in the engine room and Captain DeSoto reports they are attempting to secure the bridge," they pause as the console beeps and look up dejectedly. "That was the *Galatea*. It's been destroyed."

The captain is silent for a moment as the medic finishes sealing the wound with a dermal regenerator before closing up the med kit and dashing towards the turbolift. She is needed on other decks to attend to other casualties.

"Captain, what are your orders?" asks Ghafari. "*Endurance* is a tough old gal but we're slow and lumbering. We don't have the firepower or maneuverability to last long against that thing."

Delahoy nods his head in assent. "I know, but it doesn't look like *any* of us are making much of an impact. Damage assessment on the cube?"

Ghafari inputs commands into the console as another impact rocks the ship. Sparks fly from the overhead and a small fire erupts behind the aft science stations – a nearby crewman rushes towards it with a fire suppressor. "It isn't even dented," comes the dejected response.

There is a series of urgent beeps and Prard'ras'kleoni scrolls through the incoming data. "Distress beacon from the *Galatea*. I'm picking up multiple calls for help throughout the debris field." Delehoy runs his hand up over his head through the blood-soaked hair. He considers their options, then nods to himself as he comes to a decision.

"Okay, let's try and pick up as many survivors as we can. Helm, plot a course through the debris field. Try to keep the cube as far away from us and behind debris where you can – we'll do a sweep through and grab who we can, then try to disengage."

"But what about the cube?" asks Ghafari. "We have to stop it!"

"Marika, I know. But *look* out there. A dozen ships already destroyed and even *Columbia* is taking a pasting. I will gladly put this ship into harm's way to save lives and defend the Federation, but I will not throw away our lives out of spite. Whatever Hanson was hoping to do here has *failed!*"

There is a tense moment as all eyes on the bridge focus on the tension between the captain and his first officer, but the XO nods their agreement.

Delehoy gives a smile and places a reassuring hand on Ghafari's shoulder, then moves back to the command chair. "Okay, let's prep the shuttlebay. Send a message to *Columbia*. Tell them we are going to try and round up our wayward flock and move them out of harm's way. See if they can spare a couple of ships to give us some cover. Transporter room?"

"Urm...transporter room here. Chief Cole is dead – this is Ensign Ward."

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE ■

"It's okay, Ensign. Is the transporter operational? We're going to try and rescue survivors."

"No...sorry, Sir. The main pattern buffer exploded and the resequencer was destroyed. The chief got hit by the full force. It was...urm, I don't know what to do with what's left of him, Sir."

"Okay, get to the cargo bay and see if the transporters there are operational. Someone from sickbay will tend to the chief."

"Yes, Sir." The channel closes and everyone on the bridge looks uneasy.

"Okay, we're going to have to do this the old-fashioned way. Get shuttles to standby and prepare for EVAs. We'll try to bring in as many pods as we can and direct any shuttles that can maneuver to head for us."

There is a new warning beep from the tactical console and Ghafari assesses the information, but before they can speak a new alarm sounds.

"*Roosevelt* and *Hood* have accelerated out of the system at high impulse. The *Seleya* is moving on our vector...possible collision course!"

"Helm, get us out of the way!" shouts Delahoy.

"Sir, she's fighting me," calls Lieutenant Je Ni-Gonres, the Efrosian officer at the conn. She frantically inputs commands to try and bring the ship about, but *Endurance* was already a large lumbering beast before taking damage. The ship cannot get clear of the rapidly approaching *Kilimanjaro*-class starship, which is oblivious as it accelerates through the debris field and away from the battle

"HOLD ON!" shouts Delahoy as the bridge collapses down around him.

END OF FILE ■

ROBERT DESOTO

USS *HOOD*

Captain

It was shaping out to be a really bad day – given how poorly I thought it was going to go, that is *really* saying something. Hiroshi staggered out of the turbolift. There was blood pouring from his head, but he seemed oblivious as he tried to talk. He was in shock; I'm not sure if it was from the impact he had taken or from what he had seen, but he near enough collapsed on the deck. Tricorder told us he had a fractured skull. I tried calling sickbay, but no response. My worst fears were they were overwhelmed...turns out it was far worse.

We were monitoring the battle and knew that the *Roosevelt* and *Seleya* had also been boarded, the rest of the fleet was taking a pounding. No one was coming to help us; we had to deal with this by ourselves, but without sensors and limited comms that was going to be extremely difficult. I needed information on how many Borg were on the ship, where they were, and also, what they were going to do. The Borg clearly did not need any help from a 40-year-old *Excelsior*-class, so why they singled us out for special attention to this day I have no idea.

I started to get reports in from various decks and they made for grim reading: the Borg had taken engineering and worked their way forward to deflector control where they were doing something to the main deflector. The rest were making their way up through the ship. The worst part was their numbers were increasing. I was still reeling from the image of Jean-Luc standing there on the Borg ship, but now I was getting reports of our own family being turned into those...things. We got a patched-in audio report from a couple of ensigns in the cargo bay. They had run there to hide, but they said there was a Borg in there and they couldn't get out. I wanted to send a security team or beam them out, but the graviton burst made transporters inoperable. All we could do was listen as they cowered behind some cargo...and then to their screams as the Borg found them. The worst was the silence that followed and the sound of footsteps as they left the cargo bay.

[He grips the tumbler tightly, his hands slightly shaking as he stares into the empty glass.]

I was contemplating ordering everyone to abandon ship when suddenly the ship lurched and we were underway again. All of our attempts to get the helm back failed; she wouldn't respond. I tried to engage the autodestruct, but the computer told me it was offline. The ship was heading away from the battle and out of the Wolf 359 System. We could see that *Roosevelt* and *Seleya* were also moving. It seemed the Borg did not have complete control of the *Seleya* – or perhaps they just did not care – but they flew right into the *Endurance*.

I'd known Captain Delahoy since the academy; even with all that was going on seeing the *Endurance* disappear was a gut punch.

Once we were clear of the battle the ship lurched again, but did not go to warp. The Borg had done something to the engines and the deflector; we had slipped into some other kind of FTL. All of our sensors were useless, we had no celestial reference to fix our position, but what I did know for certain is wherever the Borg were trying to take us, I really did not want to make the trip.

As near as I could tell we were out of options; reports now had the Borg on deck six. They were clearly heading to the bridge and without the autodestruct – unless we could get to engineering – I couldn't think of any way to stop the ship. It's times like that when you can feel the eyes of the entire crew on you. They look to you as the captain to keep them safe, to let them know that whatever the situation, no matter how bleak it might seem, you have an ace up your sleeve or you have a plan. I tried as hard as I could to keep my poker face on and let them know that I was still in control. I could see from their faces that they knew I didn't have a strong hand.

It was right then that the universe took pity on us and we got a signal coming in, routed through a shuttle in the hangar of all places. It was Alison Obena: she had escaped engineering and was holed up on deck nine. The flood of emotion I felt hearing her voice was indescribable. She had an ensign with her – they had escaped and she wanted to know how she could help. I laid out our predicament as succinctly as I could: we needed to either stop the ship or destroy it, because I was not about to let any more of our crew be turned into those things. She listened and then went quiet.

The thing about Alison, you see, is she entered Starfleet in 2290, served on USS *Excelsior* under Hikaru Sulu, and had spent her entire career working on

the class. She knows these ships better than the back of her hand. She headed up the Flight II extension program, she is – sorry, she was – Starfleet’s premier expert on the *Excelsior*-class starship. It was one of the reasons we had so many cadets come to *Hood* to work with her. So, if anyone knew how to get us out of this situation, it was her.

After a while she simply said “Okay, I have an idea,” and well, that was that. She was off the comm and I was none the wiser. Now I knew we would be alright, or at least I knew the Borg would never get this ship.

That’s when they started banging on the door. We took cover wherever we could and got ready: the Borg were coming and we needed to buy Obena time.

USS KONOM NCC-32285

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Flight Recorder Visual — Stardate 44002.5

"Borg tractor beam attempting to lock on," cries the Edosian operations officer, their three arms rapidly moving over the console as they rotate through various shield harmonic frequencies. "I don't think shields are having any effect."

The bridge is carnage: fires rage from the bank of consoles at the rear, cables and conduits hang down from above, and the command chairs have been replaced by a large duranium beam. The surviving crew tries very hard not to look at the place their captain and first officer had been moments before.

From what remains of the rear of the bridge, an ensign tries to hold on as the ship bucks wildly. The helm console explodes, propelling the lieutenant who had been sitting there back onto the deck; their face and torso a ruin of burned flesh embedded with ceramic shards. The ensign tries to make their way down to tend to the lieutenant, but another jolt rocks the ship. She dives for the deck and grabs hold of the sole remaining pillar.

The Edosian has split his console between operations and helm and now attempts to pilot the ship through the debris while performing evasive maneuvers. "I'm going to try and steer us into some clear space and then will signal to abandon ship," he shouts over the din. The ensign looks up to see a hole across the forward bulkhead where the viewscreen should be. Now it is open to the void, the force field rippling as tiny bits of debris impact it.

The Edosian looks around the ruin of the bridge and tuts as though disappointed at the state of a cadet's room during an inspection. "All hands, this is the bridge. Prepare to abandon ship. Get to escape pods, but don't launch until I give the signal. I repeat: all hands get to the escape pods, but do not launch! Ensign, I need you to take a station and scan for a suitable spot. If we try to launch escape pods here they will be lost in the debris and with the sensor disruption no one will find them."

The ensign looks around wondering who he was talking to, and is horrified to find that she and the Edosian are the last remaining souls on the bridge. "Me, Sir? But I-I-I..." she stammers.

Another jolt rocks the ship and the Edosian grunts with effort as he tries to coax the mortally wounded ship through the carcasses of Starsheet ships the Borg have already gutted.

"Yes, you, Ensign. What's your name?" His voice is calm and level as if he were making idle small talk.

"T-T-Tripper, Sir. Cara T-T-Tripper," she manages.

"Okay, Cara. I'm Ardax. I'm usually head of security, but today I fancied a change so now I'm running operations, helm, and I think *technically* I'm in command, too. I know you're frightened. I know I'm terrified right now, but I can only do so much so unless you would rather take over the helm, ops, or tactical, right now I need you on the sensors. Can you do that for me?"

Tripper hesitantly lets go of the pillar and moves towards the burned-out stations at the rear of the deck. "These are all dead, Sir."

"Try the auxiliary stations over on the port side."

She starts moving towards the darkened monitors when a jolt knocks the ship and sends it tumbling, knocking Tripper off her feet. Ardax grunts with exertion and fights the controls. The ship starts to right itself though more tones have joined the chorus of alarms and warning alerts. "So, Cara," asks Ardax almost conversationally "what brings you out here?"

She staggers and makes it to the console, taps at the display and it comes to life. "It's working! What do I need to do?"

"That's great. I need you to access the sensors and scan for an area of space that's not filled with debris. Calibrate the sensors to look for material density and anything under the threshold I'm sending to you now,

then give me a heading I can steer towards."

Deep within the ship there is a long, almost mournful groan as the spaceframe is stressed beyond its limits. Ardax's hands are a blur as they dance across the console, reinforcing structural integrity fields and rerouting power to force fields. Tripper yelps and cowers back down on the deck.

"Ensign - Cara, look at me. You never told me what you do." Ardax appears calm and composed while struggling with the dying ship.

"I-I'm in life sciences. I help with crew environmental needs, making sure the ship is safe for whatever species we have on board," she manages.

"Okay, well this is *exactly* the same. We need to make sure the environment where we're going to send the crew is safe, and ensure they will be rescued. Once you give me the heading and I have locked it in, we'll head straight to an escape pod ourselves. But we have to make sure the crew will be rescued. Can you do that for me, Cara?"

She sniffs and nods meekly, rubbing her nose against her uniform sleeve as she stands up and inputs the data to the station. It cycles for a moment before giving a beep to indicate it has completed its scan.

"I have something! It works!" She exclaims excitedly. "There's an area on a heading of 117.2!" She turns around beaming with pride, but a strange hum fills the bridge and a greenish energy field has fallen around Ardax. He looks momentarily perplexed and then in an instant he is gone, transported away by the Borg.

Tripper stands there puzzled and alone on the bridge. "Ardax?" she asks hesitantly. She steps towards the ops console and even looks underneath, seemingly unable to comprehend that Ardax has gone.

Suddenly a new alarm starts to sound coupled with the computer's dispassionate warning: "Alert. Collision. Alert. Collision. Alert."

■ HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Cara stares out of the hole in the forward bulkhead as the remains of a starship's saucer section rears up to meet the *Konom*. She calmly moves to the ops console and takes a moment to locate the button then presses it. "All hands, this is the bridge. Launch escape pods now, launch now."

There is the distant thump as escape pods launch from the ship, but Cara Tripper calmly sits down in the chair that had previously been occupied by Ardax as the debris impacts with the *Konom*.

■ END OF FILE

USS COLUMBIA NCC-71102

HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Flight Recorder Visual — Stardate 44002.5

Sparks erupt from overhead and *Columbia* is rocked again by impacts from the Borg. The large tactical plot shatters and icons blink in and out on the static filled display. Chet lies dead, slumped over the tactical console with part of the holographic plot bisecting his head.

"Sir, the main bridge is not responding! I think they're gone!" shouts Kendra over the din. "Transferring control of *Columbia* to the battle bridge!" The ship shakes and Hanson struggles to remain seated as another series of impacts rocks *Columbia*. He glances over to the tactical station and Chet's lifeless body, then looks across to Rip'lah, her hair matted by the dark – almost black – blood running down her head from a nasty wound.

"Rip'lah, what's the status of the Borg ship?"

She tries to access the sensors but the display shakes and breaks up. She thumps the top of the LCARS panel and the system seems to restore briefly but then dies. With an exacerbated sigh she moves to a second station and inputs the request for information. "The cube has received minimal damage to its outer surface. Its fighting ability has not been diminished and remains 98 percent effective." She grips the side of the station as *Columbia* rocks under fire.

Once the shaking stops, Rip'lah resumes her report: "The fleet has been decimated, 23 ships confirmed destroyed or disabled, five ships appear to have been taken by the Borg, other ships have reported crew members have been transported away from their posts by the Borg. The remaining fleet has an efficiency of 17.5 percent."

Hanson seems to deflate in his chair. "Any sign of backup? Or the Klingons?"

"Long-range sensors are not operational. No response from the buoys. Sir, we've done all we can. We need to disengage and regroup." *Columbia* is rocked again and a shower of sparks erupts from above. Smoke fills the bridge as the ventilation system struggles under the barrage.

A beep comes from the tactical console under Chet's body. A lieutenant gingerly lowers the Lurian to the deck. He takes over the station, wiping Chet's blood off the panel with his sleeve. "Sir, the *Georgiou* attempted to ram the cube, it has been destroyed, no damage to the Borg. The *Kyushu* is requesting support, the *Kaneda* is moving to assist, the *Ahwahnee*... Sir, the *Ahwahnee* is sending an automated distress call – it's reporting all crew are dead and requesting recovery."

Hanson looks out across the battle bridge, nodding to himself. "Okay, Rip'lah, signal the fleet to withdraw. We'll try and hold off the Borg to give them time to get out of the gravitational pulse's effect. Any ship unable to go to warp, have them go dark and try to play possum. Send a message—"

A new warning tone sounds from the engineering station. Rip'lah moves and inspects the alert. "Sir, it's Commander Quinteros."

"On screen." On the viewscreen the ship's chief engineer appears, his neatly-trimmed beard at odds with the grime covering his face.

"Admiral, we've taken damage to the magnetic containment system. We might have to eject the core."

"We can't do that," replies Hanson. "We can't survive without the core."

"Yes, I figured that would be the case. I'm going to have to disable the automatic safety systems, then. I need command authority to proceed."

"You have it," says Hanson and with that the image of Quinteros vanishes. On the viewscreen they see the Borg lock onto the *Kyushu* with a tractor beam; the cutting laser starts to slice into the ship's hull. He sinks back into his chair, forcing himself to watch this grim scene of devastation.

"Sir, we're being hailed by the *Enterprise*!" exclaims Kendra.

Hanson sits forward. "Thank god. Have them move in to support the *Kyushu* and *Kaneda*. With *Columbia* and *Enterprise* we can cover the rest of the fleet while it withdraws."

Rip'lah is quiet for a moment, her black eyes betray almost no emotion, but from the way her shoulders sag and head drops it's clear it is bad news. "Sir, *Enterprise* is not in the system. They indicate they are 12 hours away."

Hanson slowly sinks back into his chair, nodding slowly in understanding, perhaps. "Put them on screen."

On the main viewscreen the bridge of the *Enterprise* – it looks the mirror of the main bridge of *Columbia*, at least what it had been before. Captain Riker is flanked by Commander Shelby. Another impact rocks the *Columbia*.

"Admiral," says Riker by way of greeting and question – the image is heavily distorted and difficult to make out.

"The fight does not go well, *Enterprise*," says Hanson. From the rear engineering station, comes a new alert and Rip'lah moves to assess it. "We're attempting to withdraw and regroup, rendezvous with fleet at–"

END OF FILE ■

USS HOOD NCC-42296

■ HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Flight Recorder Visual — Stardate 44002.7

A hatch is kicked out onto the deck and Alison Obena sticks her head out, looking both ways down the corridor before she crawls out onto the deck and helps Ensign Cordero out of the Jefferies tube.

"Okay it looks clear," she says as she ties her silver hair up into a ponytail. "Keep that phaser handy and if you see any more of those Borg, try and take out a console or conduit rather than hitting the Borg itself."

The ensign holds the phaser tightly with both hands keeping it up in front of him and sweeping left and right. "What are we doing? Where are we going? You told the captain you had an idea!"

"I do, Kid. We need to get to the computer core. If we can get there I think I can bypass the Borg's control and enable anti-intrusion countermeasures."

They move down the corridor keeping low, carefully looking around corners before moving forward. Obena keeps the ensign behind as she moves, occasionally gesturing for him to wait then waving him on.

"Anti-intrusion countermeasures? What are those?" he asks nervously. There is a clanging sound from somewhere behind them. He spins around, pointing the phaser down the dimly lit corridor. The red lights pulse and briefly illuminate the empty corridor. He relaxes slightly, and Obena continues to move forward.

"What's your name, Kid?" Obena asks.

"Ensign Cordero, Ma'am," he replies automatically.

"No, what's your first name? What do your friends call you?"

He pauses for a moment in confusion then shrugs, "Ernesto, Ernesto Manuel Cordero – but my friends call me Manny."

"I'm Alison, my friends call me Aly. Do you mind if I call you Manny?"

"Urm...sure I guess, Ma'am," he responds hesitantly.

There is another clang down the corridor and this time the sound of servos. They both stop and peer back into the darkness. In the brief pulse of red light the corridor seems empty. Cordero relaxes his grip as the red light fades, plunging the corridor back into darkness, but as the light returns the silhouette of a Borg can be seen rounding the corner, followed by another, and another. He raises the phaser but Obena grabs his arm and pulls him away. "Shit! No time, run!"

Throwing all caution to the wind, they sprint down the corridor until they arrive at a door. The identifier plate reads "Main Computer Core" and Obena taps the door to gain entry. It does not respond. She taps again more urgently but to no avail.

"Shit, shit, shit, shit," she mutters as she drops to the access hatch next to the door and pries it off. She reaches in while Cordero looks frantically between the chief engineer trying to open the door to their salvation and back down the corridor; he cannot see the Borg approaching, but he knows they are coming.

There is a loud clunk sound and the doors open. Obena rushes to her feet and pulls the doors apart. "Get in!"

The ensign rushes in and Obena follows. "Help me with the door!" she orders and they both push on the doors until they are closed. She takes the phaser from him and sets it to maximum power, minimum beam. Using her outstretched hand to shield her eyes, she proceeds to weld the doors shut. Once there is a thick bead the entire length of the door she resets the phaser and hands it back to Cordero

"Manny, I need you to keep that aimed at the door, and whatever happens keep them from getting to the core. I can save the ship, but I'm going to need a few minutes. Can you do that?"

■ HOLOPROGRAM IN USE

Cordero stammers, wide-eyed. Obena takes his hand and looks him in the eye. "Manny, *can you do this?* The ship is counting on you."

He swallows and nods. "Yes, Ma'am."

Obena smiles and squeezes his hand. "I told you, you can call me Aly."

He smiles, turns around, and points the phaser at the door. Obena goes around to the computer core and opens an access hatch near the base. She crawls in, starts pulling out isolinear chips and rearranging them.

"What are you going to do, Aly?" asks Cordero. "I've never heard of these anti-intrusion countermeasures."

"Ah, well, you wouldn't have. You see *Hood* is an old gal – she's a Flight I *Excelsior*-class and the *Excelsior*-class ships were designed and built in a very different Federation than the one you grew up in."

There is a loud bang on the door, and another. Cordero tenses up and grips the phaser, Obena continues rearranging the isolinear chips in the core. "When the *Excelsior* was first conceived it was the most advanced starship in the quadrant. Sort of like the *Galaxy*-class of the 23rd century and Starfleet was at war with the Klingons, they were worried about the Romulans. It felt like a much more hostile galaxy, the frontier was a lot closer to home, and Starfleet was worried about its ships being boarded by a hostile force."

The banging grows louder and dents appear in the door, on the computer core the LCARS access interface starts to flicker and seems to be malfunctioning.

"Aly! They are coming through!" cries Cordero.

"I'm almost done, just a few more moments," she responds calmly. "So, as I was saying, back then Starfleet didn't want to risk its ships being taken

over by a hostile force – and that threat seemed a lot more real – so hard-wired into the firmware of ships of that era were countermeasures in case the crew lost command of the ship. We don't use them anymore because they were a bit...uh...extreme. We've upgraded and refitted the ships with LCARS and new systems, but if you know where to look, deep *deep* down is still the kernel of those systems."

She places the last isolinear chip back into place and the LCARS interface goes black. Obena crawls out from under the core, the lights in the room go out as the banging continues and then the computer reboots.

"What do you mean by 'extreme'?" asks Cordero.

The LCARS interface reboots, gone are the familiar purples and yellows, replaced instead by blues and teals.

"Systems online. Error: unauthorized hardware detected. Error: unauthorized software detected." The familiar comforting feminine voice of Starfleet computers has been replaced by a male voice Cordero does not recognize and Obena has not heard in over 50 years.

"By extreme I mean...I'm sorry, Manny. We can save the ship, but it won't help us. Computer, intruder alert. Initiate West Protocol authorization Obena 27479 Gamma."

"Acknowledged" is the computer's cold response. Manny looks back at Obena in confusion as the door suddenly breaks down and three Borg enter the room, their laser target designators landing on Obena and Cordero as they move towards them with cybernetic arms extended. Obena takes Cordero into a protective hug as they turn away from the Borg.

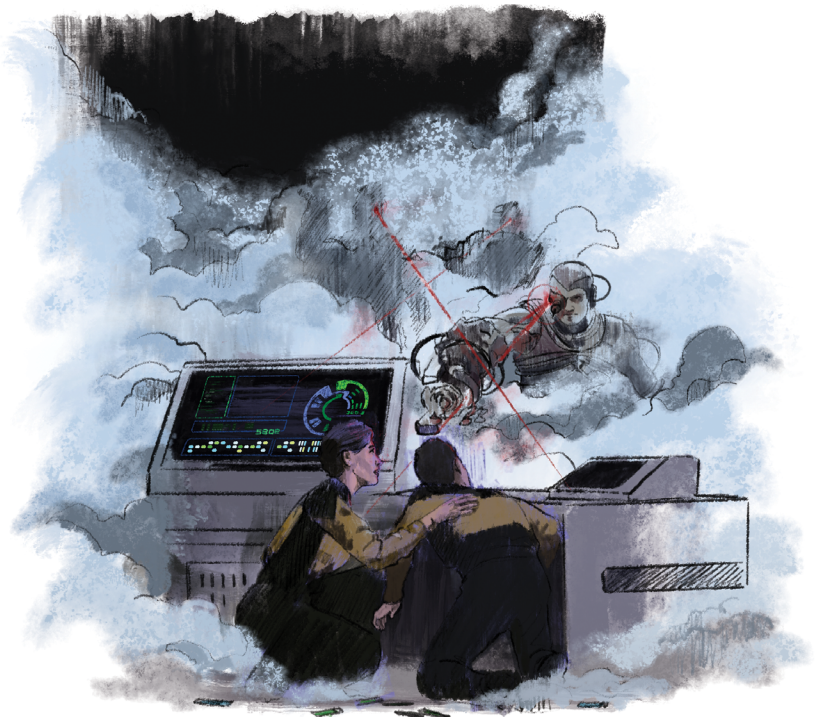
In main engineering, the computer consoles untouched by the Borg go dark and then return with the blue and teal interface. A warning tone trills throughout the space. The Borg present pay it no heed as the interlocks for the plasma coolant unlock and the computer floods the engine room

■ HOLOPROGRAM ENDING — PLEASE WAIT...

with liquid plasma, vaporizing all organic matter in the room. It causes the warp core to go offline and sends the ship crashing back into real space. The violent transition sends the ship tumbling end over end. Inertial dampers fail, throwing crew against decks and ceilings, causing chaos throughout the ship. On the bridge, Captain DeSoto is thrown back into the helm console, crashing down at an awkward angle and into the viewscreen.

The Borg who remain operational climb back to their feet. Outside, the USS *Roosevelt* transitions back into real space and moves alongside *Hood*, her deflector and nacelles giving off an eerie green glow. The ship beams all the functioning Borg from the *Hood* on board and then, without pause, accelerates away and vanishes from real space.

The *Hood* is adrift: light-years away from Wolf 359 with no power and no warp drive. Many of her crew are dead, injured, or assimilated by the Borg.



TEBOK

PARADISE CITY, NIMBUS III

Stardate 69181.9 - 2392



I am...I was a loyal soldier of the empire. I swore to never divulge what I saw, but Romulus is no more and the empire a mere memory that fades a little more every day. In 25 years I have never spoken of this.

[He takes a sip from the glass of *kali-fal*, pauses and then downs the entire glass and pours another. He gestures with the bottle to me but I decline. He downs the second glass and is silent for a moment.]

All of my life, I was taught to hate the Federation and all it claimed to represent. We were taught that you were weak, undisciplined, and barely worthy of our attention. And we were taught that Starfleet was a *joke*, that it lacked the will to fight and would surrender if ever faced with a threat that might cause its officers to spill their tea.

When I first heard of this mission to shepherd the Borg into Federation space, I thought it was delightfully wicked and took no small amount of pride at the thought of Starfleet fleeing for their pitiful lives as their own arrogance destroyed them. The Borg were the ultimate incarnation of the Federation's values: "infinite diversity in infinite combinations" – ha!

[He takes another drink from his glass.]

As we approached the system you call "Wolf 359" we detected the presence of sensor buoys in the area. I ordered the *Keras* to move ahead and to destroy them. I was confident in the integrity of our cloaks, but it made no sense to risk any inadvertent detection. Then we picked up the fleet of ships sitting around the edge of the system...waiting.

A paltry *40 starships*! Ha! They would be no match for the Borg. I thought the tiny fleet would be beneath their notice, but they dropped out of warp in the middle of the system right in front of a single unmanned science vessel. It had

all the hallmarks of a ritualistic sacrifice where the villagers offer up a maiden to appease some giant monster of myth, then scurry around the perimeter to gauge the monster's reaction.

Then the ship detonated a massive graviton burst! We were caught completely off-guard and had to hide behind the Borg to prevent anyone detecting us. The risk of it degrading our cloaks was remote, but we had orders to ensure that Starfleet did not report our presence and then remove all evidence – including ourselves.

But the cloak remained intact and there seemed to be no other damage. The Borg ship was also undamaged, but it would be some time before we would be able to use the warp drive. I corrected my assessment of Starfleet's intentions; what had looked like a sacrifice at first glance was a trap – and that science vessel had been the bait.

It was very strange and not at all what we had expected from Starfleet. And then, *you did it* – or at least tried to do it.

♦ To do what?

You tried to *destroy the star*, you tried to unleash a stellar weapon to stop the Borg. By the time we realized what had happened – if the weapon had been successful we would have been destroyed along with the Borg. In that moment I felt a curious mixture of fear, admiration, awe, and anger.

The Federation is always the first to crow on about *morality* and to sit in judgment over others for how they can defend their borders and their citizens – yet here you were: attempting to unleash a stellar weapon. The anger I felt was not that you had tried this – it's that we never did! It never even *occurred* to us to develop such a weapon to fight the *Llaetus'le*. If we had, countless worlds could have been spared and perhaps we would have been able to secure all of our borders. It was Genesis all over again.

Clearly whatever was supposed to have happened did not. I anticipated the fleet would head to Earth to rendezvous with a larger force to try and hold the Borg back. Instead wave after wave attacked.

I think they knew they were doomed.

The Borg took several ships, as is their way, which then warped out of the

system. Their noble crews were already being infected by the *Llaetus'le*. We detected them harvesting crew from other ships, presumably species they had not encountered or genetic hybrids they wished to examine closer.

It was a slaughter. It went on for 30 of your minutes. There was but one, last ship hunted like a Klingon hunts a *targ*. Then it was done...and there was silence.

The mood on the bridge of the *Susse-thrai* had grown somber. The effects of the graviton burst disrupted our sensors, but we could see escape pods among the debris. A few shuttles tried to move, but when they strayed too close to the Borg they were destroyed or pulled aboard. The Borg was now performing a systematic search of the system, although to this day I do not know what they were seeking.

The *Keras* reported they had identified the ship which had launched the stellar weapon – that was something I was very interested to learn so I ordered the *Keras* to remain with the Borg and took the *Susse-thrai* to investigate.

We found the ship – a “runabout” I think you call them – adrift with an unconscious Starfleet officer aboard.

We did not wish to risk using transporters because of the graviton distortions – they do also have a pesky habit of leaving energy signals for your security officers to detect – so we sent a shuttle to dock and copy the computer core along with every scrap of information about the probe.

I had no idea at the time it would start my people down a road that ultimately would lead to our destruction. It is ironic, no? We tried to bring about the end of the Federation and instead you sowed the seed that ultimately brought about the empire's own.

As our shuttle was making its way back, the Borg went to warp having completed their scans. I ordered the *Keras* to remain with the cube as we recovered our team. We never heard from the *Keras* again. I do not know what happened, but I presume that they strayed too close to the Borg. All I know for sure is Starfleet never discovered our presence. That – and the data on the stellar probe – spared me once I returned to the empire.

I should have continued on after the *Keras* and the Borg, but I was hesitant to leave. On Romulus there was a tradition that when one who had done service

to the empire had died someone would watch over them until the family arrived to prepare the body for the rites and the journey to come. So, we waited and we watched for several hours. It was my intention that when Starfleet came we would resume our course for Earth, but when *Enterprise* arrived it merely slowed to pay tribute in passing before leaving the system in its pursuit. It was another 72 hours before relief began to arrive.

[He downs the rest of his glass and pours another to the brim, finishing the bottle.]

I still have nightmares.

Not about the battle, no – that was noble and right. I have nightmares thinking about those alone and adrift in the ruins of the fleet as it slowly drifted through the void. I sometimes imagine I am trapped in one of those derelict hulks and know that I am out there watching, waiting, cloaked and I wonder why won't I come and help – why won't I answer the distress beacon. I scream into a comm unit begging for me to come and save myself.

[He downs the drink and slams down the glass.]

But all that answers me is silence.

[Without another word he leaves the cafe.]



ACTION REPORT

THE FOLLOWING IS THE INITIAL AFTER ACTION REPORT AS FILED BY ADMIRAL JERIMIAH HAYES ON HIS APPOINTMENT AS THE HEAD OF STARFLEET TACTICAL FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF ADMIRAL HANSON. IN THIS REPORT, HE OUTLINES THE SITUATION AS WAS BEST UNDERSTOOD IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359 BASED ON WITNESS TESTIMONY AND DATA RECOVERED FROM AUTOMATED LOG BUOYS, WHICH WERE AUTOMATICALLY DEPLOYED BY STARSHIPS FOLLOWING THEIR DESTRUCTION.

FROM: ADMIRAL J. HAYES, COMMANDER STARFLEET TACTICAL

TO: FLEET ADMIRAL T. SHANTHI, COMMANDER IN CHIEF

SUBJECT: REPORT ON THE LOSS OF TASK FORCE 359 ON STARDATE 44002

PART I

1. BASED UPON BEST AVAILABLE DATA AT TIME OF REPORTING

A. ENEMY FORCES

2. AT 0800 ON STARDATE 44002, THE ENEMY SITUATION AS KNOWN TO COMSTARTAC (ADM J.P. HANSON) WAS AS FOLLOWS:

1. Enemy force consisting of a single BORG cube class ship entered Federation space on or around Stardate 43975.2 near spatial grid 37291/B
2. The cube abducted J.L. Picard, Commander of *Enterprise* on 43996.2
3. *Enterprise* engaged the BORG on 43998.5 using modified deflector pulse, the BORG ship suffered no apparent damage and left unhindered. J.L. Picard was now in possession of the enemy
4. BORG ship departed on direct course for Sector 001, *Enterprise* was unable to pursue due to damage

B. STARFLEET FORCES

3. ON STARDATE 43992.4, CINC AUTHORIZED THE FORMATION OF TASK FORCE 359 AND DEPLOYMENT TO THE WOLF 359 SYSTEM IN ANTICIPATION OF BORG ADVANCE

PART I, CONT.

4. TASK FORCE 359 ARRIVED INTO WOLF 359 SYSTEM ON 43997.2. THE DISPOSITION OF THE SHIPS OF THE TASK FORCE WERE AS FOLLOWS:

a. Task Group 359/A

i) Position: Local Grid 11729/C

Melbourne (NCC-62043)
 Saratoga (NCC-31911)
 Yamaguchi (NCC-26510)
 Bellerophon (NCC-62048)
 Kumari (NCC-53726)
 Princeton (NCC-59804)
 Tolstoy (NCC-62095)
 Galatea (NCC-2692)
 Bastion (NCC-2527)
 Endurance (NCC-5265)
 Seleya (NCC-65213)
 Liberator (NCC 67016)

b. Task Group 359/B

i) Position: Local Grid 38295/G

Melbourne (NCC-78256)
 Chekov (NCC-57302)
 Anderson (NCC-12248)
 Garrett (NCC-12256)
 Kaneda (NX-62498)
 Buran (NCC-57580)
 Hood (NCC-42296)
 Righteous (NCC-42451)
 Roosevelt (NCC-65983)
 Ibn Sina (NCC-70532)
 Gora Bim Gral (NCC-62154)
 Republic (NAR-1371)

c. Task Group 359/C

i) Position: Local Grid 57992/K

Columbia (NCC-71102)
 ComStarTac (TF359)
 Mjoliner (NCC-3117)
 Sha Ka Ree (NCC-6989)
 Firebrand (NCC-68723)
 Konom (NCC-32285)
 Constance (NCC-10367)
 Sonak (NCC-29873)
 Dunkerque (NCC-44532)
 T'shen Kovil (NCC-68208)
 Soval (NCC-62166)
 TPau (NCC-29783)
 Ahwahnee (NCC-71620)
 Gage (NCC-11672)
 Kyushu (NCC-65491)
 Thy'lek Shran (NCC-62151)

d. Additional Notes

i) *Bonestell* (NCC-31600) was positioned at Grid 03024/A retrofitted with a 250///Cochrane graviton burst generator rigged for remote detonation.

ii) *Runabout Rhine* was positioned at Grid 00029/A

5. COMSTARTAC ORDERS SENSOR BUOY DEPLOYMENT ALONG LIKELY APPROACH VECTORS

WOLF 359 TASK FORCE

FLEET LIST

• USS AHWAHNEE	NCC-71620	CHEYENNE-CLASS
• USS ANDERSON	NCC 12248	SPRINGFIELD-CLASS
• USS BASTION	NCC-2527	CONSTELLATION-CLASS
• USS BELLEROPHON	NCC-62048	NEBULA-CLASS
• USS BONESTELL	NCC-31600	OBERTH-CLASS
• USS BURAN	NCC-57580	CHALLENGER-CLASS
• USS CONSTANCE	NCC-10367	CONSTELLATION-CLASS
• USS CHEKOV	NCC-57302	SPRINGFIELD-CLASS
• USS COLUMBIA [F]	NCC-71102	GALAXY-CLASS
• USS DUNKERQUE	NCC-44532	CHEYENNE-CLASS
• USS ENDURANCE	NCC-5265	ESSEX-CLASS
• USS FIREBRAND	NCC-68723	FREEDOM-CLASS
• USS GAGE	NCC-11672	APOLLO-CLASS
• USS GALATEA	NCC-2692	CONSTELLATION-CLASS
• USS GARRETT	NCC-12256	GEORGIU-CLASS
• USS GORA BIM GRAL	NCC-62154	AMBASSADOR-CLASS
• USS HOOD	NCC-42296	EXCELSIOR-CLASS
• USS IBN SINA	NCC-70532	PARLIAMENT-CLASS
• USS KANEDA	NX-62498	AKIRA-CLASS
• USS KONOM	NCC-32285	NEW ORLEANS-CLASS

• USS KUMARI	NCC-53726	CHEYENNE-CLASS
• USS KYUSHU	NCC-65491	NEW ORLEANS-CLASS
• USS LIBERATOR	NCC 67016	BLAKE-CLASS
• USS MELBOURNE [I]	NCC-62043	EXCELSIOR-CLASS
• PCU MELBOURNE [II]	NCC-78256	NEBULA-CLASS
• USS MJOLINER	NCC-3117	MIRANDA-CLASS
• USS PRINCETON	NCC-59804	NIAGARA-CLASS
• TS REPUBLIC	NAR-1371	CONSTITUTION-CLASS
• USS RIGHTEOUS	NCC-42451	EXCELSIOR-CLASS
• USS ROOSEVELT	NCC-65983	AMBASSADOR-CLASS
• USS SARATOGA	NCC-31911	MIRANDA-CLASS
• USS SELEYA	NCC-65213	KILIMANJARO-CLASS
• USS SHA KA REE	NCC-6989	SHANGRI-LA-CLASS
• USS SONAK	NCC-29873	MIRANDA-CLASS
• USS SOVAL	NCC-62166	AMBASSADOR-CLASS
• USS T'SHEN KOVIL	NCC-68208	APOLLO-CLASS
• USS THY'LEK SHRAN	NCC-62151	CENTAUR-CLASS
• USS TOLSTOY	NCC-62095	RIGEL-CLASS
• USS T'PAU	NCC-29783	SHI'KAHR-CLASS
• USS YAMAGUCHI	NCC-26510	AMBASSADOR-CLASS

• USS COLUMBIA [F]



• USS GORA BUN GRAL



• USS SOVAL



• USS YAMAGUCHI



• USS HOOD



• USS RIGHTEOUS



• USS KONOM



• USS T'PAU



• TS REPUBLIC

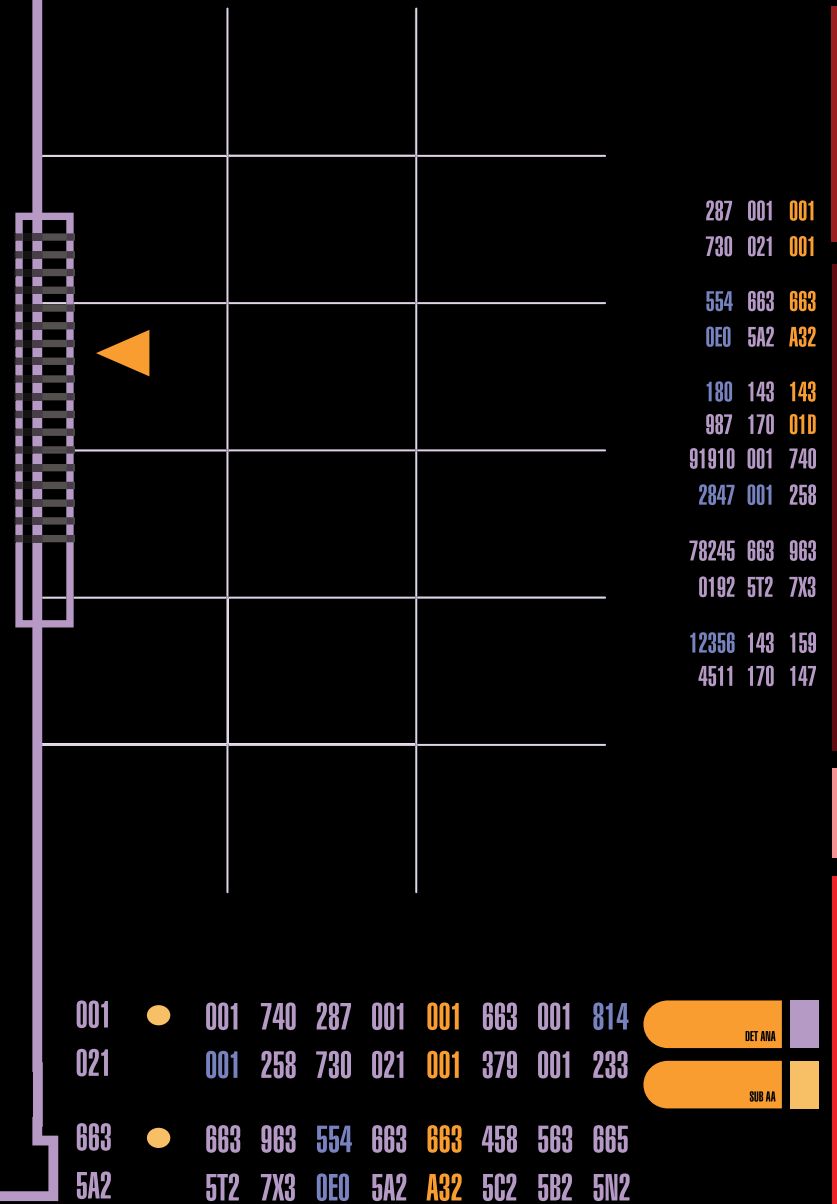


• USS IBN SHUA



CONT. FOR TASK FORCE SIZE COMPARISON DISPLAY

TASK FORCE SIZE COMPARISON



BORG CUBE • 3040M

PART II

1. STARDATE 44002.1: *HOOD* REPORTS LOSS OF CONTACT WITH SENSOR BUOYS, SUGGESTING UNKNOWN VESSEL APPROACHING SYSTEM, COMSTARTAC ORDERS FLEET TO YELLOW ALERT.
2. BORG CUBE ARRIVES IN SYSTEM AT GRID 03024/A IN PROXIMITY OF *BONESTELL*, GRAVITON BURST DEVICE IS DETONATED DISABLING WARP TRAVEL FOR A 17AU RADIUS.
3. *RHINE* LAUNCHES SOLAR PROBE INTO THE WOLF 359 STAR IN THE HOPES OF CAUSING A COLLAPSE AND SUPERNOVA. THE PROBE IMPACTED AS PLANNED HOWEVER THE RESULTING EFFECTS ARE A LEVEL TWO SHOCKWAVE AND 0.5 REDUCTION IN LUMINOSITY HAVE NO IMPACT ON THE BORG. THE SHOCKWAVE DISABLED THE *RHINE*.
4. THE BORG SHIP ATTEMPTED TO MOVE OUT OF THE SYSTEM UNDER IMPULSE TO RESUME ITS COURSE TOWARDS SECTOR 001. COMSTARTAC ORDERS TASK GROUP 359/A TO MOVE TO ENGAGE. THEY PERFORM WARP HOP INTO THE SYSTEM AND MOVE TO ENGAGE THE CUBE IN A STAGGERED APPROACH. *MELBOURNE* AND *SARATOGA* WERE QUICKLY DISABLED AND DESTROYED. REMAINING SHIPS OF 359/A ATTEMPTED TO SWAM THE CUBE BUT LACKING TARGETS TO FOCUS FIRE IT PROVED INEFFECTIVE. ATTEMPT WAS MADE TO REMOTELY RAM THE BORG WITH *BONESTELL*.
5. SHIPS REPORTED DEGRADED SENSOR RESOLUTION INSIDE FIELD OF EFFECT OF GRAVITON BURST IMPACTING TARGETING SYSTEMS AND PHASER ACCURACY AND INTERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS.
6. 359/B PERFORMS WARP HOP AND ENGAGES THE BORG WITH THE REMNANTS OF 359/A APPROXIMATELY T+00:07:00 AFTER INITIAL CONTACT. DURING THE ENGAGEMENT SEVERAL SHIPS, NOTABLY *HOOD*, *ROOSEVELT*, AND *SELAYA*, REPORTED INTRUDERS BOARDING THE SHIP AND ATTEMPTING TO TAKE CONTROL OF THE SHIPS FROM KEY LOCATIONS. IN ADDITION, OTHER SHIPS REPORT PERSONNEL BEING TRANSPORTED AWAY THROUGH COMPROMISED SHIELDS.

7. AT APPROXIMATELY T+00:16:00 359/C IS AUTHORIZED TO ENGAGE AND PERFORMS A WARP HOP TO ENGAGE BORG, 90 PERCENT OF 359/A AND 359/B HAVE BEEN DESTROYED OR DISABLED. COMSTARTAC ATTEMPTS TO RALLY SURVIVING FORCES AND TO PERFORM CONTROLLED WITHDRAWAL OUTSIDE OF BORG EFFECTIVE WEAPONS RANGE BUT BORG PURSUE AND CONTINUE TO HARRY FORCES.
8. SHIPS WHICH HAD REPORTED BOARDING PARTIES CEASE COMMUNICATION AND BEGIN TO MOVE TO LEAVE THE GRAVITON AOE. *SELAYA* COLLIDES WITH *ENDURANCE* DURING THIS MANEUVER.
9. *COLUMBIA* COMES UNDER SUSTAINED FIRE FROM THE BORG AS NUMBER OF ACTIVE TARGETS CONTINUE TO DWINDLE. *COLUMBIA* IS DESTROYED ROUGHLY THREE MINUTES AFTER DIRECTLY ENGAGING THE BORG, COMSTARTAC IS PRESUMED KIA.
10. LAST REMAINING SHIPS OF TASK FORCE 359 ARE DESTROYED APPROXIMATELY T+00:24:00 AFTER FIRST CONTACT WITH BORG.
11. BORG REMAINS IN SYSTEM CONDUCTING SYSTEMATIC SENSOR SWEEP FOR APPROXIMATELY 32 MINUTES BEFORE DEPARTING WOLF 359 SYSTEM AT HIGH WARP.

UPWARDS OF 10,000 PERSONNEL KIA/MIA.

WOLF 359 TACTICAL MAP

0887345-359

4587345-333

117458

FBP-BETA
609-343

FBP-DEMCA
096-845

FBP-TANGO
115-4715

11720/A

24533/B

36912/F

45451/T

TG • 359/A
11720/C

TG • 359/B
38295/G

FBP-GAMMA
494-710

FBP-DELTA
221-0802

FBP-ALPHA
738-345

15042/C

29024/D

43025/D

59001/J

TG • 359/C
57992/K

503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517

20955-67119

0887345-359

873005854

03020-03027 • A - G
00029-00040 • A - G

USS BONESTELL • OBERTH CLASS
GRID 03024/A

USS RHINE • DANUBE CLASS
GRID 00028/A

AUX TACTICAL CARTOGRAPHY • 47

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GAMMA-PIE 51257003



CHAPTER 6

SECTOR 001

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INTERLUDE

WOLF 359 MEMORIAL STATION

Stardate 73375.2 – 2396



The crew of the *Hood* file out of the ship and on to the station. Among the dignitaries in attendance I see many familiar faces that I have met and interviewed over the years; I can see Jake Sisko, L'Garrey, Captain Riker, and Chancellor Martok. In fact, there are representatives from almost every member world of the Federation as well as delegates from many other powers. There is even a small delegation from the Dominion in attendance – a testament to the improving relations following the formal establishment of diplomatic ties in recent years. Perhaps most surprising, I see the unmistakable face of Hugh, sitting near the front in a fashionable black cloak. Around him sit a few other former Borg bearing similar faces also streaked with scars and slivers of metal.

The last to leave the ship is her final captain and Admiral DeSoto. They take seats besides the lectern set up by the airlock where large panoramic windows show the ship in all her glory – looking resplendent in the light from Wolf 359. Beyond her, I can just make out the ships of the honor guard that escorted us into the system forming back up in columns: including the *Titan*, the *Sagan*, the *Obena*, and, of course, the *Enterprise*.

The decommissioning ceremony is scheduled to last about an hour and then there will be the formal opening of *Hood* as part of the memorial station and a tour of the ship for some of the dignitaries. The whole scene strikes me as somewhat anticlimactic after our journey here; the sea of people sat listening intently to the speeches being given seem at odds with the surroundings. This part of the memorial station is dedicated to the history leading up to the battle itself. Large holographic displays show people associated with the events and scenes representing key moments; there are large panels listing starship classes and even pieces of the Borg cube itself – behind a heavily reinforced force field, of course.

I find myself feeling slightly claustrophobic surrounded by all these people, so I try as discreetly as possible to make my way along to the end of row and to

pass towards the back of the room. I step through the throng of reporters and into the central corridor of the memorial station that curves around the central dock housing the remains of *Columbia*. With all of the station staff attending the ceremony, it's deserted. But I can hear a metallic clanging sound in the distance, coming from somewhere further away from the ceremony. The air here is cool and already I feel better to be away from all the people. I follow the sound further along the hall.

The station was designed by famed architect Vax Arass, who managed to balance many competing requirements to conceive of a facility both functional as a station, educational facility, and as a fitting memorial to the dead. The station is built off of the Ossuary and sweeps out in a large curve: at one end are the dock facilities and it is here that people arrive and learn the story of the battle. This is where the *Hood* is now berthed.

The hallway leads from this part of the station and curves around to the heart of the facility: the Silent Cenotaph.

The Cenotaph is a large open chamber, lined with 40 large windows that look out over the remains of the starships left at Wolf 359. The floor is covered in a reflective obsidian stone gifted by Andoria and the lights are kept low. It is a space that seems to absorb sound, making the clanging sound all the more jarring as I approach.

In the antechamber before entering the cenotaph proper is the *'IpyaH*. A column of fire roars along its surface and before it a pair of Klingon warriors stand proudly at attention, hammering their *bat'leths* into the stone floor in unison. The small indents in the floor show this is a common occurrence.

"I see you also heard the call," says a voice. I whip around, shocked at how close the voice was – I had not heard anyone walk up behind me. I find myself looking at a mighty bear of a Klingon in the full regalia of a member of the High Council and wearing a large fur across his shoulders. I almost have to squint before I realize who it is.

"Ambassador MeDKav?"

He places a hand on my shoulder and nods. "Sometimes it is good to remember who we are, and to dress accordingly, especially when in such hallowed grounds," he nods towards the Klingon guards. "They are preparing to

end their watch and they call for others to come take their place. Have you seen the ceremony before?"

"No, I was not aware there was one."

MeDKav nods with the faintest hint of a smile. "It is a great honor to be selected to stand watch over the *'IpyaH*. To even be considered they must prove themselves as honorable warriors and serve the empire with distinction."

A door I hadn't noticed adjacent to the main corridor opens and two more Klingon warriors enter, followed by another Klingon wearing robes and carrying a large box. The warriors hold their *bat'leths* in the crook of their arms, their uniforms look pristine with various crests and honors affixed to the front. They stop and stand before the other warriors, who stop the hammering on the stone. The silence that now fills the room feels almost oppressive. MeDKav leans close to whisper so as not to disturb the ceremony.

"The cleric will prepare the tea ceremony. The tea is made using the leaves of the fire hibiscus plant which is poisonous to most species. The warriors will drink the tea and then stand a watch for three days. It is a test of courage and honor and reminds us that death is an experience best shared – like the tea."

The newly-arrived warriors salute the ones standing guard and take the tea from the cleric, downing it in a single motion. The warriors guarding the flame dip their heads and *bat'leths* in unison, then turn and march away. The new warriors step forward, take the crests from their sleeves and throw them into the base of the fire.

"The warriors throw their family crests into the flame as well as any honors they have received in their careers. It is to remind us that we failed on that day: our friends called for aid and we did not come in time. It is a stain on our honor, on all Klingons, so we purify our houses in the fire and stand watch to help guide these noble souls to *Sto-Vo-Kor*."

The new warriors take up their positions. Already I can see sweat beginning to build on the ridges of the new recruits. I can see admiration in MeDKav's eyes as he nods respectfully at the warriors who have completed their duty as they march with the cleric out of the chamber.

"Come, let us go and pay our own respects to the fallen." He leads me past the Klingons and into the Cenotaph.

OWEN PARIS

"PROJECT PATHFINDER," EARTH

Stardate: 53425.9 – 2376



We were living in the G&G by then: we'd rack down in the bunks on the lower levels. The mess area was utilitarian to put it politely, but someone had brought some portable replicators and we were at least able to get coffee going. You know Captain Janeway was my science officer on the *Al-Batani*? Warmest, most compassionate officer I've known – so long as she had a supply of strong coffee to hand *at all times*. [chuckles]

Frankly, we didn't know what we were doing. This was so far outside of the scope of any of our training or planning that we were making it up as we went along. First, we were going to scatter the fleet – that changed and then we were going to reinforce J.P. at 359. Then *that* changed to mounting a staggered line defense up to Sol; then we were going to just muster whatever we could and hit them here.

Ross's "stellar bomb" seemed like the only option on the table with any hope of success so we pinned all our hopes on that. Once Hanson and Ross departed, we started to talk ourselves around from it being a long shot to the chance it might work – to it would definitely work. There was even talk that we should just go home to clean up and resume working in the Harriman Building. There was a definite sense of relief knowing at the very least we had a plan... you know what they say about plans in times of war? They never survive contact with the enemy.

We were patched into the command feeds from the *Columbia* as we gathered in the viewing gallery over the operations board. We had live feeds from every ship out there. When we saw that cube projected on the holographic display it sent a shiver right down my spine. I know it sounds archaic but the only word I could think to describe it was "*unholy*."

The second the *Bonestall* detonated the graviton burst we lost all live data within the system; we were reduced to audio only and a data stream on a time delay through the subspace relay network. It meant that our boards were updated every 60 seconds: the image would freeze and then 60 seconds later the board would refresh and we could see how the ships had been deployed.

Once it became clear that the probe had failed, I felt the bottom fall out of my world. We tried to transmit an abort order to Hanson to get him to withdraw, but there was no way to get a signal to him with all the interference now in the system. We just had to sit there and watch as every 60 seconds the tactical plot would update, and each time there would be fewer and fewer starships operational. Then *Columbia* was gone and that was pretty much it.

I won't lie to you – and I know it sounds callous – but losing J.P. hit me harder than the rest. I knew a lot of the people there, friends even, but J.P. and me went back a long way. We'd come up through the service together and had worked side by side for half a decade on the Admiralty Board. Sitting there, watching that light blink out all those light-years away, knowing there was nothing I could do...was almost too much to bear. It was a sense of helplessness that we just aren't used to dealing with in the modern Starfleet.

I felt numb. It's nigh on impossible to really comprehend the scope of the loss we suffered at 359: the single greatest loss of life in Starfleet's history, but we couldn't even take a moment to process what had happened. Immediately the question became "what now?". The Borg were still coming here and there wasn't a damn thing we could do about it.

ELIZABETH SHELBY

USS ILLINOIS, EN ROUTE TO ZAKDORN

Stardate 47626.9 – 2370



It was the longest 12 hours of my life. We'd lost contact with the admiral on *Columbia* and around the same time all communication out of the system just stopped. It was so sudden and all-encompassing that clearly it had to be some sort of interference from the Borg. I grabbed onto that spark of hope and hung onto it like a lifebelt – that hope and working to get *Enterprise* into a fit state to take on the Borg were the only things keeping me sane.

I spent just about all my time in engineering or crawling through Jefferies tubes. I think everyone was still in shock: first from the appearance of Locutus, and then the frustration at the lack of communication from the fleet. Captain Riker tried contacting Starfleet Command but the relay network was a mess, and – from what little we could glean – they had less information than we did. With the Borg presumably now on a direct course for Earth, the reinforcements Hanson had been promised were redeployed to the Sol System. *No one* was heading to Wolf 359.

I found it very hard to process what I was feeling. It was especially difficult because everyone on the ship was still coming to terms with what had happened to Captain Picard and our failure to stop the Borg. For my part, I greatly respected and admired the captain. Admiral Hanson often spoke fondly of his friendship with Picard and had told me I would be an excellent fit as his XO and that under his tutelage would very quickly find myself in command of my own ship. But I didn't know him like the crew here did. They had lost the head of their family and the strong arm on the tiller – the person to guide them through times just like these. Captain Riker became somewhat withdrawn during this time; he spent a lot of his time in his quarters and in the observation lounge, very rarely stepping into the ready room.

I was trying my utmost not to think about Admiral Hanson and the rest of his staff: Chet, Rip'lah, Stanz, and the rest. We had worked closely building up tactical back into a legitimate division within Starfleet and we were making real progress. More than that, they were my *friends*. Chet had the most amazing voice – have you ever heard a Lurian do karaoke? It's not something you forget, especially when his go-to was Mongolian throat singing!

[She chuckles.]

I spent most of my time working with Commander Data, who among his many other fantastic qualities is not prone to small talk. Despite his insistence that he does not understand Humans, he *does* know when something is bothering them. He suggested I go speak to Counselor Troi, but it seemed she had more than enough on her plate with the captain and the rest of the crew. Then he suggested I go to Ten-Forward and order a drink! It caught me completely off guard, but he simply returned to the calibrations he was conducting. When I asked why I should go there, he just said that Guinan would have what I needed.

So I did. While waiting for the aft shields to finish running a test I went to Ten-Forward to find this "Guinan." The lounge was pretty empty, but it reminded me a little of the 1602 back in San Francisco. I found Guinan sitting at a table with a glass of Saurian brandy and a tumbler with an orange-colored drink across from her. She gestured for me to sit and gave me the warmest smile I'd ever seen. I peered into the glass, took a drink, and instantly was taken back to my academy days. We used to call it the "Shelby Sour" – how she knew what it was or that it was exactly what I needed at that moment I still don't know.

We spoke for what felt like an hour – maybe two – about my career, Admiral Hanson, the Borg, Captain Picard...everything. The strangest thing was that at the end, she thanked me! Said I had helped her work through some things and she knew what she needed to do. We got up to leave and she followed me out to the turbolift. I called for the bridge and gestured for her to tell the computer her destination, but she just smiled that enigmatic smile and said that's where she needed to be, too.

She headed for the ready room while I took over the conn from Data. I admit, even with everything we were going through, I still felt a thrill being in command of the *Enterprise*. Three days ago this had been *everything* I'd ever wanted. Now

it seemed almost inconsequential against the looming threat of the Borg.

We were getting ever closer to the Wolf 359 System and I started to feel my insides knot up again as I let my mind wander. Then Guinan exited the ready room. She smiled at me, gave a nod, then left the bridge. I knew whatever we were going to find, it was going to be *bad*. Clearly whatever had happened something had gone terribly wrong and a lot of ships were likely to be damaged, but with luck the Borg would be, too. I gave the order to drop out of warp and Ensign Crusher called Captain Riker to the bridge. He seemed different, too. More comfortable, I would have said.

As we entered the system, sensors picked up several vessels and all the tension released at that moment. At least some of them had survived, but a wave of nausea hit me when Data reported no active subspace fields or power readings...and no lifesigns.

Once we moved into visual range and could see the fleet...I still have nightmares about that moment: scorched and blackened hulks, some still on fire, venting what little atmosphere they still had into space, still drifting on whatever course they had been on when the Borg had crippled them. The entire bridge was silent. I guess everyone was trying to process it in their own way. There was no sign of the Borg anywhere – not even any significant debris. It just looked like someone had flung a surplus yard into orbit.

I couldn't stand the silence and I remembered what Guinan had said to me about giving voice to our fears: it can rob them of their power. So I started to identify the ships I could see – the *Tolstoy*, the *Kyushu*, the *Melbourne*. I saw Riker's head fall at the mention of that ship he had been destined to captain. I continued the litany to myself, but I could only identify a dozen or so of the fleet.

Our sensors were almost nonexistent as a result of the graviton burst and the Borg were still heading for Earth. We couldn't stop to look for survivors – there was no time. Looking at the slaughter, the complete and utter destruction the Borg had wrought, it was difficult to imagine that anyone could have survived. We passed through the battlefield at half-impulse, navigating around the larger wrecks, and then continued our pursuit. I thought I caught sight of the remains of *Columbia* and said goodbye to Admiral Hanson from the observation lounge.

I remember thinking "how strange." This was what I had been dreading all

day. I had expected to fall to pieces, but after speaking to Guinan and after seeing how Riker and the rest of the crew were still functioning after the loss of Picard gave me the strength I needed to keep it together. I knew there would be time to grieve and to despair, but first we had a job to do. The Borg were still coming and *Enterprise* might really be all that stood between Earth and assimilation.

TRANSCRIPT OF ADMIRALTY MEETING

ACCESS INCLUDED AUDIO FILE "6.04"

The following is an edited transcript of a holorecorded meeting of the Starfleet senior staff on stardate 44002.9 (approximately four hours after the Battle of Wolf 359). The meeting took place in the secure conference room in the Starfleet Command Central Crisis Planning Center (colloquially known as the George & Gracie Memorial Theatre or "GGG") beneath Starfleet Headquarters in San Francisco.

Starfleet Intelligence partially declassified and approved the redacted recording for public release on stardate 63047.7.

FLAG OFFICERS PRESENT

Fleet Admiral Taela Shanthi
CHIEF OF STARFLEET OPERATIONS

Admiral Owen Paris
VICE CHIEF OF STARFLEET OPERATIONS

Vice Admiral Ellen Hayes
CHIEF OF STARFLEET INTELLIGENCE

Vice Admiral Thomas Henry
CHIEF OF STARFLEET SECURITY

Vice Admiral Jennifer Chapman
**CHIEF OF STARFLEET
SUSTAINMENT & LOGISTICS**

Rear Admiral (Lower Half)
James Leyton
CHIEF OF STARFLEET PERSONNEL

Admiral Eliza Brooks
**CHIEF OF STARFLEET MEDICAL /
STARFLEET SURGEON GENERAL**

Rear Admiral (Upper Half)
Norah Satie
**STARFLEET JUDGE
ADVOCATE GENERAL**

The Starfleet senior staff sit in a claustrophobic room around a metal conference table with a holographic interface in its center. It displays the aftermath of Wolf 359. The casualty numbers hang in midair half a meter above the table. Every few seconds, the data updates with new figures highlighting the absolute carnage less than a dozen light-years away. Long-range sensor drones clearly indicate the Borg have already resumed course for Earth at warp 7 with seemingly no damage at all.

The dim lights highlight the admiralty's haggard, sleep-deprived visages. The men are unshaven. Everyone's face seems to have aged 10 years in the past week. This recording is in stark contrast to the meetings recorded in the relative opulence of the Nogura Room less than two weeks earlier.

SHANTHI: So, it's confirmed?

HAYES: **[nodding slowly]** Yes, 32 starships confirmed destroyed. Six unaccounted for, but it's a mess out there. At least 8,000 dead and likely a lot more than that.

CHAPMAN: What about J.P. and Bill?

HAYES: *Columbia* is a catastrophic loss. No sign of survivors. Ross was in a *Danube*-class runabout less than three AU from ground zero when the Borg counterattacked. He's only listed as "missing," but he would have a better chance kayaking in a hurricane.

CHAPMAN: So, they're both dead?

HAYES: Most likely...

SHANTHI: We'll have to mourn our fallen later. What about the living?

HAYES: We've detected at least a hundred emergency subspace beacons from escape pods, but with that cube between us and the remains of the fleet, there's no way to know how many actually have survivors aboard.

PARIS: **[turning to Brooks]** Eliza, how long do they have?

BROOKS: **[she becomes flustered and pauses to consider the factors]** If the tri-ox hypos and artificial blood packs in the escape pods survived, maybe three or four days. If the life support systems were damaged or the pods were over their maximum capacity, maybe 26-52 hours...and that's for the non-critical cases. If they have severely wounded aboard, you have about two hours on emergency med kits.

Then, if you don't get them to a Level III Trauma equipped sickbay, it's game over.

SHANTHI: Is there any other ship out there that could stop to assist with recovery efforts? Have we had any contact with Riker or the *Enterprise*?

[HENRY wordlessly shakes his head in the negative.]

LEYTON: **[forcefully interjecting]** Ma'am, I think we should consider the possibility that the *Enterprise* was crippled when they attempted to engage the Borg with their modified deflector array and consider them out of the fight. The Klingons never showed. The president and her staff are running away at warp 9.9 in the wrong direction. *No one else is coming.* The fleet we have in the Sol System is now our last and only line of defense. It's time to be the warriors our planet needs us to be.

SATIE: Rear Admiral Leyton, please!

PARIS: I agree with James, Taela. Earth just became the Alamo and we have to prepare to make our final stand.

[SHANTHI grits her teeth, closes her eyes, and steeples her fingers. Finally, she lets out a labored breath, picks up a PADD, and inputs a series of orders before signing with her thumbprint.]

SHANTHI: Effective at 23:00 hours tonight, Vice Admiral Thomas Henry of Starfleet Security is brevetted to full admiral and placed in command of Task Force Sentinel, the Sol Defense Fleet. Rear Admiral James Leyton is brevetted to vice admiral and will be your second-in-command.

HENRY: Understood. I'll place my flag aboard the *Musashi*. Captain Surovang and I have worked together before. She'll know how to help me maneuver a fleet. **[he turns to LEYTON]** Pick another ship. We'll fight until we can't fight anymore...

LEYTON: And then I'll keep fighting. I'll go aboard the *Swiftsure*. She's small, but *fast*. We can mass the fleet in the Oort cloud. That will give us time to get into combat formation for a counterattack once the Borg reach the Jupiter Perimeter.

[HENRY nods his approval.]

HAYES: At the rate they move?! If you wait that long, the Borg will be in New Jersey before the fleet crosses the Neptune Outer Marker!

PARIS: We can activate the Sol Defense League. They can slow the Borg down as they approach the inner solar system.

CHAPMAN: You really think those *weekend warriors* have a chance against that cube? They're still drilling with phase pistols and shuttlepods.

PARIS: Do we have a choice?

[CHAPMAN deflates a bit as she realizes he is right.]

SHANTHI: As the two senior officers in Starfleet, Owen and I will remain behind in G&G and take command of planetary defense operations. If the Borg are able to land forces on Earth's surface, we will trigger [REDACTED]

BROOKS: [aghast] You can't be serious!?

PARIS: I concur, Taela. **[turning to BROOKS]** Eliza, you saw what happened at 359. If the Borg land ground forces on the planet, it's already over. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It will be quick and painless.

HAYES: I'll stay, too. It was intelligence failures that led to all of this. I want to help make things right.

SHANTHI: The hell you are, Ellen. I will not let the Borg compromise all of Starfleet's operations just by seizing this one planet. We have to survive! We have to help what's left of the Federation rebuild. Ellen, that's where you, Jennifer, and Eliza, come in...

[The heads of Starfleet Intelligence, Logistics, and Medical look confused.]

SHANTHI: I've handpicked one of the finest captains in Starfleet to be our lifeboat. Right now, Edward Jellico is assisting with organizing planetary evacuation and defense operations from Starbase One, but he's on standby for a very special mission on my direct order.

[The table all lean forward.]

SHANTHI: He will safeguard the rest of Starfleet's staff aboard the *Cairo* along with a hard copy backup of the complete headquarters database that I had our comm techs start encoding as soon as Wolf 359 failed.

CHAPMAN: That many isolinear chips will take up an entire shuttlebay!

SHANTHI: Yes, they will. Once you three are aboard with your personal staff and the computer data, Jellico will proceed at maximum warp to rendezvous with *Paris One* and Admiral Nechayev. Then, his sole purpose in life will be to keep you all safe. He's the only commander I trust with that level of responsibility.

BROOKS: And then exactly what the hell are we supposed to do, Taela?

SHANTHI: *Survive*, Ellen. Your job will be to keep the rest of the Federation together without Earth...whatever that looks like.

SATIE: **[interjecting nervously]** Excuse me, Ma'am. I can't help but notice you didn't reserve a seat for me on the lifeboat. Where exactly am I supposed to be in all of this?

PARIS: Right next to us in G&G, Norah.

SATIE: **[shocked]** I'm a lawyer! What possible use could I be here?

SHANTHI: You are needed on Earth precisely because you oversee the interpretation and execution of Starfleet's policies and legal procedures. Before the president departed, she signed a secret order authorizing certain escalations in the event they became necessary to prevent mass panic. I will need your help properly interpreting what is permitted and what it does not in emergency circumstances.

HENRY: Are we talking martial law here?

SHANTHI: That is one possibility, yes. We must do everything we can to keep order on Earth as the Borg close in. At the very least, we need to keep our facilities safe to continue operations for as long as possible. Eight billion civilians can cause a lot of damage if left unchecked.

[LEYTON nods approvingly.]

SATIE: Then you can consult a computer database! You don't need me to *die* to tell you what law and regulation say!

SHANTHI: **[angrily]** You are also a Starfleet officer, Admiral! As long as you wear that uniform, you will put yourself to the hazard as required! Am I *understood*?

[SATIE is speechless.]

[LEYTON mutters something under his breath. SATIE shoots a venomous look back at him but says nothing.]

END OF FILE

JUAN FLETCHER

SANTIAGO, EARTH

Stardate 47878.0 – 2370

While Starfleet is responsible for the defense of the Federation, most member worlds maintain their own independent system or planetary defense force which answers only to the planetary government to provide local protection and to allow Starfleet to focus on its core mission. For some members, such as Vulcan and Andoria, their existing defense forces – the High Command and Imperial Guard, respectively – continue to perform that role. With Starfleet's origins as the United Earth's defense force it was not politically viable nor desirable to have Starfleet protecting the Sol System and answering to the Earth government.

The Sol Defense League was established shortly after the founding of the Federation to take over the duties of protecting Earth and its interests. However, given Earth's status as the home of both Starfleet and the Federation government it has been largely seen as an afterthought and never seriously maintained as a fighting force. Most members join on a part-time reserve basis in exchange for benefits from Earth, including the possibility of owning land on Earth itself. I meet with Juan Fletcher, now retired from the SDL, at their ranch where they live with their wife – just outside Santiago on the South American continent.

I joined up to get into the lottery for a plot on Earth. I grew up on Titan and always remember when we would take trips down to Earth to see the Grand Canyon or the Andes. I was absolutely *enthralled* – growing up all I wanted was to be able to live on Earth. The thing is though...it's a pretty small planet, and it's been through a lot, you know, so there's strict controls on how many people can live on the planet.

So, I signed up for the Sol Defense League. It was mostly just a thing to do on weekends; a couple of weeks out of the year we'd go and fly some shuttles around the academy's testing range out around Saturn. That was about the size of it. I didn't really think about it much – it was more like a club. I'd catch up with friends, see stuff around the system, and maybe one day get a little plot on Earth to call my own.

I was out doing a survey near Eros when I got a call on the SDL communicator. It was lucky that I had it with me, but it happened to be in my kit bag when I threw it into the shuttle that morning. It was my local platoon commander –

nice kid called Diogo – telling me that we had been activated. I figured it was a joke or something so played along: “oh yeah, *suuure*, the Klingons have decided to attack Earth,” I think I said. He didn’t laugh. He sounded terrified, told me to divert immediately to Jupiter Outpost 92. I didn’t have time for jokes, so I told him to head over at warp 9 and shut down my communicator. Just went back to my survey. About five minutes later there was a signal over the EMS [**Emergency Messaging System**] and a call from some Starfleet bigwig telling us that all members of the SDL had been activated and were to report immediately for assignment.

Let me tell you, the flight from Eros to Jupiter took maybe 25 minutes, but they were the longest 25 minutes I’d ever experienced. I figured I was going to be in so much trouble – maybe kicked out, lose my chance for a plot. My stomach was tying itself in knots the entire way. On the sensors it looked like someone had disturbed an ant hill with all the shuttles hurtling back and forth between Jupiter Station and Outpost 92. Could see a couple of Starfleet ships there, too. Big ones.

I landed the shuttle and found my platoon commander. I expected him to lay into me, but he looked just as confused and terrified. We had *no idea* what was going on and neither did anyone else it seemed! Eventually, a Starfleet officer showed up, a Captain Jellico, who was in charge of liaising between the SDL and Starfleet. I’d been busy with the surveys and I hadn’t been keeping up with the news so this was the first I heard about the Borg. It all sounded so far-fetched, but it was pretty clear this guy wasn’t the joking sort. Starfleet had engaged the Borg and it had not gone well he said – which might go down as one of the greatest understatements of all time! Starfleet was now mustering a fleet out in the Oort cloud, but we were being activated to help to hold the line and to provide support until they could move the big ships into position.

That was a *joke*! Most of our equipment was ancient! Some even had MACO insignia on them – from the 22nd century! Sure we kept them flying and well serviced, but the same way the CAF keeps things like that old B-52 going, mostly for displays and stuff. It’s not meant for combat! He smiled when someone pointed this out to him and told us he had some new toys for us.

Reason we’d been sent to 92 was Starfleet had been building a new range of small, agile attack craft to be used for system defense: they called them the *Shri-Tals*. I heard later that these were planned to be sent to the Cardassian border for the colonies there, maybe Bajor, but I don’t know about that. Probably

for the best they never did, given how they performed.

Don't get me wrong, the specs on these things were unsurpassed: multi-quad impulse manifolds, phaser cannons, and micro torpedo launchers. These things could have given an ole *Hurley*-class ship a real run for its money. They had teeth and we only had three days to learn how to use them. It was pretty intense, but also a lot of fun; these things moved like you wouldn't believe. I've flown *Peregrines* since and they had nothing on these. By the time we were dispersed around the system I figured sure, I could take on the Borg, the Klingons, the Romulans, pretty much anyone who came calling. We were ready and we were going to kick ass!

My platoon was deployed to Triton. The Borg came into the system and bypassed us completely, heading directly for Saturn. We scrambled to get out there, but as we were launching we got the feeds in from the Mars Defense Perimeter. We saw one of the flights form up and move in to attack. There were three ships, the Borg fired three shots, and then there were no more ships. Poof! Just like that they were gone. We were pretty shook up by that, but we were still going to go do what we needed to do. The call came in from Jellico to stand down, saying there wasn't any point in throwing the rest of our lives away given how ineffective the *Shri-Tals* had proven to be. He thanked us and said we should head out of the system at best speed.

I wasn't having that – we were here to hold the line no matter what. *Nothing* was going to get through. The rest of the platoon felt the same. We punched it to full impulse and started after them when another Starfleet ship appeared. It absolutely dwarfed the ships we'd seen earlier, but compared to the Borg it was tiny. It was the *Enterprise*, and it left us in its proverbial dust. We kept on after them as fast as we could, but by the time we were close enough to reacquire visuals, it was too late. It was over.

DR. LEWIS ZIMMERMAN

JUPITER STATION, JUPITER ORBIT

Stardate 47913.2 – 2370

Since its commissioning in the 22nd century, Jupiter Research Station (or Jupiter Station) has been one of the foremost scientific research outposts within the Federation and houses some of the greatest scientific minds in Starfleet. Among the many innovations to come from the station in recent years are the advances in holographic technology; integration that has moved beyond simple interface and communication tools to become the single most popular form of entertainment in the Alpha Quadrant. I am here to speak to Dr. Lewis Zimmerman, the Director of Holographic Imaging and Programming on the station. I am led into the lab on the station by his assistant Hayley and find him having an animated discussion about ethics with a holographic version of himself. As I enter he deactivates the hologram, tells the computer to recalibrate the hologram's ethical subroutines, and invites me to sit on a chair. I remove the pile of PADDs and we begin my interview.

The first I knew about this “invasion” was when *someone* redirected power from my lab. When I stepped out of the lab I found the station at Red Alert and everyone in an absolute panic. I had disconnected the lab from the station's intercom and alert systems because it kept interrupting my research, which was at a very delicate phase – can you imagine how difficult it is to try and compile holographic matrix that is adaptive and able to run autonomously from the main holographic system buffer? Not to mention, integrating the machine learning and algorithmic diagnostic subroutines!? I couldn't continue to be interrupted every five minutes with “Ensign Smith report to deck nine” or “Lieutenant Burke to the shuttlebay.” This is extremely delicate work and my focus needed to be absolute! So, I isolated the lab from the rest of the station, and as it turned out inadvertently missed the whole Borg invasion...thing.

Typically, my research assistant Felix was nowhere to be seen so I tried to find someone to tell me what was going on: why the station was at Red Alert and why the lab was powered down. But it was like a ghost station. The computer told me that Commander Clarke was in operations, but my attempts to communicate were not getting through. Seems the comm system was also down, so I took it upon myself to go and find out what was happening. I

was storming down the corridor towards the turbolift when I heard something coming from the cafe. I stuck my head through the door to find a couple of research technicians weeping and holding each other. I was *quite* taken aback.

I don't do terribly well with...you know...people.

I considered if I should say something. I didn't think they were from the holoprogramming staff, so I decided they weren't my responsibility – in any case, I needed to get power back to the lab. I continued to operations, but the thought of seeing them crying like that stuck with me. Maybe the Red Alert was serious? Maybe there was something wrong with the reactors? Had there been an evacuation? No, I dismissed that quite quickly. I am the foremost holoprogrammer in the Federation – I dare say the quadrant. If the station was to be evacuated someone would have come to get me and ensure my research was secured, so it must be something else.

When I got to operations it was deserted. I wasn't worried at that point, more *frustrated* and increasingly irritated. I felt like there was a game of hide and seek going on and it was keeping me from my work at a critical time. I moved around to the observation gallery and that's where I found the commander and most of the command staff: staring out through the high windows.

I came up to the commander and asked him what was going on. He told me they wanted to see if they could catch a glimpse of it. When I asked "of what?" he looked at me blankly with a sort of resigned expression on his face. "The Borg," he said, as if that would make everything plain.

"What the hell is a Borg?" I demanded, "and what did they have to do with the lab losing power!?"

He gave a peculiar tilt of his head, similar to what I've seen that tin can android do when trying to do basic arithmetic. "The Borg...have you been living under a rock all week?"

I took a moment and asked him the stardate. As it happens, it had been closer to 10 days and I was suddenly very aware that I had not shaved in all that time nor been near a sonic shower. I became extremely uncomfortable and was about to go back to my quarters and shower before doing anything else when someone shouted out "there!"

Everyone gazed up and followed some extended fingers out to what they were looking at in space. It was the thing of nightmares. A ship more massive than the station we were on, black against black and cubic in shape, but its surface a mess of exposed pipes and structures. I found myself backing away from the window against the wall. Some of the people there broke down in tears, some held onto each other. "What is that?" I managed to stammer. "Where is Starfleet!?"

Someone – I think from the terraforming sciences team – shouted, "They left us, Starfleet just turned tail and ran away!"

I found that hard to believe, they'd *always* protected the Federation, or at the very least Earth. And what about *me*! They wouldn't just leave the system without taking their best and brightest! I just stared at the cube as it grew bigger and bigger, *impossibly big*. It seemed to be coming for me personally and I felt my knees turn to jelly but it didn't stop.

It just hurtled past us as if we weren't even there.

The people stared out of the windows for a little longer but then started to disperse. I grabbed Commander Clarke's arm and asked him what was going on, where was Starfleet. He told me that the Borg had destroyed a massive fleet at Wolf 359 and Starfleet were regrouping, but he did not know the specifics. All he could tell me was right now there were no ships available to evacuate the station and if there was anyone important to me on Earth, I should call them now.

He walked away in something of a daze and I was left there in the observation gallery with Jupiter just hanging above me, now painfully aware of my own odor. I had to go and clean myself up. As I headed back to my quarters I tried to think if there was anyone I wanted to contact. For the past 15 years my work had been everything – a chance to change the Federation, to maybe even take us towards the singularity, immortality itself! But I realized that I had been so consumed that I was *alone*. There was no one for me to call on Earth, or anywhere. I found that rather depressing.

After cleaning myself up I headed back to the lab – it seemed like there was nowhere else for me to go – and found my assistant Felix there tapping away on a console. Turns out the power cut was unrelated to the Red Alert or the Borg. After running the holoemitters and generation matrices for two weeks straight

the system had simply shut down due to thermal issues; the computer's audible warnings had been disconnected along with the rest of the comms. Felix was working to find a way to upgrade the field grid to allow continuous operation.

He was a great assistant: dedicated, creative, he really saw the potential for holographic technology beyond just interfaces and linear holonovels. I think he really grasped the potential for holograms to become more than just projections of photons. He reminded me a lot of myself when I was younger – so focused on our work. The last thing I wanted right then was for him to end up like me...so I fired him. Such a waste, last I heard all he is doing now is writing holonovels, although they are in extremely high demand. I must see about getting one.

With him gone I was alone again, but I decided I didn't have to be if I didn't want to be. That was when I started working on Hayley.

♦ **Wait – she's a hologram?**

I know, *impressive* isn't she? Just wait until you see my next project. My new EMHs are going to be installed throughout the fleet. In time, I believe they will be able to replace entire crews on starships. Let's see the Borg try and assimilate a bunch of photons!

WILLIAM T. RIKER

STARFLEET HEADQUARTERS, SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH

Stardate 44012.3 – 2367



No, it wasn't sanctioned by Starfleet. There wasn't time and after passing through the remains of the fleet and with the chaos and confusion we were monitoring over subspace, I'm not even sure who could have authorized it.

We'd been on the back foot since the Borg had entered Federation space and now with the captain absorbed into their collective, they had access to all of his experience and knowledge. With that kind of an advantage they were going to be nigh unstoppable. Picard had literally written the book on how to be a Starfleet captain in the 24th century. We studied his career and logs from the *Stargazer* at the academy: it is drilled into us that if you want to be the best, to be a captain in Starfleet then you needed to be Jean-Luc Picard.

There was another problem. The cube still had a significant head start and we had no idea exactly where they were or how we could get them to stop for us to enact the plan. We picked up that the USS *Excalibur* was shadowing the cube, so we had an idea of where the Borg were. They were traveling at a relatively leisurely warp 7 so we would be able to catch them. But we needed them to *stop*.

I spoke directly to Captain kaMpande on the *Excalibur*. He relayed some of what he had heard about the battle at Wolf 359 – it was an absolute rout and Starfleet should never have allowed it to happen, they knew the fleet would have been no match for the Borg, they left them to be slaughtered!

[He pauses and takes a breath.]

Sorry, it's still very raw – especially knowing we had to leave people behind. The Borg were effectively home free so I had to ask kaMpande to do something without orders from Starfleet. I needed him to slow the cube down. To his credit, he listened to our plan and reasoning, but I guess having already seen how little effect a fleet of 40 starships had...he knew that we

weren't going to win this through conventional means. He promised to harass the Borg and to buy us our time.

I don't know exactly how he did it, but he managed it. At a horrible cost: *Excalibur* was picked up adrift several days after, and over half the crew were dead or taken by the Borg including kaMpande. It's a testament to the captain and his crew that when the Borg picked us up on sensors they immediately slowed to impulse and took on a defensive posture. They no longer were content to just ignore us – they considered us a threat. I credit that to Captain kaMpande and the crew of *Excalibur*.

We had refined our plan and felt confident we knew how to play to the Borg's weaknesses. They have an innate ability to adapt, but seem unable to anticipate that in their adversaries. Someone told me that if you are facing someone who wrote the book on how to fight – then it's time for a new book.

I saw two possibilities if we were going to defeat the Borg: we either recovered the captain and found a way to undo what the Borg had done to him, or we killed him and denied the Borg Locutus. I presented these options to Worf and Data; there was no one else I could trust with a mission such as this. Our first goal was to try and retrieve the captain, but if that was not possible, if they had to...to carry out the mission they would do so without hesitation. We had devised a plan to get to Locutus and bring him back to the ship.

WOLF, SON OF MOGH

USS *ENTERPRISE*, DETRIAN SYSTEM

Stardate: 46424.1 – 2369



My failure to protect the captain and prevent his capture weighed heavily on my mind. It was a stain on my honor – one which I feared I would never be able to expunge. Passing through the corpses of starships left in the Borg's wake at Wolf 359 only deepened my conviction that I had failed in my duty. I made a silent prayer to Kahless and swore that I would avenge the fallen.

The mood on the ship was grim. Very few of my fellow officers had ever had to stare death in the face and accept the inevitability of their mortality before that day. I think it is safe to say that it affected everyone. We were all robbed of the fiction that we were beyond a time where Starfleet and the citizens of the Federation might be called upon to sacrifice for the whole.

My prayer was answered when Captain Riker approached myself and Commander Data with a daring proposition: the Borg had taken Captain Picard from us, now we would take Locutus from the Borg. We were to devise a plan to rescue the captain or to ensure he had an honorable death.

It would not be easy. There were many variables we had to overcome, not the least of which were the formidable defenses of the Borg ship and the significant head start the Borg had on the *Enterprise* as they plunged deeper in the heart of the Federation. Fortunately, the sacrifice of the *Excalibur* brought us the time we needed to enact our plan.

The Borg are a formidable foe and are able to adapt rapidly, meaning we could no longer transport directly onto the Borg ship. In anticipation of the challenge, Commander Data and myself took a shuttle while Captain Riker and Commander Shelby diverted the Borg's attention – allowing our *d'k tahg* to slip past their guard and into their very heart.

Once we had positioned the shuttle inside the cube's dampening field, we could transport directly to the coordinates where *Enterprise* had traced Locutus's transmissions. Instantly, we were set upon by his guards. The

Borg were no longer content to allow us free access to roam their ships, but immediately recognized us as a threat – as well they should. Commander Data and I quickly dispatched the guards until only Locutus himself remained. I had to remind myself that even though this Borg wore the face of Captain Picard it was *not* him. I could not afford to show any weakness if we were to succeed in our mission.

I threw myself directly at Locutus as he raised his Borg limb and attempted to infect me with the poison that had taken Picard. I held the arm away as we grappled – the strength the Borg had managed to infuse into the captain far greater than any I have seen exhibited by any Human before. We struggled for a time and I locked eyes with the thing that was Locutus: I had to know if the captain remained within. If there was any sign of the man who had seen the worth in having the only Klingon in Starfleet to serve aboard its flagship, who had been my *Cha'Dich* before the Klingon High Council – a man for whom I would gladly have given my life. I needed to know if any of that man remained in the twisted machine before me.

I stared into cold gray eyes completely devoid of the vitality I had known in Captain Picard; none of the nobility, the wisdom, the honor remained. Captain Riker has told us his hope was that the captain could be returned to the ship, but if that was not possible we were to ensure that he would no longer be in thrall to the Borg. As head of security, I could not let this thing on the *Enterprise* if there was a chance it would cause more harm. Captain Picard would never have forgiven me. With my decision made, I readied myself to snap its neck and to send the captain to *Sto-Vo-Kor*. But then I caught a flash in its eyes and for just the briefest of moments I saw Captain Picard.

I think he was trying to thank me, to tell me that it was alright, and to free him from this bondage. But now I could not. I knew the captain still lived, trapped within his own flesh and it was our duty to free him from the Borg and bring him back to the *Enterprise*.

I fought with Locutus long enough for Commander Data to affix a subneural damper, rendering him unconscious. The three of us transported back to the shuttlecraft. The Borg, however, were still eager to deny us our prize. The Borg attacked the shuttle, but once we were clear of the cube's influence, *Enterprise* beamed us back aboard to safety. The Borg destroyed our shuttlecraft, but we were victorious. We had taken Locutus from the Borg, and now we would free the captain from Locutus.

MILES O'BRIEN

USS ENTERPRISE, EN ROUTE TO BAJOR

Stardate 46378.2 – 2369

Miles Edward O'Brien is an exemplar of the unsung heroes of Starfleet: the non-commissioned officers. With competition for the limited slots at the academy being so fierce, many elect to join as non-coms. They form the bedrock upon which the organization operates with beings from all over the Federation – and even some from outside – taking the opportunity to serve the Federation and to explore the galaxy in a way that many citizens cannot begin to imagine. O'Brien is known as a "Plank Owner" since he has served on the USS Enterprise since its launch in 2363. However, as I sit down to conduct my interview we are in transit to the Bajor System, where he will assume the role of chief of operations on the former Cardassian space station Terok Nor, now designated as Deep Space Nine.

To be frank, officers have never been particularly good at keeping the rest of the crew informed as to the goings on around the ship – especially when we're on duty. I don't even have any windows down in the transporter room, and often don't have any idea where I'll be beaming an away team until the information packet comes through. Most of the time, half the bridge crew would just walk in and give me a bunch of coordinates.

Don't get me wrong – I'm not complaining. I used to do bridge duty, so I understand they have a lot going on. But my point is that at times, especially when time is critical and stakes are high, we don't always have the big picture to really know what's going on.

That week had been very bad, possibly the darkest time we'd had on *Enterprise* since we lost Lieutenant Yar. We were told that the Borg had taken Captain Picard, but that was about all we knew for certain. As you might expect the lower deck scuttlebutt was in full swing; I'd heard just about everything from he had been killed protecting Commander Riker to he was leading a covert operation to destroy the Borg from the inside. I don't think anyone really had a handle on just how dire the situation was nor the horror of the reality.

After that, it felt like the entire ship was in a state of shock. It didn't help that the ship just felt so empty without the civilians and non-essential personnel; this is a big ship and I didn't get too many visitors to the transporter

room at the best of times. Being alone there for an entire shift...there were only so many times I could realign the heisenberg compensators and flush out the biofilters. Most folk were throwing themselves into their work, but there really wasn't anything for me to do. Which left me alone to think, and after hearing about what happened at Wolf 359, well – I was grateful for the lack of windows in the transporter room. I've seen enough death before and didn't need to see that. But still you could feel the weight of it. I started having some nasty flashbacks to my time on the *Rutledge*. I couldn't even go and talk to my fiancée since she had been evacuated.

It was shortly after we'd left the Wolf 359 System and resumed pursuit that I was called up to the observation lounge for a meeting with Captain Riker, Commander Data, and Lieutenant Worf. They laid out their plan to try and retrieve Captain Picard. This was the first time they officially told me what the situation was. I had already heard that the captain had been turned into a Borg, but I didn't really understand what they meant – had he joined them? Was he now wearing a black jumpsuit? I can understand why Captain Riker wanted to control the news as much as possible, but the only thing faster than warp 10 on a starship is gossip. Naturally, we all knew something, but now I was given my first look at what the Borg had done to Captain Picard. I watched a playback of the transmission from the Borg cube when we had fired the deflector – I nearly lost my lunch. It looked like something from those old 20th century horror vids. I think this was the first time I can remember that the scuttlebutt was *less* horrifying than the reality.

Their plan was – to put it mildly – *nuts*. To try and sneak onto the Borg ship and snatch him away from the center of the hive. I've seen Worf and Data do some pretty incredible things, but I had no idea how they would pull this off. Still, it gave me something to work on, to help focus the mind and distract me from the inevitable doom heading towards Earth. It felt damn good to be doing something rather than just wait for the inevitable.

We anticipated that the Borg would have likely adjusted their electromagnetic fields to inhibit our transporters so Worf and Data took a shuttle to pass within the field and transport onto the cube. It was a tense few minutes while they were out of communication, but we soon got the signal back that they had retrieved the captain and were heading back. Captain Riker told

me to immediately beam them aboard. I found myself face-to-face with what the Borg had done to Captain Picard. It was far worse than anything I could have possibly imagined – the image on the viewscreen was *nothing* compared to seeing it firsthand.

We now had another problem of trying to keep this from the rest of the crew; only the senior staff, the bridge crew, and Dr. Crusher's staff had been briefed about the operation. I asked Commander Data why the secrecy once the captain had been brought into sickbay. He said that Captain Riker was concerned about the morale of the crew if they knew Captain Picard was on the ship and in the event of our failure to free him from the Borg we might have to kill him. He said it so matter of factly it left me stunned, but he was right. Captain Picard really was the beating heart of the ship and we'd already lost him once – to lose him a second time would have destroyed us.

I thought that was my part done and went back to the transporter room. Frankly, I was glad to be alone this time. The last thing I needed was a load of ensigns trying to get gossip out of me, but just before the end of my shift I was called to one of the science labs. Commander Data explained that the Borg's link between the captain and the Borg was active through a subspace window similar to what we use with the transporter – only at far greater ranges than anything we could achieve. I mean, theoretically, there is no limit to the range of the transporters, but we get into the messy nature of spacetime and pattern degradation. The Borg used this to establish their collective link and Commander Data wanted me there to monitor his positronic systems as he attempted to infiltrate it. Really, this was work more suited to Commander La Forge, but the *Enterprise* at this point was mostly being held together by spit and bootlaces and he was needed in engineering. So, given I was already "in the know," I took up a station and came face-to-face once again with Locutus of Borg.

If anything, he was even more terrifying in this dormant state. Stripped of his carapace armor he seemed even less Human, the implants throughout his body exposed. I tried to focus on the console and not to look at what the Borg had done to him, but in many ways that made it worse. Knowing he was there behind me, and knowing that the Borg had entered the Sol System and we were now just minutes away from Earth – my guts were tied in absolute knots.

My Da and I used to watch vids when I was a kid, and his favorites were always those with heroic last stands: the Charge of the Light Brigade, Rorke's Drift,

the Alamo – that sorta thing. I found myself thinking back to those. The thing about all of those stories though is they often knew it was a hopeless situation, but they still stuck with it and did their duty – not for their king or country or anything like that – they did it for the guys there with them, the ones standing shoulder to shoulder with them. I remember looking around at Commander Data, Dr. Crusher, Counselor Troi, and all the others there on the *Enterprise* and I felt a real sense of peace. Like this might well be our last stand, but I was willing to do it because of those standing next to me. It didn't feel quite as hopeless.

BOOTHBY

STARFLEET ACADEMY, EARTH

Stardate 47601.3 – 2370



As I recall, it was a Tuesday. The morning fog that had settled in over the bay at dawn had burned off and the sun was shining: a beautiful winter morning. The sky was an amazing sapphire blue, it almost reminded me of home, just lacking something...maybe a little violet.

I got up the same as always and headed to the academy. By this point the penny had well and truly dropped. I think most of the brass were starting to realize just how deep in the fertilizer they were, but it was already too late. Although – to be fair to them – I don't think there was anything they could have done against the Borg.

There was no panic or unrest in the streets. Folk still didn't really understand what was going on: they knew there was a ship heading to Earth and Starfleet had suffered a loss, but there was still this unshakable belief in the power of Starfleet. They wouldn't let anything bad happen to Earth – most of the news was focused on the president's decision to leave! Calling it a major overreaction and failure of leadership – reckon that's what cost her in '68. Doesn't matter that it was the right thing to do or not, but that's how it was seen.

When I got to the academy, classes were suspended. Most of the instructors had been reactivated and sent out into the system to oversee SDL forces, and some of the older cadets were given provisional commissions to acting ensigns and deployed into the fleet, but the rest were largely left to their own devices. Those from Earth went home, but the others had nowhere to go. They came to the academy, waiting to see if they would be called up or given assignments.

When I arrived there was maybe half a dozen cadets sat over there by the willow all kinds of distraught. Like I said, the problem with a lack of real

information is the rumors run rampant and these kids were pretty convinced these aliens were coming to destroy the planet. The worst part was I knew they were right. But last thing I was going to do is let them fall down into a well of despair. Nothing helps to focus the mind like a little hard work, and *nothing* can motivate hard work from a cadet better than a cantankerous old man who caught cadets walking on his grass!

[There is the slightest hint of a smile and he places another flower into the soil.]

So, I got them working the gardens. It was time to get the Andorian ice orchids planted and the soil in winter can get like duranium, so we headed out and started to get the flower beds prepped. Soon we had a few more cadets show up, then a few more. By lunch time I think there must have been close to 50, all focused on getting the soil ready and helping to move the orchids from the stasis pods to the flower beds. Work like that helps to calm the mind and to connect you with the world around you – why even I was almost able to forget about what was about to arrive, at least until we heard the siren coming from the city. Then the Red Alert klaxon started to ring out, calling everyone to head to the shelters.

I thanked the cadets and told them to get going and to report to their shelters. As they were leaving I heard one of them suddenly call out and look up. We could see it there, faint and hazy in the afternoon sky, this small black cube just hanging there. it was like a bruise on that azure sky. The cadets started to panic, some ran off towards the shelter, a couple were crying. I could feel my hearts thundering in my ears as I stared up at it – I felt paralyzed with fear.

Then the darndest thing. A young cadet came back and got back to planting the orchids. I said, “Son, what are you doing? You need to get to the shelter.” But he said the orchids were out of the stasis pods now, and they needed to get planted or they would die. Then another cadet came back and started helping and another – damn him if I didn’t have to turn away to hide the tears that were coming now. I managed to compose myself and yelled they were doing it wrong, then got down and showed them how to do it properly.

People talk about Starfleet and they will cite great discoveries and feats of exploration or bravery in battle as being what Starfleet is all about, but if you ask me... that kid getting down to plant ice orchids in the face of our imminent extinction? That is what makes Starfleet special.

[He walks over to a nearby rose bush and cuts off a rather stunning blossom.]

Here, take this one for the road.

♦ Oh no, I couldn't possibly.

Kid, you should know by now, I'm very particular about who I give these roses to. Now get going – I've got work to do.

[He lifts his head slightly in what might have been a nod of acknowledgement, then collects his tools into the wheelbarrow and heads back off down the path and out of sight.]



DATA

Stardate 46242.2 – 2369

USS ENTERPRISE, QUALOR SYSTEM



The retrieval of Captain Picard afforded me our first opportunity to study a Borg drone and their technology. Although clearly identifiable as Captain Picard, the being we brought back from the Borg ship was different – even at the cellular level. In our previous encounters with the Borg, once a drone had been disconnected from the collective, the drone had self-destructed which had precluded any study of the Borg or their technology. I surmise this is done to limit the opportunities for a species to obtain the knowledge necessary to mount a credible defense.

With the being calling itself Locutus, this was our first opportunity to compare the extent of the Borg's assimilation progress on a being for which we had a baseline. In many ways, the Borg shared more in common with myself than with the organic beings on the ship.

Using multimodal reflection sorting, I was able to identify a complex series of subspace signals between Captain Picard and the Borg ship. The signals interacted across a subspace domain similar to that of a transporter beam. I hypothesized that these frequencies might form the basis of the Borg's collective consciousness and hold the key to accessing information on the Borg, which could lead to a tactical advantage we could use to prevent the Borg from completing their stated objective of assimilating Earth.

At Counselor Troi's suggestion, we initially attempted to communicate with the Borg directly through Locutus in his stated role as liaison between the Borg and the Federation. However, it quickly became apparent there could be no substantive dialogue with the collective. We elected to pursue other means to stop the Borg's advance and attempted to bypass the Borg's control to communicate with the captain directly.

We had Locutus brought to the science lab and I established a connection

between my positronic matrix and his neural net pathways. My hope was that with the aid of Chief O'Brien we would be able to piggyback the signal through the transporter buffers and allow me access to the Borg's core network – its collective consciousness, in effect.

♦ What was the collective like?

It...is very hard to describe without a common frame of reference. While my positronic neural net mimics many of the functions of your brains and nervous system, I do not perceive the world around me in the abstract as I understand many organisms do.

♦ I'm sorry, I don't understand?

An analogy that I have found useful is to try and describe the color red to an Aenar. I cannot accurately describe my perceptions of the Borg collective since I do not perceive the universe in the same way as you. I will, however, attempt to extrapolate my perceptions in such a way that they will make sense.

The Borg's consciousness operates over three distinct layers. The first consists mostly of lower level autonomic functions, signal identifiers, and authentication keys that allow the signals to interface with the Borg technology and which grant access to the later layers. The second contains information relating to the integrity of the collective and any adaptations which the Borg wish to implement. In effect, this layer contains the Borg's firmware cloud. After the Borg have assimilated some technology or adapted to a particular weapon, this layer will contain the information for the Borg's hardware to integrate that change, increasing the efficiency and survivability of the individual drones.

The final layer is the Borg's collective consciousness itself.

The experience was quite unlike anything I had ever encountered. I have interfaced with a myriad of computers during my existence and in these instances there are a series of handshake protocols exchanged before access to the system is granted. I am able to request access to the system and the system then provides the relevant data: it is a very ordered and logical exchange.

With the Borg collective it was quite different. It perceived my presence as that of Locutus but at the same time was distrustful. It could identify that

something was outside of its baseline expectations for how Locutus was perceived within the collective.

The level of neural activity increased exponentially as the Borg attempted to quantify my presence. Dr. Crusher reported that the captain experienced a significant increase of activity in his premotor cortex and hypothalamus. His heartbeat also accelerated rapidly. There was a large amount of information for me to process, but I failed to identify a system reset and activation query which resulted in Locutus regaining consciousness. He attempted to forcibly remove himself from the lab. I arrested this attempt by destroying the prosthesis the Borg had grafted onto the captain's right arm.

When Dr. Crusher detected increased neural activity in the prefrontal and parietal lobes, Counselor Troi used her empathic abilities to confirm the presence of the captain. He reached for my arm and locked eyes with me – not Locutus, but Captain Picard himself.

I had been unsuccessful in bypassing the Borg's control of the captain, nor had I made any significant inroads in understanding their mainframe, so this connection had entirely come from the captain himself. I cannot attest to how he was able to achieve it, although it is significant to note that at the exact moment the Borg ceased their approach to Earth.

At Captain Riker's suggestion I attempted to access the Borg's root network to disable their weapons systems. However, I was unsuccessful in this attempt. I then tried to command the Borg to disable their power systems, but these were protected by additional layers of security. It was the suggestion of sleep from Captain Picard which offered a potential alternative: accessing the Borg's regenerative subroutines and commanding the ship to enter a regenerative state. This attempt succeeded, but it did have the unfortunate side effect of causing a feedback loop with the Borg's power distribution network, ultimately resulting in the destruction of the cube. With its destruction, the Borg apparently lost their connection to Captain Picard and he reasserted control over his body. Dr. Crusher was able to remove the majority of the Borg implants through a series of surgeries.

DR. KATHERINE PULASKI

STARFLEET MEDICAL, SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH

Stardate 46695.7 – 2369



I'd been on *Enterprise* at J-25, making me pretty much the only person on Earth with direct experience with the Borg. So, I'd been whisked from one admiral to the next and had to endure more briefings in a week than in my entire career to that point. All just to tell them what they already knew: we didn't know anything. Certainly nothing that could help to understand or defeat the Borg.

It was grim in Starfleet after 359 – no one could remember anything quite like it. And it punctured that comfortable bubble we liked to wrap ourselves in. The lie that there wasn't anything that we couldn't solve with enough time and technology. Well, both seemed to be in short supply at that moment. It also felt like we were out of hope. Reading the reports about what had happened to Captain Picard, I did not fancy our chances.

The powers that be seemed to have no real idea of exactly what they should do. I heard a fleet of almost 200 ships was being assembled to intercept the Borg near Alpha Centauri, then they were being reassigned and told to scatter, then recalled to Earth to mount some sort of ambush. They had no clue what to do. They were just throwing shit at the wall to see what would stick as my grandmother would say. In medical, we were trying to develop some sort of treatment for what had happened to Picard in the hope that it might be possible to retrieve him. Once we received scans from Dr. Crusher, our mission didn't get any easier. Nanoprobes are nasty business at the best of times, which is why they are so heavily regulated – we don't need a repeat of the Drexler system disaster¹.

1 An accident at a research facility resulted in a strain of molecular nanobots replicating out of control, eventually consuming all biomass on the planet. The entire system is today subject to a level one quarantine to prevent the nanomachines escaping the system

The one thing we had going for us was how inefficient the Borg seemed to be at distributing their nanoprobes. If they were to beam a cloud of them onto a ship or planet there would be no defense whatsoever. Now, I'm not about to go giving them tips on how to be more efficient – and I suspect there must be a reason – but that was pretty much the only good news we had right then.

When the Borg entered the system that was it as far as our efforts went. Starfleet enacted its "V'ger Protocols." Ha – what a joke! I tried to see as many of my staff were transferred to ships and away from the major population centers, I made sure all Starfleet Medical facilities on Earth were equipped with stasis generators. My hope was that if anyone came into contact with some Borg tech the stasis field would at least buy us some time to develop countermeasures. I composed a message to the admiralty telling them in no uncertain terms what I thought of their leadership.

With that done, I headed out of Starfleet Medical and made my way down to the spaceport. My dislike of transporters is somewhat legendary. One of the conditions for me taking on the role of CMO was I was to always have a Type-7 shuttlecraft available. Over the past weeks it had racked up a fair few miles. My pilot Jules was still there despite the rest of the shuttles and pilots having been reassigned in preparation for the approaching disaster. Initially, the kid made me suspicious – I thought he was only there to spy on me, to report back to command what I got up to, but I'd grown rather fond of him. I could see he was eager to do something. The sitting idle was gnawing at him while all his friends were out preparing to fight the good fight. I told him I just needed a lift to Alaska to go and see a friend, and then he could take the shuttle and report to command if he wanted. Or if he had any sense could take the shuttle and head to Luna or Mars. I knew he would head straight to command, but that's the impetuosity of youth for you.

He dropped me near a small cabin in Denali Park. I could see smoke coming from the chimney so I knew he was home. Jules was on the ground just long enough for me to get out of the hatch before he gunned the engines and vanished out beyond the horizon. The snow on the ground was crisp and white, but I could see footprints leading up to the cabin so I headed towards it.

I rapped on the door and felt a sudden rush of excitement – even a little childish glee – when he opened the door with a shocked look on his face. Kyle

Riker and I had reconnected a couple of years earlier on the *Enterprise* and messaged pretty regularly, but we had pointedly avoided running into each other. He works as a civilian strategic attaché to Starfleet so I didn't think he would know as much as I did. If he suspected things were going to go the same way I did, then this was where he would be. After the initial shock, he beamed and we shared a hug and a kiss – frankly long overdue – and he invited me in.

He had a comm array set up and was monitoring the Starfleet Command channel. The Borg ship had passed Jupiter Outpost 92 and was heading towards the Mars Defense Perimeter. He started to explain that Starfleet would likely allow the Borg to settle into orbit over Earth where the gravity well would hamper the Borg's ability to maneuver or some such. You'd have to ask him, but I wasn't interested in a tactical analysis. I had brought some – shall we say – medical supplements and offered some to him. He smiled as he took it and turned off the comm array.

We stepped outside, sat on the porch, and looked up into the sky. That far north it gets dark pretty early – you only get around four hours of daylight so before too long the stars were out. Kyle went and got a couple of large fur rugs and wrapped them around us as we sat and gazed into the night sky. We just enjoyed the tranquility and the peace.

Then all of a sudden there was a flash in the sky near the horizon. We both sat up startled and he went inside to turn on the comms unit. I just sat there and stared where the explosion had been. It had been so brief and now I couldn't see anything of it at all. I wondered if maybe I had imagined it when Kyle came bounding out of the cabin shouting, "They did it! Will did it! They *stopped the Borg!*"

I was stunned. I had made my peace with the fact that we were not going to survive, but somehow against all the odds they had stopped the Borg right on our doorstep. I should have known better than to bet against the *Enterprise*, or Will Riker. We embraced and danced around in the snow for a moment before a realization dawned on me and brought my mood crashing down. I remember he looked at me with concern. "What is it, Kate, what's wrong?" he asked me.

"They are going to want me back at medical right away, especially if they have managed to disconnect Picard from the Borg. Who knows what sort of damage the Borg inflicted before they were destroyed!"

He nodded, understanding. "Yes, I imagine so, but why do you look like someone just shot your horse?"

"Because I dismissed my shuttle pilot and the only way I'll be able to get there is the damn transporter!"

He picked me up in a great big hug and roared with laughter. He was still laughing when we got to the local transporter terminal and I swear I could still hear it as we dematerialized.

MARCO AMASOV

USS ENDEAVOUR, ARCTURUS ORBITAL

Stardate 46918.3 — 2369

My work for Admiral Holland took me far and wide across the Federation and required me to meet and interview several starship captains. 40 starships were directly involved in the Battle of Wolf 359, but many more had stories to tell from the Borg's advance on Earth. Prior to the cube's destruction, a sizable fleet of 200 starships was massed in the Sol System's Oort cloud to launch an assault to attempt to prevent the Borg from landing on Earth. One of those ships was the USS Endeavour under Captain Marco Amasov.

We meet on his ship while docked at the Arcturus Orbital. Captains often have a strong sense of loyalty to the organization and to their immediate superiors, making them unwilling to be openly critical. This can be counterproductive when attempting to discover if there had been some operational failings. By this time our interview had been ongoing for some 45 minutes.

As I said, I do not feel it is my place to comment on the thoughts of the admiralty. I'm sure they had access to far more information than we were presented on the ground and I am happy to make my official logs available to you and the commission.

◇ Captain...it's important you feel free to speak candidly. The purpose of this report is to identify deficiencies in Starfleet's response. We cannot do that if you are unwilling to speak your mind. Admiral Shaanti has promised that no one will be reprimanded for speaking to the commission.

[He lets out a sigh and sits back in his chair, for the first time losing the defensive posture he has adopted throughout the interview.]

Okay, then. It was a *shitshow*; that's the only word I can use to describe it. Command fucked up. They did not have a clue what they were doing or how to deal with the threat of the Borg. We were recalled to Earth, then sat in system as half the fleet showed up, causing STC to become so utterly overwhelmed that the liner *Elysium* collided with a bulk transport ship. God knows how many lives were lost there, only to be told the fleet was to be scattered throughout the Federation. Then, once we had started out for Risa we heard that a task

force of 40 ships was massing for Wolf 359. Just *40 starships*! Do you know how many ships had been in Sol prior to that? Close to 500 but they sent just 40.

Then we were told we were to reinforce the task force. We were to rendezvous with an additional 80 starships which would head to Wolf 359. But then those orders were rescinded and we were ordered back to Earth to prepare to engage the Borg if they were able to defeat the force at 359...which they did. Handily. What were they thinking sending just 40 starships up against them – and mostly the dregs of the fleet at that!

If the situation wasn't so utterly dire I think I'd have resigned in disgust right there and then. At least now we knew the Borg were coming, we had a sense of what they were capable of and command was beginning to get its head in the game. 200 starships massed around the system, mostly in the Oort cloud. The idea was to wait until the Borg had entered Earth orbit and then to attack while the Borg's ability to maneuver would be hampered by Earth's gravity well. The hope was if we could throw enough ships at the Borg we would be able to cripple them, but we'd seen what they had done at Wolf 359. Everyone had known someone there and to the best of our knowledge there were no survivors. We spent the next 48 hours preparing our ships for battle and ourselves for death.

I don't mean to sound overly dramatic, but we didn't think we were getting out of that alive. I made sure the crew knew the facts and knew what we were facing, encouraged them to send messages home and speak with loved ones, gave couples on the ship time to be together. The reports we got from Earth were surreal though – just business as usual for the most part. Things were a little different on Mars and the colonies throughout the system. There was more of a propensity to believe bad news and to be ready to prepare for trouble, but I think that's just a holdover from when they were first established and were reliant on Earth for food, water, and air.

Finally, we started to pick up the silhouette of the Borg on long-range sensors. We knew *Enterprise* was in hot pursuit, but we were under strict orders to maintain communication silence outside of the system in case we alerted the Borg to our presence. As far as *Enterprise* knew, they were on their own.

The Borg entered the system near Jupiter and apparently no one had told the SDL to stand down and wait for the Borg to reach Earth – or maybe they

were deliberately kept in the dark to give the impression of some defense of the system. I'd like to believe that they wouldn't have thrown their lives away so brazenly, but they sent a few attack craft at the cube. The Borg destroyed them without so much as a second glance.

The atmosphere on the *Endeavour* was tense. Have you ever prepared for death? Known that you were about to walk up to the abyss and willingly step into it? I don't mean to sound fatalistic or melodramatic but, yeah, we'd all spent time coming to terms with what we were about to do. We were ready to sacrifice our lives to save the billions on Earth and throughout the system, and to avenge those we had lost at 359. There was a determination on the faces of the crew that I hadn't seen before. We weren't *looking* to die – far from it – but we were ready to spend our lives and to make the Borg pay for what they had done. We were going to draw a line in the sand right here and show the Borg just how grave an error in judgment they had made.

And then it was over, like that. [snaps fingers] The *Enterprise* pulled off a *deus ex machina* and managed to get the Borg ship to destruct right there in Earth's orbit. I was speechless – we all were. I could hear some on the internal comm cheering; people were hugging and celebrating. My conn officer broke down in tears and ops was there to comfort them.

You know the craziest thing? I felt cheated, *robbed* even.

Again, I wasn't looking to die. None of us were. But we'd worked ourselves into this mindset. We were ready to take this fight to the Borg and had come to terms with what that would cost. We were looking to avenge the task force and those we had lost, and also take out some frustrations that had been building over the past weeks. But we were denied that release. *Enterprise* saved the day and we were sat there in the Oort cloud impotently watching on as the debris from the cube settled into orbit around Earth.

Immediately command was on the horn with new orders; some ships were sent to police the Borg debris, keep any civilian ships clear, and to make sure none impacted Earth. They cleaned that all up quick sharp – you better believe it – whisked it away to who knows where. *Endeavour*, though – we were ordered to proceed at best speed to Wolf 359 and to begin rescue and salvage operations.

I would have preferred ramming the cube. It had been three days and with

all eyes on the Borg ships no one had been able to spare the ships to get to 359. Now we headed out at high warp, making the trip in around a day. What we found will haunt me to the end of my days.

The Borg *massacred* the fleet. The reports were so clean and clinical – seeing 40 starships destroyed on a PADD does not prepare you for the reality. What was done to those ships and to the people there went beyond just disabling a threat. They systematically and methodically took the ships apart piece by piece. They knew our ships could not hurt them and they still hunted down every ship and made sure they were dead before moving on to the next one. I've seen it said that the Borg are some sort of unfeeling machines that aren't driven by emotions but let me tell you that is *targshit*. I saw what they did to those ships, what they did to those people. It is my opinion that the Borg are as close to pure evil as any race we've ever encountered.

END OF CHAPTER 6

SECTOR 001 • PLANETARY ASTROMETRICS

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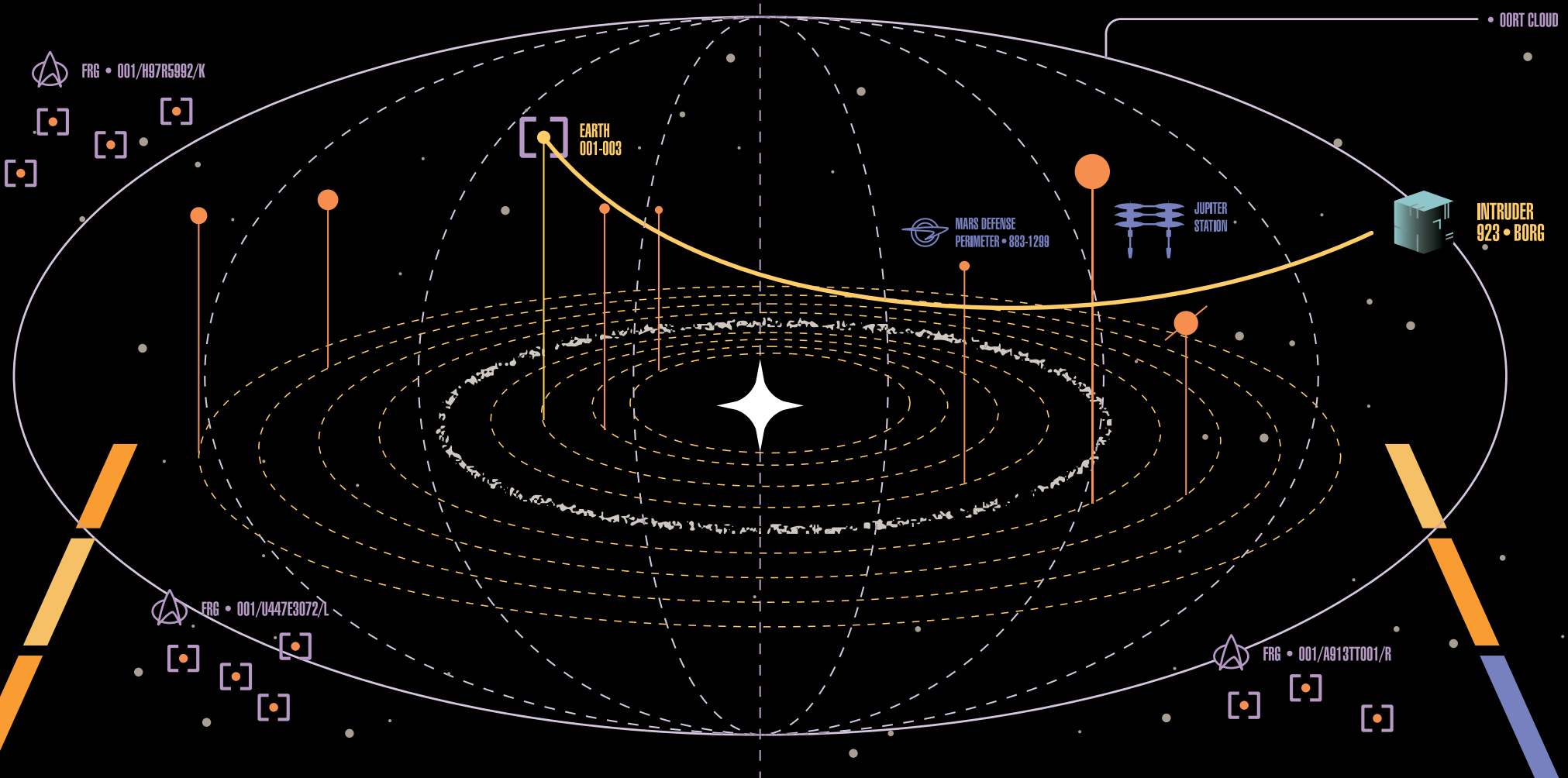
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CHAPTER 7 RECOVERY

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INTERLUDE

WOLF 359 MEMORIAL STATION

Stardate 73375.2 – 2396



It's peaceful in the Cenotaph. Not just quiet. It centers you in a way that I find hard to quantify. I'm sure it's intentional: something to do with the subtle lighting, the curve of the viewports, the way the room seems to absorb all sound and leaves you along with your thoughts as you gaze out into the void and the remains of Admiral Hanson's task force.

I walk closer to the nearest viewport. The transparent aluminum towers above me and I stare out at the ships as they hang there in the dark. It has always struck me as strange how still they are – deep down some part of my brain always expects to see them slowly tumbling end over end, but they are perfectly still. They remain in the position they were placed by SCE work crews many years ago, organized in such a way that no ship is obscured and each is clearly visible. I reach out and place my hand on the viewport. The computer projects a discreet information overlay on the ship I am looking at: the *Kyushu*.

I can make out the ship's name and registry number. There are several large impact points on the saucer by the sensor pods and one of the nacelles is missing its forward half – the other looks as though some giant beast had taken a bite out of it. I recall accompanying Ambassador MeDKav to the shrine in Nagasaki and the tale of the sword. I never conducted any interviews with survivors from the *Kyushu*; there were none. Now all that remains is the shell of their ship, and the ghost of their memories.

A few other people have now entered the Cenotaph, each lost in their own private contemplation of this place. It is perhaps archaic to say, but this place feels holy. I step away from the viewport and move to the benches positioned in the center of the walkway. From here you can take in several of the viewports

and catch glimpses of more of the ships. I see people walk in and watch as they catch their first glimpse of the ships beyond.

I see an old Vulcan walk up and place his hand tenderly on the screen between him and the void – perhaps he served on one of those ships? More likely he knew someone who did. Further along, a couple of Andorian Starfleet officers embrace as one of them weeps softly into the shoulder of the other. A third officer comes up to them and places a hand reassuringly on his back, and then embraces them both. They separate and all holding hands walk away, one of them allowing their gaze to linger on the remains of the *Shran*.

Someone sits down next to me and I feel a sudden surge of annoyance that someone would choose to disturb me when there are so many other places for them to sit. I am shocked to find it is Admiral DeSoto, gazing out at the ships.

"You know I haven't been back here since '67." He stares up out of the giant viewports. "I don't think I was actively avoiding it or anything like that, I'd just never had a reason to come back. After *Hood* was returned to service we weren't on the milk runs anymore. We found ourselves further out on the front line, and it never occurred to me to come here just to be here."

After a brief silence, I tentatively ask, "Well, you're here now. What's it like?"

His eyes never leave the vista before him and I wonder if he even heard me. I am about to ask him again when he speaks.

"I'm not foolish enough to believe that *Hood* could have made any sort of difference if we hadn't been swept away by the Borg. If we had remained in the system, then *Hood* would be out there right now; my name would likely be one more listed as KIA on the memorial wall, but you know what? There are times when I wish that was the case."

I'm a little taken aback by this. I have known Robert for close to 30 years now and we have spoken often about the battle and his service in *Hood* during the Dominion War. In all that time it had never occurred to me that he had never come back here – his story is so linked to that of the *Hood* and to Wolf 359. I really don't know what to say, and I can see there are tears welling in his eyes.

"It was a hell of a thing. I know you've been uneasy being invited out and dragged along with us on *Hood*, but this is why I wanted you to be here and to

come along with us: you gave them a voice." He gestures up towards the ships. "Starfleet would have quite happily forgotten about the people and would have tried to just quantify it as numbers and statistics, data points on a PADD. But the work you did for the commission and since has given all of us – the living and the dead – a voice. I wanted to make sure you understood how grateful we all are for what you have done for us.

"I wanted to find you to say thank you. Thank you for telling their stories. It's important. This battle, the Borg, what came after, that's important too, but that's all statistics and facts. These were lives, and when you get down to it we're all stories in the end. It's important we don't lose track of that."

I try to respond, but my mouth flaps uselessly like an Antedian's. I feel my eyes starting to sting and the vision blurs as the tears as he pulls me into an embrace. After a moment we part and he hands me a cloth to wipe my eyes. There are more people now in the Cenotaph, but each is caught up in their own private revelations. No one pays us any mind.

"I'm going to go and say goodbye before we leave. Do you want to come with me?" he asks.

"Say goodbye to who?" I ask, perplexed. I'm confused for a moment and unsure who he means. I was under the impression that everyone who had traveled out with us on *Hood* would be returning to Earth on the *Enterprise*; to the best of my knowledge no one was staying behind.

He smiles his impish grin. "To *Hood* of course."

I return his smile and we leave the Cenotaph to head back towards the dock and say our last goodbye.

JAKE SISKO

NEW ORLEANS, EARTH

Stardate 58036.4 - 2381



At first it was exciting: when we launched it was like a roller coaster. I had never been in an escape pod before and I was caught up in the adventure. The explosions looked like fireworks and ships whizzed past when I could catch a glimpse of outside – everyone was trying to catch a glimpse of the outside, but I remember the atmosphere shifting and becoming more and more subdued. I remember seeing some adults crying and a lot of them had cuts and bandages. Suddenly, I really wanted my mom but I couldn't see her anywhere around. I wanted to tell her about the ships I could see. I asked my dad "where's Mommy, I want Mommy" but when he tried to answer his voice broke and he just held me tight. She wasn't there.

I cried a lot. That's what I remember most about the escape pod. I didn't really know what was happening and it was crowded and hot and I wanted my mom. I couldn't understand why she wasn't there, so I would cry for my mom and cling to my dad. He was really quiet and withdrawn. I remember he spent a lot of time just staring out of the viewport at the debris and whenever I tried to look out of the window he would move me away and pass me to Hranok. There was a buzz of excitement at one point and everyone crowded round to stare out the window as we saw a starship enter the system and pass so tantalizingly close. It was the *Enterprise*, but I didn't know that – all I knew was it was a *Galaxy*-class and I wondered if it was the same one I had seen at Earth earlier in the week. But it didn't stop to pick us up. I don't even know if it knew we were there. It warped out of the system and the mood in the pod seemed to crash again. I cried some more.

I don't know how long it was. I think I had cried myself to sleep, but I woke up and could see we had docked with another escape pod. Outside I could see several others close by; my dad and Hranok were talking to some other people who I didn't recognize. I made my way over to where my dad was and could

see this other escape pod was filled with more people. I remember there being shapes on the ground covered in sheets. I didn't know they were bodies, but I remember Hranok picking me up and turning my head away. The man from the other escape pod put his hand on my head and said something to my dad, then he went back inside and came back holding something furry. I was mesmerized – it was a cat! I had always wanted a pet, but Mom had always said no. At least while we were living on the ships. He said that the cat was called Amos and his owner wasn't on this escape pod; would I look after him until they found his owner? The cat was orange and white and did not look happy to be carried. He leapt out of the man's arms and shot into our escape pod. I wriggled free and went off to find the cat, who was hiding under the flight console. It took me a while and no short amount of bribery with some resequenced protein from an emergency ration, but I managed to tempt him out and was able to stroke him while he ate. He had this deep purr that made me smile and it made everything seem okay.

The next day, my dad and the man from the other escape pod spoke about moving us all to one of the ships. It was really crowded in the pod, the air was getting hot and smelled really bad. They decided to try and move to one of the ships that might still have habitable space. I caught sight of the shape as the flotilla was pulled by a couple of shuttles into a large cavernous shuttlebay. It was pretty scary and I held Amos tight; he tried to pull away to go and hide under the flight console, but I held on and kept stroking him – telling him it would be okay. After a while he started to purr and settled down.

They managed to hook up one of the shuttles to the ship's systems and restored power to the shuttlebay so we were able to get out of the escape pods. Dad told me we were on the *Endurance* and we were going to camp out in the shuttlebay for a while until Starfleet could come and get us. He told me that I needed to be brave and to look after Amos, set us up with a sleeping roll by the flight control room, and found a large crate we were able to modify to keep Amos safe and to stop him getting lost.

We were there for a couple of days. More escape pods were brought into the bay and it filled with more and more people all looking weary and dejected. There were a few more kids and we were kept over by the flight control room. Amos would sit on my lap in the control room and eat from the rations while I

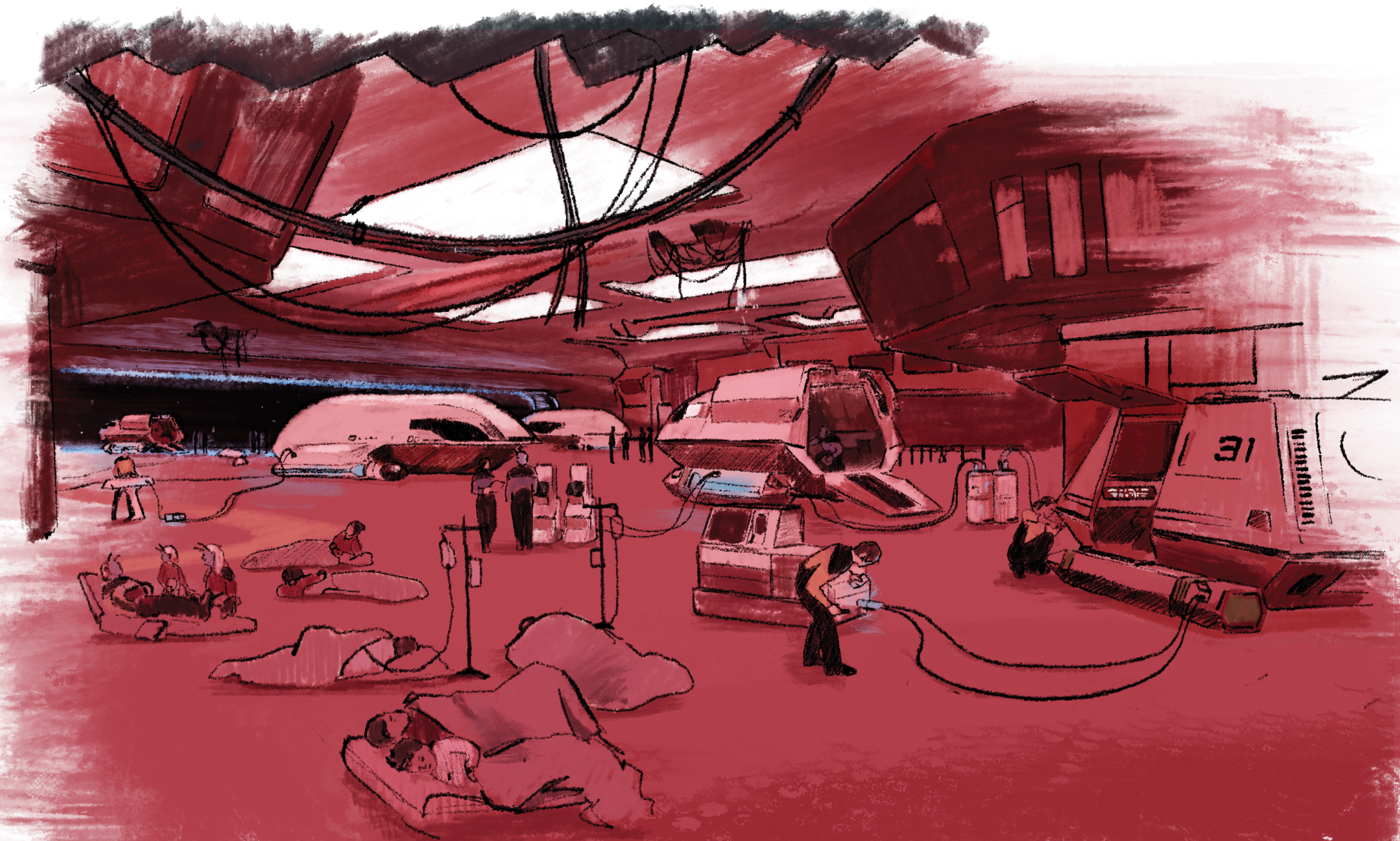
stroked him. I still really missed my mom, but having the furry thing to stroke helped to take my mind off of it.

I was woken up on the third day, and everyone was buzzing and excited. Starfleet had arrived and Dad had taken a shuttle to go and meet them and bring them to us. I was a little conflicted about leaving my camp bed, if you can believe it. We couldn't use the transporter so we were being ferried in shuttles. We were taken to a *Nebula*-class ship and can you believe I was actually disappointed it wasn't a *Galaxy*-class! When we arrived there were doctors and crew with blankets and giving out hot drinks. I was holding Amos close when suddenly someone shouted out "AMOS!" and the cat pulled out of my arms. He trotted up to a woman whose bandaged arm was in a sling. He stopped just short of her and seemed to feign disinterest before rubbing his face up against her leg.

I felt Dad's arm on my shoulder and then he picked me up. He said it was okay. He said we would be okay. That's when I noticed that he was crying. I'd never seen my dad cry before, but he just held me and was crying into my shoulder. I knew that I needed to look after him, the same way I had looked after Amos, so I hugged him close and told him it would be okay – I even patted him on his back. I think that made him cry even harder, but I knew right there and then that as long as we were together we would be okay. He carried me out of the shuttlebay and I caught a last glimpse of Amos sitting on the woman's lap. She was crying but looked so happy. It felt good. I never knew who she was and I never saw Amos again. When we got back to Earth, Dad asked if we wanted to get another cat but I always said no. I needed to look after Dad...and it wouldn't have been the same.

[Suddenly a small furry creature leaps up onto Jake's lap as if on cue. I hadn't noticed the cat previously – it paws at his legs before settling down and staring at me curiously. Jakes smiles as he pets the cat who purrs contentedly.]

This is Kaylee, she sort of came with the house. I was unsure at first, but I guess with Dad being away it makes sense. I've seen enough while living on DS9 to know the Prophets work in mysterious ways, and besides, she's good company when I'm writing.



L'GARREY

CTSU SHIPYARDS, GANYMEDE

Stardate 65053.9 – 2388



Have you ever been expecting some really bad news? You spend some time mentally preparing to receive it – really psyching yourself up because you know you're going to have to deal with this...and then it doesn't arrive? No? Huh.

We were all hunkered down on Janus VI. We had set up in the magnificent set of caverns the Horta had prepared for us, we were in constant communication with Starfleet Command in the G&G back on Earth.

After Wolf 359, the president had become focused on leading the Federation through this crisis. We had seriously misread the mood and the "We Must Negotiate" speech had gone down like a lead balloon, but the president saw this as a defining moment – a chance to show some real leadership and to shape the very future of the Federation, maybe even the entire quadrant. We were already making plans for what the next move would be and had speech writers working to craft a new address to take charge of the narrative and help rally the people of the Federation behind Starfleet against this new threat.

When we got word that the Borg had entered the Sol System, we made our way to the situation room where we had real-time telemetry from the system. We could see the Borg ship as it passed Jupiter Station, utterly dwarfing the facility, and as it approached Mars a series of the new *Shri-Tal* attack craft moved to intercept. They had been designed for use during the Cardassian War, but with the impending peace talks we had delayed their deployment to the border. I remember feeling my spirits lift as we saw them heading towards the Borg; these things were meant to swarm a Cardassian *Galor*-class cruiser so we knew they packed a punch. But the Borg just swatted them away like they were an inconvenience.

As the Borg ship approached Earth orbit, the president leaned over and asked me when I thought the appropriate time for an address would be. I was a little taken aback since the Borg ship was just sitting there and hadn't even

made a move against the planet yet. We were getting strange reports from the surface of Earth: a lot of confusion and anger, but there was no panic. I found that strange – I had expected panic and riots once it became clear that we couldn't evacuate anyone, but no one had realized there was a threat they needed to be evacuated from. I expected the moment the Borg opened fire on the surface or started "assimilating" that would change.

While we were talking I suddenly heard a gasp and someone said "my god." Another person cheered. We whipped around to see on the monitor a growing cloud of debris where the Borg ship had been: it was gone, *destroyed*. I asked Admiral Nechayev to rewind the data feed and as we watched a view from *Enterprise*, the Borg ship was just sitting there when suddenly there was a small eruption of sparks from its surface followed by another. The *Enterprise* moved away at high speed as the Borg ship exploded seemingly spontaneously. We confirmed it with a feed from Spacedock and other monitoring satellites: the Borg ship had been destroyed. Earth was safe. The room erupted into cheers and whoops; we were all overjoyed – all except President Amitra.

She asked to be patched through to Starfleet Command on her private channel and left the room. I went to follow, but she stopped me as she went into one of the adjacent meeting rooms. It was such a strange mix of emotions. I felt elated that the Borg had been destroyed, but also a sense of loss – maybe even disappointment, I guess. We had been focused on preparing to deal with this great emergency and now it was just...over.

The president returned after a short while. She did not look pleased, but remained cool and professional as I had expected from a politician as experienced as she was. We had to make an address, but we didn't have a speech ready. No one had seen fit to prepare a speech for this eventuality so the writers scrambled to get something together. They were told in no uncertain terms that it had to be better than "We Must Negotiate."

The president told us to prepare *Paris One* to return to Earth immediately. Admiral Nechayev advised against returning until Starfleet had given the all clear, but the glare the president gave her would have stopped even the Borg in their tracks. She was not happy and I needed to understand why – this was the best possible outcome. I managed to corral her into a corridor down away from the situation room and asked if there was something I was missing.

She was incensed. I had never seen her so angry and we had to move further down the corridor into an empty room to prevent her voice from carrying. She thought it was all a scam – that Starfleet had played her and taken advantage of the crisis to mount a coup! By getting her to leave Earth in the middle of the crisis, by playing up how the administration had gutted the fleet and was preventing Starfleet from adequately protecting the Federation, they had allowed the Borg to get to the very doorstep of Earth and then destroyed them. She thought the whole affair had been orchestrated and that Starfleet could have stopped the Borg at New Providence if they had wanted to, but they saw the opportunity to humiliate her and the administration.

I was appalled at the insinuation. 42 starships had been destroyed since the Borg had entered Federation space, not to mention the colonies. For all we knew as many as 20,000 dead. For the president to even suggest such a thing – it made my blood boil. I told her in no uncertain terms that I was going to choose to believe it was the stress that had prompted those comments and that if she ever dishonored the memories of the people who had died by spouting such drivel in future I would resign on the spot. She looked suitably chagrined, but I could tell from her eyes that she had believed what she said. We stood in silence for a moment. Then I nodded and said I was going to oversee the preparations to return to Earth.

We didn't speak much on the way back home. The president spent a lot of time with Admiral Nechayev; there was something of a scramble to salvage something of her legacy to make sure she wouldn't be remembered just for the Borg. She doubled down on getting the peace deal signed with the Cardassians, but we knew there was no chance for re-election. She was tainted for leaving Earth, and for her public fight with Starfleet.

Looking back, we shouldn't have pushed to sign the peace treaty with the Cardassians. We hung our people out to dry and we empowered the Cardassians. We showed them that the Federation would do anything to avoid a war and would accept any compromise. Ultimately that thinking led us to the Dominion War.

Ironically, one of the president's last acts was to authorize replacement ships for *Yamato* and *Columbia*. Starfleet could have as many *Galaxy*-class ships as it wanted now, but it knew the galaxy had changed so the focus was on smaller, more "tactically focused" designs.

My relationship with the president never recovered. I stayed on as chief of staff till the end, but Nechayev was her confidant now and the president rewarded her with a seat on the Admiralty Board.

I don't know what we could have done differently – not with the information we had available to us. But the breakdown of trust between the president and Starfleet Command really hurt us. I don't mean the administration – I mean the Federation. If Starfleet had trusted us with the information about the Borg from the beginning, if the president had trusted Starfleet when they said they needed the ships for defense would we have been in a better situation? Maybe, but from everything I know it was pure luck that *Enterprise's* crew was able to stop the Borg how they did. I'm not sure even 400 starships would have been able to stop the Borg at Wolf 359. When it comes down to it, all the starships and all the technology in the world aren't worth a *damn* without the right person in the right place.

ALYNNA NECHAYEV

USS *GORKON*, EN ROUTE TO STARBASE 375

Stardate: 48357.4 – 2371

It is said that the one thing that scares a Starfleet captain more than facing down the Borg is being told that Admiral Nechayev is coming to pay them a visit. Over the past decade, she has cultivated a formidable reputation and is known to take no nonsense from captains who traditionally enjoy a certain autonomy as master of their own vessels.

Nechayev was unique among the senior leadership of Starfleet in being able to cultivate a good working relationship with former president Amitra, although when asked if the president might have considered her a friend the admiral laughs and dismisses the suggestion. However, the admiral worked closely with President Amitra in brokering the Cardassian peace accords and was instrumental in pushing Amitra to get the Cardassians' agreement to leave the Bajor System. Rumor has it that the admiral's promotion to the admiralty in 2368 was at the insistence of the outgoing president.

I conduct my interview with the admiral aboard the USS Gorkon en route to Starbase 375 where the admiral is the sector commander overseeing the Bajor System and Cardassian border. Quite at odds with her reputation, she is warm and friendly and invites me to join her for a cup of tea in her suite.

Oh no, no. The president was extremely grateful for all of Starfleet's efforts during the crisis. While I was working as her liaison we often discussed what more she could do to offer support to allow the fleet to better conduct its mission. I certainly never saw any hint of resentment from her during the flight back from Janus IV. All that being said, once we returned to Earth there were questions that needed answers and it could not be ignored that the man who had led the attack at Wolf 359 was one of our own: Captain Jean-Luc Picard.

I did not know Picard at that time beyond his reputation. He was something of the darling of many within the admiralty, having graduated the academy at around the same time but he had spurred advancement beyond captain. Although I'm not sure how much of that was entirely down to his own choice following the loss of *Stargazer*. Let's just say there was a reason it was over a decade before he was given another command.

The admiralty were of the view that Picard was a singular figure who had come to embody the best of and brightest of what it meant to be in Starfleet. The media had latched onto his rescue and the subsequent destruction of the Borg ship, making him out to be the hero of the whole affair.

He was examined at length by Starfleet Medical, who were able to remove the majority of the Borg implants and confirmed that any remaining hardware was completely inert. He was subjected to just about every scan we had available to ensure no nanobots were active within his body. We also insisted that he visit the M'Benga Clinic for assessment, but this received pushback especially once it was made clear that a number of survivors from Wolf 359 would be sent there for treatment. There was concern that the sight of Captain Picard might prove...*difficult* for them. It was agreed that he could be assessed on board the *Enterprise* instead.

I will be frank with you. While the contents of the assessment are confidential, there were those of us who were not satisfied with how the entire matter was dealt with and sensed more than a hint of cronyism – the old guard closing ranks to protect one of their own. I did report my concerns to the president. However, she had been very clear that she would not intervene in what she viewed as an internal Starfleet matter.

In the end, though, the reality of the situation was both sides were right. Picard was too public a figure to be turned into a scapegoat. Starfleet would have to look itself in the mirror, but Picard was compromised no matter how much we would like to pretend that wasn't the case. Alien technology had permeated his body and we did not fully understand what hold they may still hold over him. It was quite the conundrum.

[She pauses to sip from her tea and stares out of the viewport at the stars warping past.]

We knew that Picard would not accept promotion or reassignment and we were very clear that we did not want to be seen as trying to force him out. However, if he chose to resign of his own accord, that would be different. We made some discreet inquiries to projects that we felt might entice him away from Starfleet if he wished to take on a fresh challenge: some archeological digs on Vulcan, the New Atlantis Project. We even approached his brother should he wish to return to the family business. But I think we always knew that in the end the allure of space and the center seat on the *Enterprise* would be too

strong of a call to resist. I can hardly blame him, but that still did not address our concerns. So, we had to make accommodations.

♦ Are you able to elaborate?

No, no, I'm afraid I cannot – it's not my place. I will say that we made sure there was someone to keep a close eye and ensure that the captain suffered no adverse effects from his time with the Borg. And that the Borg would not be able to enact any influence over him. Thus far, in the few instances when the captain has been in close proximity, it would appear that has not been the case. Although I do still have my doubts following the Argolis Incident. That being said, I have found myself working with the captain and the *Enterprise* on a number of missions in the years following and while we do not always see eye to eye, he has always been professional and courteous. Even if at times his personal views might not align with the orders presented from Starfleet, he was able to see the mission was completed and served the best interests of the Federation.

OWEN PARIS

"PROJECT PATHFINDER," EARTH

Stardate: 53425.9 – 2376



There was utter disbelief in the G&G: we could not believe our eyes or our luck – if you want to call it that. We soon got confirmation that the Borg ship had been destroyed, seemingly from some internal forces. Our fleet was still positioned in the Oort cloud and had not yet moved to engage. One moment the Borg had been engaging the *Enterprise* and the next it stopped and then just *exploded*.

There is a saying in Starfleet that dates all the way back to Jonathan Archer and the NX-01: "fate protects fools, little children, and ships named *Enterprise*." That certainly rang true. With the immediate threat seemingly gone the focus was "what now?". We had been anticipating some mass panic and possibly riots from the population once it became clear that there was no possibility of evacuating the planet, but by and large people seemed totally oblivious to the danger. We had not disclosed the extent of the failure at Wolf 359, so I suppose in the mind of the public there was nothing to worry about. The president's speech had also gone some way to reassure the public – although not in the way I imagine she had hoped.

Our immediate concern was to isolate the debris from the Borg ship. There was no telling if the Borg technology could still be dangerous and we did not want anything of that making planetfall. We retasked a dozen or so ships to police the area and to move as much debris to the L2 Lagrange point. *Enterprise* was in need of immediate dockyard time and there was the question of Jean-Luc Picard.

Once *Enterprise* had made it to McKinley Station, myself and Thomas Henry, Head of Starfleet Security, beamed to the ship where we were greeted by Captain Riker. We congratulated him on a job well done and thanked him for the hard work of the crew under difficult circumstances – if the reports were accurate they had literally saved the planet. But we needed to address the "Picard Question," as it became known.

Captain Riker escorted us to the bridge and into the ready room. We were shocked to find Jean-Luc there seemingly going over duty rosters. The only visible sign of his ordeal were some surgical regen pads. We were not expecting to see him up and about so soon – indeed Riker later told us it was at the captain's insistence and that the ship's counselor Deanna Troi had concurred that putting Picard into a familiar setting as soon as possible would be best for his recovery. Therefore Captain Picard had resumed limited duties, although Riker remained in command of the *Enterprise* for the duration.

We spoke for some time. I think it is fair to say we were walking on eggshells. Picard certainly presented himself as being none the worse for what had happened, but it was very apparent to myself and Admiral Henry that you cannot go through what he had without it leaving a mark on you. Picard came from an era of captains before counselors were routinely assigned to monitor the wellbeing of ships' crews. From the reports we had there was a definite impression that while he valued Troi as a senior member of the crew and replied upon her to give him insight into how the crew was performing, he did not avail himself of her services.

There was also the question of security. The Borg had kidnapped and tortured Picard, and seemingly had access to his mind and all the knowledge and experience therein. Could we trust such a man to return to duty, especially the captain of the flagship? And as the facts of what happened started to come to light a lot of people would blame Picard for the deaths at Wolf 359. This was going to be Gorkon all over again.

Enterprise was given orders to head to McKinley Station for refit and repair and Captain Picard and Riker were ordered to report to Starfleet Command for debriefing. In the case of the former, he was also ordered to attend Starfleet Medical for a full medical review.

When we returned to Earth, I turned to Henry as we headed back to the G&G and asked him for his take. He gave a bit of a shrug before answering. Ever since he had been promoted to captain of the *Stargazer*, Starfleet had made a conscious effort to hold Jean-Luc Picard up as our ideal: well-educated, curious, eloquent and even-tempered, willing to listen the options when presented to him but able to be decisive, and above all fully committed to Starfleet and its ideals. We had used Picard to try and move away from the more – shall we say

gung-ho? – image of captains from the 23rd century and we had invested a lot into the idea of Jean-Luc Picard. To lose that now would be a huge blow for both him and for Starfleet.

I nodded in agreement – of all the people this could have happened to. I collected my effects from the G&G and was able to return home for the first time in what felt like months. It was good to be able to take a sonic shower in my own house and sleep in my own bed – to see Julia. I was able to speak to my son Tom who had been assigned to Jupiter Outpost 92. I was gratified to learn that he had not been able to launch with the SDL forces.

Before too long, I was back to work overseeing the day to day running of Starfleet. I attended a meeting of the Admiralty Board – there was a lot to do including mounting rescue and salvage operations in Wolf 359. We had dispatched a dozen ships from the task force we had maintained in system, but there was a shortage of medical and engineering specialized ships so we had to send what we had. It was already three days since the massacre and ships from Andoria had arrived, but the reports were that it was a challenging environment and the chances of finding many survivors was slim.

The discussion had moved back to the Picard Question when Ellen Hayes once again dropped a photon grenade into the room. Although to her credit, she had told us right away this time. It happened that within the debris from the Borg ship which SI was guarding jealously, they had found Borg drones – well, given the reports from the *Enterprise's* away teams that wasn't too surprising. But we didn't understand yet.

As the recovery ships had moved in to start collecting the debris to transport it to a secure site, they had started to pick up locator pings from Starfleet communicators. Following the trail had led them to some larger debris which seemed to have remained largely intact. Upon entering the structure they found a number of drones – all seemingly inert and to initial scans “dead” – but a number of them identifiable as Starfleet officers from the locator pings and verified by DNA scans. Again, this sounded tragic, but we were unsure as to the significance before she finally cut to the chase.

One of them had woken up.

EIVØR ZIMANSKI

8063RD S*M*A*S*H HEADQUARTERS, OHNIKA III

Stardate 56190.8 – 2379

With the destruction of the Borg cube so close to Earth, Starfleet was faced with the new problem of thousands of tons of potentially hazardous debris falling to the planet's surface. In addition to the logistical challenges, there were massive security concerns. It was essential for the wreckage to be removed for study to help develop better defenses to potential future encounters with the Borg.

Eivør Zimanski was tasked with overseeing this operation which would have been the largest and most complex salvage and recovery effort in Federation history were it not completely overshadowed by the mission at Wolf 359. I meet with Eivør at the Starfleet Mobile Army Surgical Hospital on Ohniaka III after the events of Operation House Call, where they and their fellow doctors have been working since 2378 to aid in the rehabilitation of the xBs reawakened from Starfleet cold storage.

We pulled a dozen or so starships from the Oort cloud and retasked them to plot every vector we could model from where the cube had been destroyed. We knew the Borg used nanotechnology quite extensively, so there was a real concern about what could happen if any part of the cube made it to Earth. It was imperative that *not one atom* infect the planet. Anything we could tractor was pulled to a Lagrange point. We ordered ships to vaporize anything else potentially Borg in origin if it got close to the kármán line.

This delayed the salvage efforts from deploying to Wolf 359, but at this point the last thing we wanted was some small piece of Borg tech to make it down the well to the surface and start infecting our systems. We had already gotten a small taste of the adaptive and regenerative abilities of their tech, so that was the word from upon high – nothing could be left to chance.

Once the bulk of the debris was secured and we established satellite systems to monitor and destroy any potential hazardous material, we were able to release the ships to assist at 359. We could turn our attention to assessing just what we had – there was certainly a lot of excitement at the prospect of analyzing this technology up close. We hoped to help develop defenses against any future Borg attack, but we also saw the potential for some technological breakthrough or paradigm shift. There were about 12,000,000 metric tons of

debris, representing around 17 percent of the Borg ship's estimated mass based on scans of the cube before its destruction. As you can imagine, that was a lot of material that needed to be examined, but also moved to a secure location. It was going to be very difficult to conduct any meaningful analysis – not to mention the navigation hazard – while the debris remained at the L1 point. Naturally, SI took the lead in overseeing the operations, but we needed the support of the SCE to handle the transportation of the debris. Again, it was extremely important that we did not allow any of the remains to come into direct contact with any unshielded technology so it was slow going. We elected to use engineers in EV suits to go in first to assess the debris before it was loaded into the transports.

That was when we made the discovery.

Reports from the teams conducting relief operations at Wolf 359 contained accounts of individuals taken by the Borg – and at least four ships were currently unaccounted for – but that didn't prepare us for the reality. As the crews began to examine a mass designated BCR-238 they picked up a communicator location ping indicating a Starfleet officer in distress. They followed protocol and moved in to investigate the signal. On the *Svalbard*, we saw the team's heart rates spike as they approached the signal's origin. BCR-238 seemed like just another large tangled mass of duranium and ship conduits, indistinct from any of the others in the debris field. They reported no sign of Starfleet officers, but had located several dozen Borg drones locked into alcoves. They refused to venture any further into the wreckage until a security team examined the Borg.

When the security detail conducted their assessment, they found the locator ping's source. It came from one of the Borg. DNA results proved inconclusive, but facial recognition and cellular analysis gave us a 85 percent probability match to a T'yrish Ellis who had been aboard the USS *Kaneda* at Wolf 359.

This was very unsettling for all of us. We knew that Picard had been assimilated, but this was the first face-to-face reality with what the Borg had done to our people. There were no life signs detected in any of the Borg present, so it was decided to remove them to secure storage for assessment by Starfleet Medical. As we moved through the rest of the debris field we encountered several other clusters of drones; some were perfectly intact and appeared to have died from exposure to vacuum, others had suffered significant trauma as a result of the cube's violent end. In all I think around 800 Borg were recovered, with two dozen identified as Starfleet crewmembers lost at Wolf 359.

We moved the debris to a secure location on Charon and began the work of sorting through and attempting to identify what might be useful technology and what was just scrap. The Borg were also brought to Charon pending a decision on what to do with them. Command was still unsure on how exactly to return the bodies to their families. Certainly, they didn't want them to be filled with potentially dangerous technology, not to mention how distressing it might be for them to see their loved ones looking like this. Starfleet Medical had successfully removed most of the Borg implants from Jean-Luc Picard so it was decided that we would attempt to do the same with any Borg we were able to positively identify in order to return them to their families. Families would not be told that their loved ones had been assimilated, but instead that they had been killed at Wolf 359. With recovery operations ongoing at 359, it should have been straightforward to arrange for incoming transports to collect the bodies and to take them to Earth.

We elected to start with T'yriish. She'd become quite the object of fascination since her discovery and I had made the mistake of looking up her personnel file. She was half-Vulcan but raised as Human, was married and lived in London. She was assigned to the *Kaneda* just a few days before the ship was deployed to Wolf 359. I'd looked at the photos in her file and read about her achievements. There were several letters from her wife logged in the communications buffer. I resisted the urge to view them, but I felt a huge amount of sorrow for her loss given how clearly very much in love they were. I thought we were going to be doing something noble in returning the bodies to the family.

We had T'yriish in the science lab ready to begin removing the Borg implants; the carapace was relatively straightforward and it was distressing to find the remains of her Starfleet uniform still there underneath. Removing the prosthetic arm was also relatively easy as was the ocular implant, but there was a large processing node affixed to the back of her skull. As we started using the molecular saw to remove it her organic eye suddenly shot open and she screamed. We all recoiled – the saw almost took off the technician's arm.

She was *alive*! But how?! She had been "dead" as far as we could tell for almost two weeks. Security burst into the lab with phaser rifles drawn and were about to shoot her, but I moved in front of them to stop them firing. T'yriish had crawled from the biobed into the corner of the lab and was clearly terrified. She sat there naked with tears running down her face as she stared at us and at the

stump where the Borg prosthesis had been. I moved towards her with my hands held out to show I meant her no harm, but she was so utterly traumatized I'm not sure she could understand me. She just cried and started rocking back and forth asking for Gemma, her wife. This complicated things.

I was called to Earth for an emergency meeting with the admiralty. They wanted to know exactly what happened and why we hadn't guess that there might be survivors. After what seemed like an eternity of questioning, I was finally able to ask what would happen with T'yriish and the other Borg at the base.

Paris and Hayes shared an uneasy look. They said that while they were sympathetic, they could not allow T'yriish to return to Earth at this time – not until we had a better understanding of the Borg assimilation process and could be sure they would not present an ongoing threat to the Federation. They were also still unsure about how much to disclose to the public. If it became common knowledge that loved ones might have been turned into Borg and then used to kill others it could lead to...“complications” as Leyton put it. It broke my heart, but I knew he was right. Already FNN was running opinion pieces asking if Jean-Luc Picard should be tried for war crimes for the actions of Locutus or if he was a victim and should be presented with a medal for his heroism.

There was the question of what should be done with the other Borg. Could they be revived? And if so, *should* they be? Over half of the Borg recovered were from species we didn't even have in our databases, and there were literally dozens of Romulans. It was a hot potato that Starfleet just didn't want to deal with and just wasn't equipped to deal with. But what was clear was that Charon would not be a suitable site for T'yriish and the other Borg.

When I returned to the site, I headed straight to the room we had provided for T'yriish. At first we had not been sure of where to put her. We didn't have a brig and besides that seemed unfair – she hadn't done anything. She was a *victim* here. But, at the same time the site just wasn't equipped to house someone with her needs. I arranged to have a cargo bay reconfigured and made as comfortable as possible. It was...challenging. The Borg assimilation had changed her and the subsequent surgery had removed a number of systems the Borg used to ensure their drones could live with their new augmentations. We were still learning and writing the book as we went – all this to say nothing of the psychological scars. Starfleet refused my request for a counselor to work with her, and most of the base's staff viewed her at best as a scientific curiosity, at worst a monster.

I sat with her and tried to explain that she couldn't go home just yet; she couldn't go and see Gemma. There were moments when it seemed like she would understand, I would catch glimpses in her eyes, but I can't say for certain. I knew she was in there somewhere but it was beyond my ability to reach her at the time. I sat with her on the edge of the bunk and just held her remaining hand and stroked it. She would just stare at my hand as I did it. She laid her head down on my lap and I took out the hypospray and gently pressed it against her neck. It seemed the most humane thing was to let her sleep until we were equipped to give her and the other Borg the care and support they needed.

We continued the work on the remains of the Borg. Once they recovered the *Hood*, they brought us more parts that the Borg had partially assimilated, along with a large number of Borg that had been caught in some sort of plasma flood. Every organic component of these Borg had been melted away by the superheated plasma leaving just the cybernetic components. At least we didn't have to worry about those Borg waking up.

HUGH

USS KETER, OHNIKA III ORBIT Stardate 55606.7 – 2378

Hugh returns from a short recess outside our interview room. Considering his distress before our break, I did not want to intrude on his privacy as he conferred with a much taller xB named Croxis. However, it is clear from their behavior that the two are quite close. I notice them share a long embrace and they kiss each others' hands before separating so Hugh may rejoin me.

It is...an addiction. To someone like you, who has never been part of the collective, that is the closest analogy I can think of. I was, in effect, born into the Borg: it was the only kind of existence I'd ever known. When the young are submerged the collective – before a sense of identity is established in any way – they are far more malleable. It requires less mental artificing for the “new unit” to integrate with the collective and become one with the Borg. My friends and I have a name for this: “Nameless.” Drones who were either created by the collective, or have no memories of their past lives. But the stronger the individual's sense of self is, the greater the level of...*stimulation* is required.

It takes a moment for the newly-growing cortical node to fully sync with a new Borg unit. But as the connection grows *stronger*, the collective is able to sense their thoughts and feelings. They begin to become Borg. Now, how *intensely* those thoughts and feelings are felt by the collective and all its parts vary wildly by a number of different factors. There are things such as central plexus proximity to consider, whether or not a drone unit is deployed from their alcove, overall computational investment from the collective a certain assimilation site...all these aspects affect the process – whether the Borg are focusing on a single, sought-after assimilation such as Picard's, or are processing 10,000 routine assimilations in 10 minutes.

At first, they are almost always afraid – but it is followed by a sense of euphoria, and then a numbness. A feeling of being *content*. Partly due to the

artificial dopamine and endorphin increase. As the individual self retreats and the collective disbursts itself throughout the new drone, they feel...detached. Without a care in the world. The neural links become more established, more and more optical feeds from other Borg become accessible, and they might even be able to see themselves – their own body – from the perspective of the others. An “out of body” experience.

[Hugh pauses and smiles faintly, holding his chin in one hand and drumming our table with the other hand's metal-tipped fingers.]

It is peaceful in the collective. We were never lonely, and we had a sense of harmony. I suppose it's somewhat easy to feel like that, considering how vast we were. The collective allowed us all to think as one: to let a multitude share information instantaneously across a network that spanned the stars. Other units were simply extensions of us. Over time...the assimilated would care less and less about their individual selves. As a result, their nervous systems' memory-related neurons degrade the longer their bodies are within the hive. In a very real sense, they would cease to be Human or Kremin or Karemma...and would become *Borg*.

We could regenerate through our shared neuroelectric fields – ensuring that every Borg contributed to the well-being of the others, and extended their unit's existence long beyond their species' typical lifespans. At the point of a drone unit's death, its assimilated memories are stored within the collective and remain accessible to the whole. Each Borg is, functionally, *immortal*. Even now, Third of Five still exists somewhere deep within the collective.

♦ But weren't you and your ship were disconnected from the collective?

When the *Enterprise* decided to bring me aboard and treated me as an individual...that was unique in the recorded history of the Borg. My new identity, “Hugh,” was built on top of the identification “Third of Five,” outside the collective's firewalls and failsafes. My own crash-landing injuries aside, I would have died if not for their care. If I was a blank slate, then the kindness of Geordi, Beverly, and all those who showed me compassion and mercy on the *Enterprise* was the chisel made out of tritanium.

Once I was returned to the collective, my memories and new individuality were dispersed throughout the collective, though Cube 5219's central plexus

handled most of the direct processing. There was no small amount of effort extended to retrieve me, after all, so the hive deemed it necessary to pore over and log what had happened. Due to this and...perhaps the sudden, still-stinging absence of Locutus, it began a cascade effect.

Our unified sense of self was disrupted as other Borg suddenly started to consider themselves separate from the whole. This was different from their latent personalities emerging. Instead, there was a new identity being laid on top of the collective, and in some instances was like a schizophrenia. The collective moved very quickly to disconnect the ship from the rest of the Borg and ordered us to self-destruct, though with the level of discord and chaos that had erupted on the ship, the order was argued over and ignored. We suddenly found ourselves alone...adrift, unable to function, and, soon, falling into Ohniaka III's gravitational pull. But that was a unique circumstance, and that is a story for another day.

[He pauses before taking a long drink from his mug.]

When other drones are disconnected, their previous identities are able to re-establish themselves. Without the collective, memories begin to resurface – though, like any drug, it varies in how well they may be able to “recover” from the collective. With cases like mine, when a Nameless drone unit has no prior identity and is disconnected from the hive, they simply die from medical complications – if not from self-destruction. Not to mention anyone who might find a Nameless would most certainly abandon – or worse – destroy them. *Thoroughly. Efficiently.*

Usually, when the link to the collective is severed and shutdown or self-destruct protocols haven't been executed, the cortical node will continue to suppress the individual and drones will carry out whatever the last instruction was that it received. After said task has been completed, the drone will typically attempt to enter an alcove and go into a regeneration cycle until the link to the collective can be restored. However, the cortical node can't maintain the endorphin and dopamine levels necessary to ignore the drone unit's resurfacing organic components and memory-related neural pathways. If the drone is operational and unable to regenerate, the sense of self will emerge over time. This can be, ah...*extremely unpleasant.*

♦ *Can you elaborate?*

Of course. Without the neural electric fields, neurotransmitters, and hormones released by the cortical array, a drone suddenly finds itself suffering from severe withdrawal. It is...I lack the words to describe it. Like waking from a nightmare. They have their own personal experiences, but also those of the collective as a whole. Try to imagine – a reduction like that! Being reduced into a single, frail body after existing as an immovable, unstoppable force. Never being lonely, never without harmony, into...[pinches fingers] *this*. Physical pain from the sudden lack of endorphins, the massive chemical imbalances...I've heard the intestines can feel frozen and aflame all at once.

"Normal" bodily functions begin to return as excess nanoprobes die and are expunged from the body, but are accompanied by sweats, vomiting, and scarification if lesions or abscesses form. A former drone requires outside assistance to help restore systems that haven't needed to work in years...decades...possibly even *centuries*. Not to mention other possible ways the body starts to reject specific Borg implants. Again, without urgent medical intervention, most drones will die painfully once removed from the collective. I apologize for such gruesome details, but I hope you understand the importance of what we could offer to those affected by the Borg.

The psychological experience can be even more traumatic. For those who are not Nameless, the original self has borne witness to their actions as Borg. They might be far from home, if home even still exists. Worse, they may have helped in the destruction of their homes, as well as the assimilation of their loved ones. The guilt for that...it can be overwhelming.

In addition to this...we bear the stigma of being once Borg. I've watched the way Starfleet officers have looked at us. I've read how former Federation citizens are viewed with distrust and suspicion. The stories of people like Seven of Nine and Icheb...it is a cruel truth we've had to acknowledge, that some people see us as "monsters." I will do *everything* in my power to reject that hatred. They loathe us for enduring past a nightmare? Hate seeing us flourish beyond "victimhood" – having resisted that which is supposedly futile? I hope it's clear how this societal pressure puts more mental strain on a recovering psyche, and how that makes it all the more difficult for xBs to heal. And unfortunately, I predict it'll be a constant difficulty we're forced to endure for some time to come.

Most civilizations fear the Borg. They are right to do so. The collective is a fearsome, great, and terrible entity that you – you, who are *untouched* by the

Borg – will never fully understand. And I assure you: it's alright that you don't. **[he points at me]** But let me tell you something: that *lack* of understanding should not deny us the right to exist as we are. It should not *vilify* us for trying to live and thrive against the challenges we already face. I have seen and heard others shun and vilify xBs, even within the supposedly "accepting" Federation. You cannot let yourselves give way to such awful failures that weaken your community. Failures like fear, prejudice, hatred...how inefficient. Just because you're incapable of understanding something you can't comprehend or haven't experienced, doesn't mean you have the right to deny my friends and I *peace*.

xBs will exist so long as the Borg do. Perhaps even beyond that. The infinite variables of individual life mean that each xB will acclimate to this new form of existence against many hurdles. But despite those hurdles – despite the heartache and hardship that might come with those struggles – we will do our best to live. We will, hopefully, become something *more*, despite it.

♦ **And what's that?**

Ourselves.

T'YRISH

TSIOLKOVSKIY CITY, LUNA

Stardate: 59138.7 – 2382

T'yrish is one of the 138 known Starfleet officers assimilated by the Borg during their first incursion. While many were sent to the Delta Quadrant, she remained on the Borg cube after the Battle of Wolf 359 and traveled back to Earth. She was pulled from the wreckage by the USS Svalbard in suspended animation that first appeared to be death. She was the first xB recovered to regain consciousness. After four years of "rehabilitation" at a closed facility on Ohniaka III, she was no longer deemed a threat to herself or others, discharged from Starfleet, and released on her own cognition.

I arrive at the apartment in Tsiolkovskiy City. The far side of Luna is currently in one of its two week cycles of night. It is pitch black except for the dim illumination provided by the streetlamps outside of her building which sadly appears to have seen better days. Her one bedroom flat is located on the third floor behind an old-fashioned metal door on hinges. She welcomes me into her sparsely furnished living room. The carpet seems to have not been replaced since the 23rd century. The walls are off-white and completely bare.

There is a small kitchen off to the left and a partially closed door reveals a single bedroom. We take a seat at the dining room table. A sideboard next to us holds five plastic heads, each with a different wig. Tish sits down across from me dressed in blue denim coveralls. She only has about half an hour to speak before she must clock in at work. After seeing me notice the wigs, she points to her bald head and forces an awkward chuckle.

They said it would grow back when my "follicles were properly stimulated." It never did. Can I offer you a cup of tea?

♦ No, thank you.

[She wanders over to the kitchen and drops a tea bag into a ceramic mug before filling it with boiling water from an old-fashioned electric kettle. She returns to her seat.]

The replicator's been broken for six months. Landlord still hasn't come to fix it, and quite frankly, I don't mind. Every time he walks in here, his face asks uncomfortable questions that I really don't want to answer.

Speaking of uncomfortable questions, you're wondering why I still have scars around my artificial eye in an age of dermal regenerators, aren't you? Stare away. 24th century medicine is amazing but it's still not a miracle. Half my

skull is duranium and the ligaments around this eye are all polymer composite. Not enough blood vessels are left to keep healthy skin alive. I'm lucky to have anything here at all. Deformed face, bald head, artificial eye, biosynthetic arm...

[She holds up one hand and wiggles the fingers.]

Seven years and it still doesn't feel like my own. I couldn't pilot a ship now even if I wanted to. I tell strangers that they're wounds I got while "in the service." Technically that's true. If you get crippled during a warp core breach or fighting a Cardassian, you're a hero. Get crippled because you spent eight weeks as a Borg drone...well, then you're a freak. You're dangerous. People aren't sure if you can be trusted. People don't want you near parks or schools. When you apply to get an apartment in the town you grew up in, the entire neighborhood signs a petition to get you kicked off-world because they are afraid of nanoprobes getting in their drinking water.

[She pauses and takes a sip of tea.]

I grew up in Pennsylvania, a small town near Crest Forrest. I used to get teased a bit about the pointed ears at school – got called Romulan a lot – but other than that, a pretty normal childhood. Left school, went to the academy, met a girl, fell in love. It was a *good* life.

I used to love flying; there was nothing quite as liberating as piloting a starship. I was doing a tour at the ETPS **[Experimental Test Pilot School]**. We would take new starship designs and run them through their paces, work out the optimal flight envelopes for the spaceframe and then we would find out just how far beyond we could push it. You know how captains are, always wanting that little bit *extra* in a crunch. It was a ton of fun. When I was sat there at the helm, nothing before me but the stars – I felt so alive.

I was on leave when the call came in; Gemma used to love spending Christmas together. I was called up with the rest of ETPS. They wanted to take the *Kaneda* out. It had been with the school for a number of years – a great bird to fly – but didn't fit into any particular niche for Starfleet so we kept her at the school mostly to remind us what a good starship should fly like.

She did us proud at 359, but we got our asses handed to us. After we were boarded, I was chosen for an exciting new career as a Four of Four, Secondary Subjunctive of Unimatrix 8208.

[She is silent for a long moment.]

If you want to know more about that you can read the files from Ohniaka III.

I remember the first time Gemma came to visit, when they finally told her I was still alive. I was so nervous – hell, I was more terrified than I had been at 359. When she was led into the room and she saw me for the first time since...she did her best to cover it up, to try and hide the pain and the horror at what she saw when she looked at me. But I knew her well enough. I'd seen her reaction. She saw that it had broken my heart despite my attempts to hide that.

I just want to make it clear that I don't blame Gemma at all for filing for divorce. We tried, but we were different people after I was released from Ohniaka – in my case, quite literally. She still had a chance at a normal life. I didn't...

I suppose I'm lucky to be allowed back in the Sol System at all. A lot of very powerful people wanted us kept locked up forever. This place isn't much, but it's *mine*. My job isn't much, but it's *mine*.

I get up like a normal person. I take a sonic shower. I work the night shift at an automated warehouse serving the Luna cargo docks. I sit at my console and monitor the autocranes loading crates onto anti-grav pallets for eight hours. I sign my reports, and then I come home and go to bed. Sometimes, I can go a full two weeks without seeing another sapient being. It's very safe for me.

♦ That sounds very lonely.

Lonely is safe for an xB. Tolerance in the high and mighty Federation doesn't last very long when people are told to be afraid of you. You wonder why so many want the hive mind back so badly? You're never judged in the collective. You're never shunned in the collective. You're never scared or frightened of rejection in the collective. You just do what you're told and your implants reward you with euphoric immortality.

I'm not going to be a poster child for an xB pride march. I don't want people to read this interview and say "oh, she is so brave!" or, god forbid, to pity me. I just want to be able to live what life I have left. I want to be able to take the metro and not have mothers pull their children away from me. To be able to eat in a restaurant and not have the hostess lie to my face and say, "so sorry, we're full tonight." To walk down the street, and not hear the gasps and muffled whispers from people who don't think I notice.

41 Starfleet xB survivors were pulled from that cube after Wolf 359. Five of them committed suicide. 18 will require round the clock in-patient care for the rest of their lives. Three left the Federation and no one knows what happened to them. 14 live like me. One is the captain of the Federation flagship and has a vineyard in France. The universe might consider that balanced, but tell me, do you think that's right?

MARIE PICARD

LA BARRE, EARTH

Stardate 49827.5 – 2372



We had been following the events ever since Starfleet told us Jean-Luc had been taken. Robert was glued to the squawk box they had provided and had an earpiece so he could listen in while he was working out in the fields. Starfleet sent a counselor, an Aurelian named Migleemo, to be on hand to answer any questions we may have, but Robert was not interested in talking about his feelings – a trait that runs through the Picard men, I'm afraid. I made a conscious effort to encourage René to be more open about his feelings. It was a lot easier while he was attending school in England; he would normally come home for the weekends, but we asked the school to keep him there for the duration.

I felt very conflicted about what I was hearing. They spoke of starships being disabled and destroyed and the Borg ship leaving unharmed. I felt strangely relieved that Jean-Luc hadn't been killed, despite the death and destruction that the Borg had used him to inflict on the fleet.

One night, shortly after I had spoken to René on the comm before he went to bed, Robert burst into the house proclaiming that they had gotten him! It seemed that the *Enterprise* had mounted a rescue and had brought Jean-Luc home. I thought that was wonderful news, but then Captain Keough arrived at the house.

He explained that while they had been successful in retrieving Jean-Luc he was still in grave peril and still controlled by these Borg. I'm not sure how much of this Robert took in – he was very dismissive and convinced that now they had rescued Jean-Luc that would soon be the end of it. He took himself away to bed. I spoke with Captain Keogh and Dr. Migleemo for some time, but there was not much they were able to tell me other than to reassure me that they were going to do everything in their power to bring Jean-Luc home.

The next day was strange. We knew that the Borg were now approaching the Sol System and might even reach Earth soon, but Robert still woke up at dawn and went to tend to the grapes. The workers arrived to help – it is a critical time in January to make sure the vines survive the cold and the wines in the casks need to be tended, too. I tried to follow his example and carry on as best I could, arranging for collections and deliveries of the year's harvest. But I kept looking up towards the sky.

We ate dinner in silence that night, barely interrupted by the squawk box. Captain Keogh had explained earlier that Starfleet would be encrypting transmissions for security reasons and so the box would not work. Robert would occasionally glance over to it but said nothing.

There was a knock at the door and once again it was Captain Keogh. He was smiling and told us that the Borg had been stopped and that Jean-Luc had been freed from their influence. I felt ecstatic and turned to hug Robert, but he stood from the table, muttered that it was good news and then that he had an early start. He went to bed. Captain Keogh was taken aback by Robert's reaction, but I assured him that he just needed time to process it and thanked him profusely. I also said if there was anything we could do for Jean-Luc to let us know.

The next day we continued much as we had done before. René was back from school and it was delightful to have him back in the house, Robert was off with his grapes, and no one mentioned Jean-Luc or the Borg. It was as if those few days had been a fever dream.

We received a visit around a month later from a woman in a Starfleet uniform. She introduced herself as Deanna Troi and said that she was working with Jean-Luc on his recovery. I welcomed her in and she asked if Robert was home. I sent René to bring him up from the cellar and then asked René to run some errands in the town so we could speak.

Deanna explained that Jean-Luc had gone through a traumatic experience and that while his body had healed his mind could not until he was able to accept that it needed to. Robert seemed rather dismissive at first, asking what good was asking us for help and that Jean-Luc had never had much interest in what he had had to say in the past. But the counselor explained that Jean-Luc would not be allowed to return to active duty until he could start to process what he had gone through and he was extremely reluctant to engage in more traditional

methods of therapy. She remarked that he was an extremely private individual. Despite them serving together for four years, it was only in the last month she had learned of the existence of his brother.

She said that Jean-Luc had needed to reconnect with his own Humanity and that he was not going to be able to do that on board the *Enterprise* so she was approaching us to see if we could offer any insight to help him.

Robert listened intently then said that we shouldn't worry. Jean-Luc would find his way home and Robert would put him straight. When the counselor asked how he just smiled and said in the way that only brothers would understand.

Sure enough, about a month later I received a message from Jean-Luc asking if it would be possible for him to visit. Actually speaking to him felt surreal; he had been such a large part of our lives without us ever speaking directly. Robert insisted that he come and stay with us – it's his house after all. I was so excited for his arrival and when the day finally came I was all set to head to the town to meet him, but Robert insisted that it was not necessary and then left to go and tend to the grapes. René met with Jean-Luc and brought him home. Jean-Luc was quite striking, he seemed far younger than Robert but years of working under the sun had taken something of a toll on Robert. I was shocked at how distant they were. I knew that they had a fractious history but had thought after the events of the past year Robert had mellowed and was ready to bury the hatchet. The tension was so thick you could have cut it with a knife. When I spoke to Robert he said that he was helping Jean-Luc remember who he was.

I came home from the market one day to find them sitting in the house absolutely covered from head to toe in mud. Clearly they had been fighting but now they were sitting together singing and drinking wine. I never asked Robert exactly what had happened since it was not my place, but true to his word he had helped Jean-Luc remember who he was.

When it came time for Jean-Luc to leave, there he was standing in his uniform. René was besotted with his famous uncle and would have run away to the stars right then if we would allow it.

Jean-Luc and Robert spoke frequently after that and he would send messages to myself and René. Whenever the *Enterprise* was home he would come, stay at the house, and regale René with tales of his adventures. He gave

him a model of the *Enterprise* and took Robert and René for a tour in the summer of '69. Robert was suitably unimpressed but it just solidified René's desire to follow his uncle into the stars.

That was the last time they saw each other.

MARCO AMASOV

USS ENDEAVOUR, ARCTURUS ORBITAL

Stardate 46918.3 – 2369



Have you ever been to Gettysburg? Or Pearl Harbor? What about the Tannhauser Gate? The thing about battlefields on planets is that they're *static*. Once the battle is over the bodies remain where they fell, the ships where they sank. Space isn't like that. When a ship is disabled or destroyed in space it continues traveling along its course at the speed it was traveling until something else acts on it.

When we arrived in Wolf 359 it had been close to three days since the battle and the remains of the fleet were scattered throughout the system. To further complicate matters, the graviton burst had made a mess of subspace. Our sensors were barely functioning and incapable of reliably picking up lifesigns and transporter function was inhibited.

We set up the *Endeavour* as the command point and dispatched every shuttle and support craft out into the expanse to look for survivors. At the same time I put in an urgent request for tugs and engineering ships to help to tractor the debris to more stable orbits in order to reduce the search time.

It was a grim business. We were able to pick up some signals at shorter ranges and tap into communicator frequencies. People would tell us the ship they were on but in some instances there was nothing left to readily identify which ship was which. We were flying blind and had to try and triangulate signals. We found some people trapped deep inside the *Melbourne* – a sister ship to the *Endeavour* – but we were very aware that the longer it took for us to find people the less chance there was for their survival. What resources I had from command I stretched as thin as I dared to try and find anyone still alive.

There was a brief bright spot when we encountered a shuttlepod from the *Saratoga*. It told us that a large number of survivors had taken shelter on board the remains of the *Endurance*, an old *Essex*-class expeditionary cruiser.

We immediately dispatched shuttles to the location. They were able to ferry the survivors to the *Endeavour* and then get them the medical support they needed. There were a few other moments like that where we found groups of survivors clustered together deep within ships. Far too few. More frequently we discovered empty hulks or rooms with bodies where people had hunkered down hoping for rescue that would never come while the heat bled out of compartments and air became unbreathable as power systems failed.

When we found what was left of the *Columbia*, that was a hard task. Those *Galaxy*-class ships were massive and without reliable sensors and no transporters we had to move deck by deck in the search for survivors. We were not equipped to deal with this sort of a scenario – not technologically, not logistically, not emotionally. I was constantly on the horn to command begging for medical ships and more specialized teams to deal with this sort of recovery, but in truth there wasn't anyone in the Federation equipped to deal in this sort of work so it fell to us.

As the days stretched on, the chances of finding survivors diminished and our task transitioned to recovery. It was such a mess. We didn't even know that some of the ships were missing. It was only when the *Ganci* stumbled across the *Hood* out near the Bolian Sector that we were able to determine that there was no trace of at least three starships.

Starfleet finally dispatched medical ships to help us with the survivors and to help to process the remains, but it was slow going having to work through the ships effectively by hand. There was a process where we would identify a wreck and try to marshal large pieces of debris together in a holding area, at which point shuttles would move in for a close range scan. It was too hazardous for anything much larger than a runabout to enter the debris field. The shuttles would try to ping any communicators and remote access any active computer systems, but success was very rare. The Borg had been extremely efficient in rendering these ships non-operational.

As the days dragged on it started to take an increasing toll on the crew. We were working around the clock along with the crews of the *Merrimac*, *Trieste*, and *Ajax* as well as the SCE with their *Antares*-class ships, but the strain was starting to show. My counselor advised me that more and more people were reaching. Likely, even more needed support but were refusing to seek it out.

It came to a head when we lost three people in *Columbia* when a plasma manifold erupted while they were trying to get deeper into the engineering hull. We couldn't continue to work like this and – for once – command agreed. They authorized the transportation of a Spacedock, which was to be transferred from the Deneb System to Wolf 359 to act as a safe space where the ships could be searched and remains could be recovered before being identified and sent to their families.

By then, though, it was clear that there were no more survivors to be found at Wolf 359. Starfleet started to redeploy the ships. There was a desire to show that despite the losses at 359 Starfleet still had plenty of ships. We were sent on something of a tour to reassure worlds that we were still out there and to remind the Cardassians, Tzenkethi, Romulans and any others who might have wanted to take advantage of the situation to think again. I thought that the crew would be grateful to leave and to get away from that place, but I had a lot of transfer requests to assignments on the new Spacedock from crewmembers who wanted to remain and help with the recovery operations: including my first officer, Zhang Mo.

When I asked her why, she said that there was still work to be done, and she didn't think it was right to leave until they had brought home as many of the dead as possible. I respected her decision and that of the others...but for me – I wanted to get as far away from Wolf 359 as possible. When I looked out my ready room window at those hulks sitting out there all I saw were the failures of command. I knew that if I stayed any longer I would've had to leave Starfleet.

LES BUENAMIGO

DOUGLAS STATION, RIBOS

Stardate 47949.8 – 2370

After arriving at Douglas Station, I am met by a tall hispanic man with a finely groomed mustache. He greets me warmly and offers a tour of the facility. Lieutenant Commander Buenamigo is something of a rising star in Starfleet Corp of Engineers having made his name during the salvage operations at Wolf 359 and the deployment of robotic systems to aid with the recovery efforts.

Throughout its history, Starfleet and the Federation has had a fractious relationship with robotic systems and AIs. Proponents will point out that there are many hazardous environments where it makes sense for robots or automated systems to operate, while detractors argue that robotic systems cannot adapt to the unexpected unless the system is a true AI which brings with it ethical concerns that the Federation continues to grapple with to this day and will likely continue into the future.

We arrive in his office, filled with mementos of his native Texas and a large decommissioned DOT standing sentinel to one side.

We always knew we were going to be sent there sooner or later. I was second officer on the *Rutan* and we were moved to the Andoria System along with the *Brunel* and *Scott* to wait for the outcome of the battle. The plan as we could figure it out was that Starfleet wanted us to swoop in after the battle and start to sweep away the remains of that Borg ship – get it somewhere secure away from prying eyes and sticky fingers.

When we got word that the battle had not gone well, at first we thought there had been some sort of issue with logistics. Maybe the ships had missed the Borg? It never occurred to us that the Borg would have utterly annihilated the fleet. I mean, we're not naive – we know that space is hard and space is dangerous – but usually when we have salvage ops it's because a ship suffered some sort of mechanical failure or encountered some natural phenomenon. When they go, they go *big*.

We had been on the *Horatio* cleanup after it was destroyed in '64 and there wasn't anything larger than a turbolift, and when the *Yamato* was destroyed in '65 the remains were destroyed to make sure it didn't fall into Romulan hands. Those were probably the two biggest salvage ops that we had been involved

with prior to 359. My point is it never got *personal*. Like, you didn't see ships let alone people – all we saw was debris or components. When we arrived at 359, it was very different.

When we arrived in system it was no longer a rescue operation and the attention was turning to salvage and recovery. The *Endeavour* was in command, but they were already overwhelmed with survivors and had taken to just tagging the location of bodies and identifying ships where they could. Something had made a mess of subspace. Sensors and transporters weren't reliable so we had to do it old school, dividing the system up into a grid and working methodically piece by piece.

The procedure was we would move into our grid and identify the debris and assign it to the relevant ship, then use tractor beams to stop its movement. We would try scans but they always came back inconclusive, so we would board the wreckage and then move deck by deck, compartment by compartment, to check for survivors. By that time it would be a miracle, but some species can survive in low oxygen environments – especially if they have a hibernation response – so it couldn't be taken for granted.

This meant that we had to be thorough with every ship, or at least every piece of ship. The last thing we wanted was to find we had just missed someone. We took to hammering on bulkheads as we went to see if there was any response from the sound carrying through the hulks, but that never happened.

Everything stopped when we found bodies or remains. We would holorecord everything in the location where they were found and if at all possible try and identify them by their combadge. When that wasn't possible, we would take a DNA sample and then prepare them for transport back to the *Rutan*. They would be placed into a body bag and we would escort them through the hulk to the shuttle. At first we would send the shuttle for each body we found, but when we got to the larger ships like *Columbia* or *Yamaguchi* there were so many we would wait until there were a dozen or so and then send one shuttle back while another returned.

Conditions were *rough*. Then there was an accident with some crew from the *Endeavour*, I think, and a plasma manifold ruptured, killing three of them. We found some larger debris from the *Republic*, an old *Constitution*-class ship

they used for training at the academy, and as we were pushing through the engineering hull we came across something which at first made me jump out of my skin! It fell out of a bulkhead from a cradle where it had been docked: this large dome with a pair of black lenses that looked like eyes. Once my heart had finished racing and we realized it wasn't some poor sapient's head we started wondering just what the hell was it? Shining our lights up we could see what looked like half a dozen of these things clamped in place.

When we got back to the *Rutan* the COB [Chief of the Boat, the most senior non-commissioned officer] asked where the hell had we found a DOT? He explained that back in the mid-23rd century starships, especially the long-range ones, would be fitted with these robots (the "DOT-7s") to carry out repairs and maintenance considered too hazardous for the crew. We were all intrigued by this little robot. Why weren't they in use anymore? We all knew about the android they had on the *Enterprise*, but he wasn't some sort of robot but a fully realized life-form. Why didn't we have some of these for carrying out hazardous operations? Back in the 23rd, Starfleet was a lot more willing to explore the use of computerized and robotic systems until an incident in 2268. A multitronic unit malfunctioned during a training exercise, crippling and destroying a number of starships. Apparently, it was the final straw after a number of AI related incidents so Starfleet moved away from using robots on ships, which just seemed utterly absurd to me! For one thing, they would be *much* more efficient in moving through the hulks to locate and identify bodies.

With the captain's permission, we brought the remaining DOTs to the *Rutan* and tried to reactivate them. Based on the logs, they hadn't been operational since the 2290s and were pretty much forgotten. We were able to get two of the units operational by cannibalizing parts from the others and set them to work.

The first hulk we tackled was the *Bellerophon*. We programmed the DOTs to map out the ships to identify safe routes throughout and to mark any hazards, to identify and record the location of any organic material they encountered. They worked *flawlessly*: we were able to clear the *Bellerophon* faster than any wreck hulk we had come across to date.

The DOTs worked so well that we were able to upgrade their maneuvering systems and outfit them with more modern sensor packages. We sent them out on an autonomous sweep to search for anything we might have missed in our existing grids. That was when we had the miracle: they found the runabout *Rhine*

largely intact, but it was several AUs away from the rest of the fleet. We headed there right away and we found Admiral Ross *alive*! He had been trapped in the runabout with no power, no comms, living off MREs and a bottle of Lagavulin for two weeks! He was in pretty poor shape – it's lucky we found him when we did, but it was all thanks to the DOTs!

It was clear by then that the salvage work was taking a huge toll on the recovery team. I don't just mean physically, but mentally. It was long hours in uncomfortable EVA suits in zero-g and, well, what we were finding was pretty grim. I remember one instance finding a group of five young officers in some quarters on the *Ibn Sina*. We found markings which suggested they had survived for maybe a week after the battle, but there was no way for them to contact anyone. We found a PADD with messages they had left for their families. That was tough, those moments, but we had to get it done, you know? I focused on trying to optimize the DOTs for the work we were doing, maybe even try and get another unit functioning.

Finally Starfleet brought in the Ossuary and the mission profile changed. The remaining hulks would be towed into the dock one by one and then searched. The remains could then be recovered and repatriated with much reduced risk to salvage teams. Most of the ships in the relief effort were going to be redeployed, but I wanted to stay and continue working with the DOTs. I saw great potential in this technology. I can understand why Starfleet moved away following the M5 incident, but that was a century ago. With the advancements in isolinear and positronic computing that have taken place, I really think we have a duty to explore the possibilities. Not just from a maintenance and hazardous environment perspective, but look at Wolf 359 itself: Would a fleet of remotely operated or autonomous ships been better deployed against the Borg? The end result might have been the same, but think of all the lives that would have been saved. A computer can learn and adapt exponentially faster than an organic mind – it's one of the reasons the Borg were able to beat us in the first place!

I am currently working on a project to demonstrate the potential from an updated DOT type robot and maybe something larger. Obviously, we aren't talking about AI in a real sense, but it's *long* past time for Starfleet to get over its phobia of the artificial. I'm hoping that at least some good can come from the tragedy at 359, from all that death, and in time we won't have to risk lives on the more mundane aspects of space.

MEDKAV, SON OF DAA'MAQ

NAGASAKI, EARTH



Stardate: 53277.3 – 2376

We leave MeDKav's residence and walk through the streets of Nagasaki. Soon, we find ourselves surrounded by trees and the sounds of the city fade away. The ambassador changed from his leisure clothes into formal armor. It is obvious that he holds this here-to-unknown "survivor" of the USS Kyushu in very high regard. The only sounds besides the chirping of birds and drone of cicadas are the grinding of MeDKav's boots on the stone path.

Suddenly, we turn a corner and are confronted with a tall wooden arch standing alone in the trees. Its bright red paint pops out in stark contrast to the lush greenness surrounding it. A long straw rope hangs across the center beam of the structure and folded streamers of white paper woven through its strands flutter in the gentle breeze. The scent of sakaki leaves hangs heavy in the air.

MeDKav bows deeply at his waist and growls at me to do the same. Once respects are properly paid, we pass through and continue down the stone path through the woods.

Most of your Federation has forgotten shame. You see it merely as a remnant of an oppressive past rather as the essential component of motivation.

♦ *I thought honor was what motivated Klingons?*

How can you have honor without shame? They are two sides of the same *darsek*.

When we finally departed the empire for Wolf 359, we thought we would find nothing but honor and glory. Instead, we found only shame: the realization we let our allies die without us at their side. It was unspeakable, unthinkable. But it did motivate us to begin to find our honor again.

Though most of our fleet was summoned back to Qo'noS, I remained on my flagship, the *Sho'Va*, with a few escorts to perform *ak'voh*.

◇ What?

[he sighs] *ak'voh* is the vigil for the recently fallen. In the ancient days, warriors would watch over their fallen comrades on the battlefield to ensure their bodies would not fall victim to predators and scavengers before their souls could leave their mortal shells and travel to *Sto-Vo-Kor*. Just because we had missed the fight, did not mean we would let Orion pirates and Ferengi scrap salesmen descend on Wolf 359 like jackals to dishonor the sacrifice made by your comrades. We swore a blood oath that Klingons would not leave that place until the last piece of debris left the Wolf System.

◇ And you are still there...

And we are still there.

Captain Amasov and the *Endeavour* were immediately overwhelmed with the official salvage effort. I offered my ship's assistance and he accepted. The first vessel my men boarded was the *Kyushu*, named after the island on which we now stand...

[We come to the end of the stone path and find a wooden structure made of Japanese cypress wood standing alone among the trees. It appears to be a *Shinto* shrine. A small fountain of water with two ladles sits next to the path. I watch in awe as MeDKav adeptly uses one of the ladles to rinse both his hands and his mouth. I'm surprised by this, as Klingons usually avoid water like Earth housecats. Still, it is obvious that he has done this ritual for years. After he is finished, I rinse my hands and mouth as well, doing my best to match his motions.]

It is traditional in Japanese culture to forge a sword to commemorate an auspicious occasion. It is one of the few facets of human culture that we truly understand. When the *Kyushu* was launched, Starfleet commissioned Japanese master swordsmith Yoshihara Yoshimasa to craft a katana that would sail with the ship for all its days. He came from an ancient line of master smiths renowned for their ability to create a tempering pattern in the steel that appeared to be clouds in the sky. Starfleet felt that it was an appropriate design for a ship that sailed in the heavens.

◇ How do you know this?

I learned. Something I wish some in your Federation would do more of when it comes to Klingons.

[The sliding door of the shrine opens and a priest dressed in a white robe and black head covering appears. Neither he nor MeDKav say a word to each other, but each bow simultaneously. The priest beckons us to follow him into the shrine's sanctuary. As we approach the entrance, we remove our shoes and pass through the threshold behind him.]

When my men entered the *Kyushu*, we thought all aboard were dead. The only things we found were floating corpses, breached bulkheads, and burst conduits. Then, when we entered the captain's ready room, we discovered the only survivor on the ship. A piece of flying debris from one of the EPS regulators had blown across the room, shattered its glass case, and broken it into three pieces. Soon after, the gravitational field aboard also failed. It was floating alone in the quiet darkness...

[The priest stops in front of the shrine's altar, picks up a cluster of sakaki branches, and waves them over an object as he utters a prayer. Then, he steps aside to let MeDKav pass. The giant Klingon steps forward, kneels, and removes a small flask of bloodwine from his armor. He respectfully pours a fresh drink into a small ceramic cup placed in front of the altar. It is then I notice the sword: a katana of unparalleled beauty. However, it has been pieced back together using a much darker steel that I don't recognize. Though one would think the dark welds on the blade would diminish its beauty, somehow, they enhance its imposing and stunning appearance.]

♦ The sword? Is that the last “*survivor*” of the *Kyushu*?

[The priest flashes me an annoyed glance. MeDKav ignores my breach of decorum.]

Among Klingons – and even among some *humans*, as I have come to learn – there is belief that a blade carries a spirit of its own. It is called the *yinqa’*. Kahless taught us that saving the life of another and helping them return home is one of the highest acts of virtue a warrior can hope to attain. We rescued the sword and offered to return it to the crew of the *Endeavour*. However, they said it would be “a waste of their time to worry about a butter knife right now.”

[A look of disgust crosses his face.]

I thought I understood Humans until that moment.

We kept the pieces of the katana on board the *Sho’Va* until we were relieved and returned to Qo’noS. Then, with permission from K’mpec, I took it to K’vel’kar, the blade foundry at the foot of Mount Kri’stak where the Unforgettable forged

the first *bat'leth* over a thousand years ago.

Though the smiths there had never worked on a human blade before, they understood the importance of what we were trying to accomplish. With great effort, they were able to repair it with *baakonite*. It took years, but I was finally able to bring another survivor of Wolf 359 home. This shrine agreed to help care for it and give its *yinqa'* a place to rest. With this act, a small part of my honor has been returned.

You see, this katana is the opposite of the Borg. While they take life and turn it into death, this sword takes death and turns it into life. Steel from both Mother Earth and Mother Qo'noS exist harmoniously side by side in this blade, permanently merging our planets together, and creating a new spirit that is of both places. It is the best of *both* worlds...

ZHANG MO

THE OSSUARY, WOLF 359

Stardate 48364.4 – 2371

"Ossuary" is a word taken from ancient Earth meaning a container or room where the bones of the dead are placed. It is doubly apt for the station now located in the Wolf 359 System: a place where the bones of dead starships now rest and where the remains of their fallen crews were recovered and cared for before being sent home.

The station commander, Zheng Mo, takes her role as the custodian of this site very seriously. There is a sense of reverence as she talks about the work done in the years since the battle. As we walk through the empty high bay, we pass through into dock two where I am left momentarily dumbstruck by what I see: the broken and skeletal remains of the USS Columbia, barely recognizable as the majestic Galaxy-class starship that led the charge against the Borg. Commander Zheng gives me a moment as I take in the scene before gesturing for me to follow her through to her office. She asks if I would be more comfortable with the viewports opaque but I decline. She explains that she finds that the view reminds her of the importance of their work here.

The primary mission was to rescue any survivors trapped inside the remains of the fleet and to retrieve the bodies of those who had died. It took a while for us to get a solid number but we estimated somewhere in the region of 15,000 souls unaccounted for. The challenges that we faced were immense: the number of ships lost and the relative state of the hulks, the after effects of the graviton burst which rendered traditional search and rescue tactics moot, and how relatively isolated the Wolf 359 System was in the first place. There was almost no Starfleet infrastructure in system – certainly nothing that we could use to coordinate search and rescue.

After the initial weeks of rescue operations – and once it became clear that there would be no more survivors – the mission moved to retrieving remains and trying to learn why the Borg had been able to defeat the fleet so easily. We knew the Borg were technologically superior, and some of the ships deployed had been shall we say past their prime, but we had lost a number of the *Nebula* and *Ambassador*-class ships which made up the bulk of Starfleet's exploration and defense forces, not to mention the *Columbia*

[She gestures to the windows.]

Starfleet had a lot of questions about what had happened and it needed the answers so it could put those lessons into the next generation of starships. There had been a sense of growing unease across the quadrant for at least a few years prior to 359, but this cemented in the minds of many that the galaxy was entering a period of instability. Starfleet would need to adapt and be ready to face that.

The Ossuary started life as most other starbases: the core components are assembled at shipyards and then these are taken under warp-tow to systems to be assembled. This station was going to be deployed to Beta Aquelie to replace the old V-type station there, but Starfleet decided to repurpose the station and brought it here to allow safer and easier access for the recovery teams. Once the main parts of the dock assembly were established and we got the reactors online we were able to start bringing in ships. The SCE teams had done a fine job of marshaling the remains to the Lagrange point and we were ready to bring in the first ship to be examined: it was the USS *Kyushu*, a *New Orleans*-class ship. It was relatively intact and had already been declared cleared by the SCE teams. We felt it a good candidate to test the dock and our procedures. It was pretty nerve-wracking as the tugs pulled the ship in towards the doors.

Once *Kyushu* was inside the dock and settled on the tractor cradle, we caught our first look at the ship under the lights of the high bay. It was otherworldly to see the ship just sitting there; its surface postmarked with scars and deep gouges, decks open to space, warp coils exposed. The ship was moved into the low bay where we had set up the clean room with atmosphere and we could get to work. We had a high level of confidence that there were no remains to be found, but we still treated the ship as if that were a possibility. We were also developing procedures for when we brought in ships which were less structurally sound and would not have been fully cleared.

As we made the way through the ships, we also had engineering teams who would try to access the ships' computer cores to download the flight data recorder and the logs stored there. That was extremely important to command for the investigation, but I guess I don't have to tell you that.

We carried out comprehensive sensor scans of the ships to map out all the

damage each ship had received and ran metallurgy to see the effect the Borg's weapons had had on the ships, which we had been unable to do while the ships were out in space. Apart from that, we were told not to interfere with the ships. Once the assessment had been completed and any hazardous materials and weapons had been removed, we would then take the ship back to the high bay and then return it to the debris field and move onto the next ship.

Some ships were in, shall we say, less materially sound condition than others. The *Saratoga* was particularly bad. In that instance we would move it into one of the lower auxiliary bays where we could gather as much of the ship as we could positively identify and attempt to reconstruct computer cores. That was very challenging given how little remained of the ship and how many parts lacked identifiable markings. We often had to resort to molecular analysis to identify what yard the metallurgy came from and to go from there.

The biggest challenge, as you might imagine, was *Columbia*. The *Galaxy*-class ships are far larger than any other ship in the fleet and Starfleet was very keen to analyze everything to identify if there was any inherent flaw with the ship's design. That and its position as Admiral Hanson's flagship made recovering the data from the ship a priority.

Analysis suggested *Columbia* had suffered extensive damage from the Borg before succumbing to a warp core breach; it appeared that they had managed to eject the core but it had detonated just below the ship. The debris had been scattered, spread across at least eight major sections, then brought into dock two where we reconstructed the ship as best we could. It took us almost a month just to get the pieces into the dock and positioned.

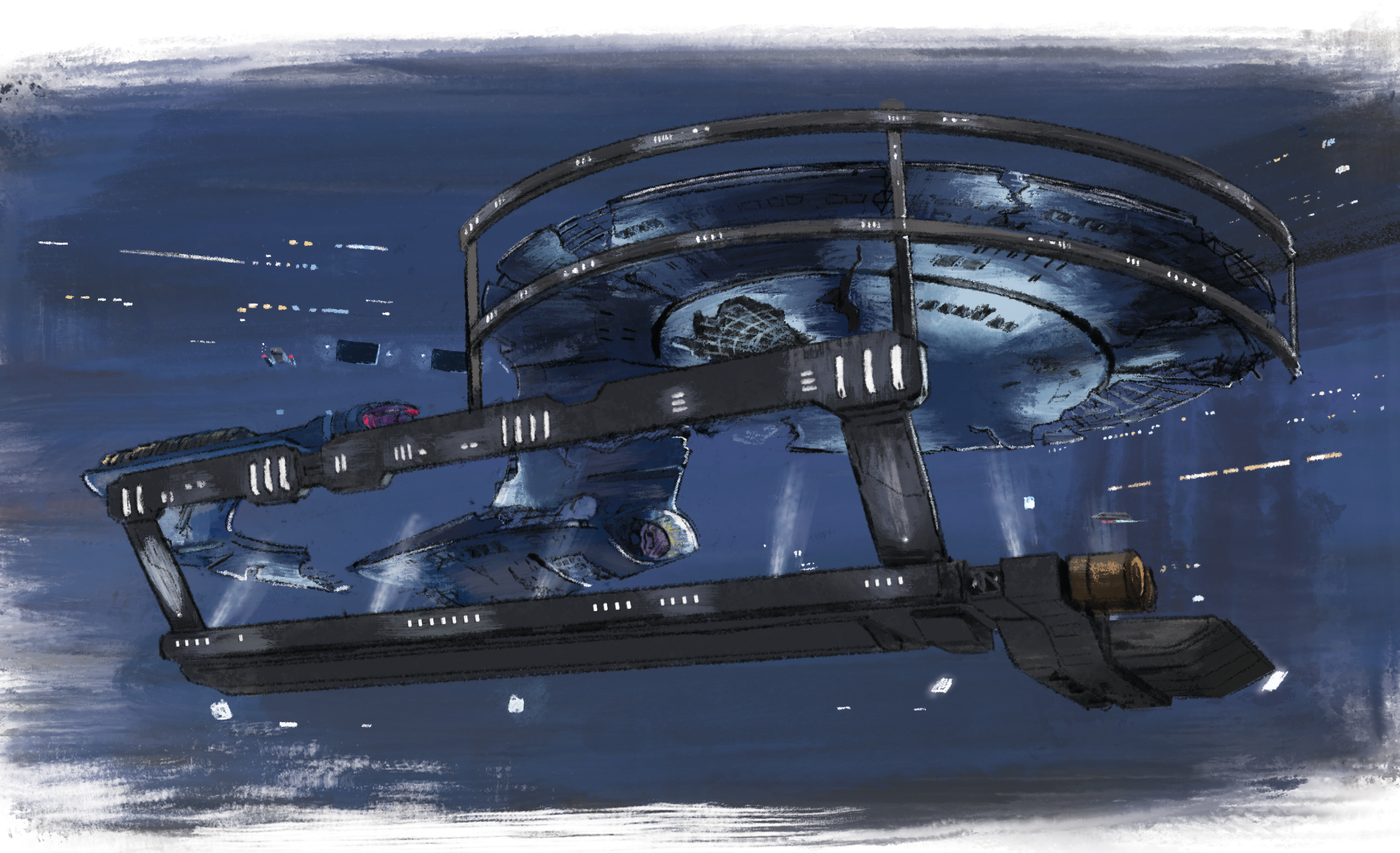
The result was a pretty ghastly sight. There is something clean about the lines of those *Galaxy*-class ships – I remember when *Galaxy* was launched seeing it on the news looking so sleek and futuristic. What sits in dock two is more a collection of bones than anything else. We knew once it was in the dock *Columbia* would not be moved out again, Starfleet wanted an extremely thorough examination conducted over every inch of the ship. There was a team from Utopia Planitia dispatched to help conduct the investigation after we had recovered the bodies and computer cores. I remember when we finally got into the flag bridge, we found Hanson still sitting there in his command chair. That was surreal.

There was, of course, the mission to recover remains – to make sure they were identified and returned home. While the ships had been in freezing vacuum these had been preserved, but once the ships were brought into the Ossuary and we established atmosphere we were against the clock to find the bodies and to get them to the morgue to be processed before there could be any further deterioration. Again, fortunately once inside the low bay it was possible to use the interior sensors to scan for communicators and organic material. The bodies would be collected and taken with all reverence to the mortuary where they were placed in stasis until formal identification could be made.

For all the devastation that was visible out there and on the ships, when it came to the people there was very little visible trauma on most of those we recovered. You hear stories from during the Klingon War of the types of wounds they would face but here most of the time they seemed peaceful, like they were just sleeping. There was an incident where we found a young ensign in the *Gage* and one of the recovery team broke down and started shaking her shoulders trying to get her to wake up. It was tough.

It takes a very particular type of person to work in the Ossuary. We had a dozen counselors assigned to the station following the lessons learned from the *Endeavour* and the initial recovery efforts. We would take the remains to the mortuary and they would be placed in stasis. We would replicate a new uniform for them and make sure their bodies were treated in accordance to their wishes as listed in their service record or according to the custom of their home worlds.

I'm not sure what the future holds for the Ossuary going forward. Even now, some three years later, we are still finding debris from the battle further out in the system. There was a concern about pirates and opportunists trying to steal technology and high quality duranium necessitating a constant patrol of the system, but more recently we've had ships approaching the "battle site" area carrying family members and people who want to come and pay their respects. We ask them to maintain a respectful distance but I imagine Starfleet will have to look into some sort of permanent station to look over the ships



ELIZABETH SHELBY

USS *ILLINOIS*, EN ROUTE TO ZAKDORN

Stardate 47626.9 – 2370



I didn't believe it at first. I had made my peace and was waiting for Captain Riker to issue the order to ram the Borg ship, then they just...stopped. I remember hearing Commander Data reporting that he had "put the Borg to sleep" in such a nonchalant manner – it was very much in keeping with my experiences of working with him. There was an innocence to the commander I found quite endearing.

Captain Riker requested I lead an away mission to confirm the status of the Borg and we beamed over – myself and a small security detail led by Lieutenant Worf. I know it sounds strange but as soon as we rematerialized on the ship it felt wrong. I don't know if I could quantify it to someone who hadn't been there but when I had been on the Borg ship previously there was an oppressive air all around and a sound, just at the edge of consciousness – like servos maybe? But it was dead quiet now aside from the irregular thrum coming from the power manifold. We quickly established that the Borg ship's power systems were in a runaway cascade. Fortunately, Captain Riker was inclined to let it destroy itself. A part of me wanted to go and find a way to stop it but looking back now...no, it was certainly for the best that the ship was destroyed.

In the immediate aftermath of the cube's destruction we were all in a bit of a daze. In truth, I don't think *anyone* expected to come out of this alive. Signal traffic was haphazard and orders were being issued and rescinded, there was a sudden dash to get recovery crews out to Wolf 359 to help rescue any survivors. The Borg debris needed to be collected and removed from Earth orbit and only now were the people of Earth realizing just how close they had come to oblivion. At Captain Riker's request I remained on *Enterprise* as his XO while Captain Picard was being tended by Dr. Crusher and Starfleet Medical. Riker ran the gauntlet of admirals who now wanted a piece of him, a chance to ask a question that would obfuscate the fiasco that had been Starfleet's

response and deflect the blame away from the admiralty and president.

As I suspected, Admiral Hanson's command of the task force made him the focus of Starfleet's targeting scanners and his death left him unable to defend himself. Investigators began to weave the narrative that he was overly emotional in his decision to attack. I very much opposed that viewpoint and made my thoughts on the matter clear when it was my time to enter the gauntlet.

I remained on *Enterprise* while Captain Picard underwent his initial rehabilitation, medical assessments, and the surgery to remove the Borg components that had been implanted in his body. Starfleet had a difficult decision to make regarding Captain Picard. Captain Riker and the whole crew were fiercely loyal to him and I can not help but admire anyone who can endear such loyalty in their subordinates. I heard a rumor that Starfleet insisted that if Picard was to remain as captain of the *Enterprise* then it was only on the condition that Riker remain as his XO to ensure there were no lingering side effects of the Borg, but I don't put too much stock in that personally. Captain Riker, I'm sorry *Commander* Riker, is a damn fine officer and any ship would be lucky to have him as captain. I hope the admiralty will find a ship for him, because we need officers like him leading.

As for myself, I'm not ashamed to say I was suddenly in high demand. I was offered several very impressive positions and even received a message from Captain Keogh, who was selecting his crew for the *Odyssey*, the next *Galaxy*-class ship that was due to enter service. He offered me the position as his XO based in no small part he told me on a personal recommendation from Captain Picard. I was extremely tempted and it was absolutely what I had hoped to achieve when I first accepted the posting to Starfleet Tactical, but everything had changed. With the death of Admiral Hanson and with all I knew about the Borg I knew I couldn't focus just on myself anymore.

Starfleet Tactical was officially defunct following Wolf 359. Starfleet finally accepted that it had to put the defense of the Federation on equal footing with its diplomatic and exploration missions so they established Strategic Operations under Admiral Hayes. Once I left *Enterprise* at McKinley Station and reported to him, we were faced with the monumental challenge of not only rebuilding the task force, but completely redefining what a starship had to be going into the 25th century and, more importantly, how we trained officers at the academy.

I spent many months analyzing the sensor logs and the recordings from the battle and I have been asked by Admiral Holland to compile the official report into the effectiveness of the tactics that were employed in Wolf 359. It was *hard* going through the flight data recorders – seeing people I knew go through their final moments employing tactics that I had helped devise and realizing how wrong we were. I tried to remember what Admiral Hanson had told me: we have five years to save the Federation. The Borg had jumped the gun, but we survived, and I was damned if I was going to ignore the gift of the extra time we now had.

We started working on new ship designs that looked unlike anything we had seen before. I'd never seen such a variety of designs – you would be hard pressed to recognize some of them as Starfleet ships. Some of the designs like the *Defiant* and *Intrepid*-classes worked, others like the *Yeagers* not as much. We also expanded the role of support ships, building more *California*-class to work as supply and logistic vessels to support a main task force. It was very much a case of throwing tribbles at the wall and seeing what stuck. We have some exciting developments coming, too – still classified, I'm afraid, but we're in a much better position now than we were in '66 and a good thing, too. With the discovery of the wormhole in the Bajor Sector, the galaxy just keeps getting smaller. I shudder to think what might be lurking out in the Gamma Quadrant just waiting for us.

ROBERT DESOTO

JOSEPH M'BENGA MEDICAL CENTER, EARTH

Stardate 45904.2 – 2368



I came to maybe 36 hours later? It was all a haze of voices and shouting. When I finally did wake up I was in so much pain all I wanted was to pass back out! There was a crewman, maybe Nurse Lally, who came over and shone a light in my eyes. My attempts to sit up were quickly dissuaded by the wave of nausea that hit me everytime I moved from the horizontal, so I made the command decision that it would be best to wait for the doc to come and give me a report.

A little while later, Doc Hughes and Commander Murakami moved into my line of sight. I'd already been able to gather that things were bad: for one thing, I wasn't in sickbay. I think I was in the wardroom along with others, and they were using portable generators to provide light and power to the monitoring equipment. Hughes repeated the examination, blinding me with a light and asking a load of questions about how I felt and what I could remember. I said the last thing I recalled was Aly talking about having an idea to stop the Borg from taking the vessel. I assumed that since I wasn't currently modeling a fetching little black number she had been successful. I assumed that she was off trying to run repairs to the ship.

After a while Doc Hughes gave me an injection and helped me to sit up. I was right, we were in the wardroom and there were a dozen cots laid out with crew in them...and four where sheets had been pulled up over their heads.

"Captain, you need to listen to me," he said. "You suffered a serious blow to the head and the trauma caused a cerebral edema; there was swelling of the brain. Normally, I'd just get you on a biobed and we could relieve the pressure via cortical stimulation and subdermal ventriculostomy, but that wasn't an option."

I looked between the doc and Hiroshi. I didn't realize how long I'd been out nor how bad things were. "Why wasn't that an option?" I asked.

"I'll let Commander Murakami explain the details. The point is, I have been able to repair the damage to the meningeal artery and the swelling has reduced, but I don't have the resources or the staff to try and keep you here. So, I'm releasing you to Commander Murakami." He fitted a monitor to my arm to allow him to monitor my vitals via his tricorder and then without another word he was away. I'd never seen the doc run so ragged.

Hiroshi helped me up off the cot – I was still pretty unsteady on my feet – and led us to a nearby Damage Control Station on deck three. It was acting as the "bridge." We stepped aside into what was nominally a storage locker but was apparently now the ready room. We perched on some crates and I saw the strain of the past day had taken on him. He looked like he was carrying the weight of the entire ship on his shoulders. I placed a hand on his shoulder and said to just breathe and tell me what we were looking at.

He started by explaining that Aly had managed to perform a computer reboot to the ship's original firmware – we're talking pre LCARS, what it left the yard with. She had been able to enact some sort of security protocol that was a holdover from the 2290s. It had stopped the Borg but had effectively destroyed engineering and the computer core had gone offline and erased itself as part of the protocol. In short, we were dead in the water.

I had to take it slow; sudden movements would make my head swim and I got tired easily, but I felt it was important for the crew to see myself and Hiroshi. I think it's safe to say we were all in shock.

We tried to piece together exactly what had happened, which was proving difficult without the main computer or access to the ship's sensors. Hiroshi had asked everyone to record their recollections onto PADDs or any systems that were not linked into the ship. Seems that after the Borg had boarded the ship they had performed some modifications to the deflector and impulse engines which had allowed the ship to enter some other form of FTL. From a star fix we had managed to take it appeared we had traveled from Wolf 359 to near the Bolius Sector in a couple of hours. On any other day that sort of a discovery would have been game changing: it would revolutionize travel across the Federation and open up the Delta and Gamma Quadrants for exploration, but all of that was for naught if we couldn't tell anyone.

The shuttlebay had taken a hit during the battle destroying the shuttles

although we had been able to salvage some of the fusion reactors to provide some power on the *Hood*.

Doc Hughes had been coordinating medical teams to find the wounded... and the dead.

[He takes a deep breath then stands and walks around the room for a moment before getting another drink from the replicator. This time it is just water. He returns to the couch and sits back down.]

We'd lost a lot. There was a roll call and only about a third of the crew were accounted for – there wasn't anyone from below deck eight to be found. Hiroshi had led an engineering detail down to check the status of main engineering but when I asked he just shook his head and said it wasn't pretty, which was something of an understatement. Of those still alive around two dozen were in critical condition, around another 50 were walking wounded. Food and water were starting to become a concern. Of course we had MREs and rationpacks throughout the ship but we'd lost access to everything in the engineering section so we were raiding the escape pod supplies. We had maybe a two weeks' supply of food and after that – well after two weeks of MREs I expect we would have welcomed starvation. [he smiles ruefully]

Fortunately, it didn't come to that. We were in the "bridge" when an ensign came running in shouting that there was a starship outside. We ran for the nearest viewport and, true enough, the USS *Ganci*, a fleet tender and supply ship, was sitting out there presumably trying to hail us and wondering what the hell an *Excelsior*-class ship was doing drifting out here. They patched into our comm network and we were able to communicate our situation. They came right to our rescue. She was a small ship, only room for a dozen or so, but they were able to hook an umbilical to *Hood* and let us get some secondary systems online. Within hours, there were more ships arriving to take our wounded and to try and figure out what to do with us.

I think I've already mentioned that *Hood* was an old ship even before Wolf 359, and after everything that she'd been through there wasn't too much left of her. They towed her to yards at Inbhir Ghòrdain and I thought that was that: they would remove any Borg technology they could get their hands on. I knew they were especially interested in whatever modifications had been made to the deflector for this new propulsion system, but I figured that was probably it

for *Hood*. Like too many of her forebears she would suffer an ignominious end.

It was probably that realization that brought me here. There's a lot of pressure when you take the center seat to be able to just absorb everything and to keep going. For some people that works, that's how they can cope with it. I know that's what Jean-Luc has done – get right back in the saddle – but I needed some time. Besides, it sounded like my lady was “retiring” to the farm upstate.

I was visited by Admirals Paris and Ross shortly after. I thought that it was nice that they would come here just to check in on me, but they wanted me to hear it first before it was out on the news. They knew the toll the battle had taken on us. Not just the ship, but on all of Starfleet and even the Federation. It had seriously dented our self image of being able to take on anything the galaxy throws at us.

Ross had been there and I could see that it had affected him, too: he seemed quieter, more reflective than I had remembered. They started talking about the importance of symbols and about redefining the conversation.

I was having a hard time following so asked them to just cut to the chase, what did they come here to tell me?

Ross stated “We lost 40 starships at Wolf 359. That is a tragedy, however you slice it. But if we lost 39 starships and one *survived* – that changes the narrative.”

I was still none the wiser. It's all well and good wishing we hadn't lost 40 starships, but that just wasn't the reality of the situation. They clearly were expecting me to grasp what they were saying sooner but in my defense, I was on a lot of medication at the time.

It was Paris who finally said it. “We're going to repair the *Hood*.”

It made absolutely no sense, *Excelsiors* are literally 10 a penny and there was nothing special about *Hood*. Ross disagreed.

“Of all the ships lost at 359, you never gave up the ship, and when they tried to take it you denied them their prize. I'll be honest with you, Robert, Starfleet is hurting after this and we need a good news story. Being able to say that one ship despite everything was able to defy the odds and return to service? We need to do that and we need you, too.”

And so they have. They brought her back to the Clydebank yards for a complete overhaul: everything from the keel up was refurbished and repaired, new warp core, new computer systems, new weapons. She should be able to go toe to toe with a *Galor*-class now. Hiroshi has been overseeing the refit, but she'll be in effect a brand new ship. Starfleet incorporated a lot of new technology into her to see about the feasibility of retrofitting a lot of the older ship classes to more modern standards. She should be good for another 30 years at least.

Not sure I can say the same about me, but I feel more like myself again and I think I'm ready to get back on the horse.

A dynamic space battle scene from Star Wars: The Force Awakens. In the center, the Resistance's Millennium Falcon is firing its main cannons, creating bright blue energy beams. To its left, a First Order TIE fighter is engaged in combat. Above the Falcon, a larger First Order ship, possibly a Star Destroyer, is visible with its red lightsaber-like energy cannons glowing. The background is a deep black space filled with stars and the faint outlines of other ships and debris.

CHAPTER 8 AFTERMATH

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EL'RIK ZH'UHEAD

STARFLEET ACADEMY, SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH

Stardate 45904.2 – 2368

Zh'uhead and I take a final stroll around Starfleet Academy's campus. The sun is setting to the west as we pass through the Japanese Gardens towards the gravel path that follows the meandering edge of the bay. A pair of cadets in running gear jog past us at a speed that makes our old joints ache. Zh'uhead is silent, but I can't help the impression that he is leading me somewhere with purpose. Finally, about 300 meters down the path, he takes me through a gap in a hedge. I must have passed this spot dozens of times in the last two and half decades, but never realized there was anything beyond this group of bushes.

After five more meters, we pop out right at the edge of the water. The panorama that confronts us is absolutely stunning. The Golden Gate Bridge is directly in front of us. Its solar panels shimmer as orange light reflects off the glistening wavetops. The sea air surrounds us as a few seagulls caw on the distant breeze. Otherwise it is completely quiet.

It's only then that I take stock of our more immediate surroundings. A small patch of manicured green grass, less than half the size of a tennis court, butts up against the shore. A few wooden benches around the periphery of the space indicate that this is a spot meant for extended contemplation.

In the very center of the space is a one meter tall cube of black marble. Carved in irregular intervals over its blank surface are 40 stars. Each is meticulously decorated with gilded paint so that they seem to burst forth from the lifeless surface of the cube in the fading sunlight.

What you're looking at is the only official memorial on this entire campus to Wolf 359. Back when they put this up in 2370, there was talk about putting it right in the center of the quad so every cadet would pass it on their way from the barracks to class. However, certain members of the Alumni Association felt that would be too "depressing" for young leaders in training, so they stuck it back here.

[Zh'uhead takes a deep breath and takes in the landscape for a moment.]

Piss-poor reasoning aside, I think they might have made a better choice.

You know, for nearly a decade, this was the only official memorial in the entire UFP? There was not an insignificant number in the government that wanted to bury Wolf 359 in the pages of history and let it go forgotten and unmourned. The problem with forward leaning organizations is that failure is difficult to justify or explain. It took another decade of bloodshed and conflict to force the higher-ups to realize that the Federation people needed more central places to come together and confront their memories of trauma and death. That's why they finally passed that bill in the council to convert the Ossuary at Wolf 359 into a public museum and memorial.

Do you see that plaque at the base of the cube? Read it.

[I study the inscription mounted beneath the memorial.]



Herald, save thou thy labour;

Come thou no more for ransom, gentle herald:

They shall have none, I swear, but these my joints;

Which if they have as I will leave 'em them,

Shall yield them little...



Gift of the Class of 2354



Shakespeare's *Henry V*, when the young king tells the French messenger before Agincourt that he and his comrades would rather die than submit to their demands.

◇ But Agincourt was a great victory. Wolf 359 was a defeat.

Are you sure about that? Wolf 359 changed everything for the United Federation of Planets. Almost overnight, the Federation Council tripled Starfleet's defense budget. In less than two years, the most anti-interventionist government in recent UFP history was wiped away by a peaceful election and transition of power. A new wave of reformist officer thinkers who were

dismissed as crackpots before were suddenly given a real voice in command policy and modernization planning. Shelby, Sisko, Gomez, Janeway, and others worked together to help rebuild and transform the fleet from a mass of floating space hotels to a lean, sharp organization that could both explore and defend equally well.

No fewer than 14 new starship classes introduced after 2366 incorporated lessons learned from the Borg and Wolf 359 into their designs. Innovations from quantum torpedoes to bioneural gel packs, and even holographic back-up crew members can trace their lineage to that battle. When the Borg returned in 2372, Starfleet defeated them in less than 72 hours with no loss to any civilian population or infrastructure. That's a *huge* victory in my book.

♦ It also created a group of radicals like James Leyton.

Yes, that is true. But Wolf 359 also forced the Federation to confront its own mortality. What seemed like an unbeatable juggernaut coasting to the end of history was almost wiped clean from the face of the galaxy in less than a month in 2366. We realized that we couldn't just focus on making new friends, but also had to be prepared to confront new enemies that would never tolerate or accept our way of life. It was a lesson that pushed us to help free Bajor from occupation. It kept us focused on the Cardassian DMZ when every single gul and legate seemed to want to test the boundaries of the new treaty. It allowed us to stop the Klingons cold in the Archanis Sector when they came calling in 2374... it built the Starfleet that rallied the Alpha Quadrant and defeated the Dominion.

We lost 11,000 at Wolf 359, but their sacrifice ended up saving us all. They gave their lives so that two old Starfleet officers could stand in this quiet spot almost 30 years later, remembering them as the sun disappears into the tranquil Pacific.

WILLIAM ROSS

PHILEDELPHIA, EARTH

Stardate 57436.2 – 2380



There is no question in my mind: without Wolf 359 we would not have survived the Dominion War. None whatsoever.

When I look back 20 years, Starfleet was just a paper tiger. We were complacent and in no fit state to mount any kind of prolonged military action. Hell, if the Romulans had known just how poor things were they could have waltzed right up to Vulcan, had their reunification, and there would have been nothing any of us could do about it. No, as tragic as Wolf 359 was, even with the 11,000 dead, without that defeat we would have been utterly annihilated by the Dominion and the death count could well have been in the hundreds of billions. Believe me, I saw the projections. They did *not* make for happy reading.

Even as it was, it took us a long time to really absorb the lessons from 359. In the immediate aftermath there seemed like a real push for change and we started projects like the *Defiant* and *Prometheus*-class, but almost immediately there were voices asking if this was an overcorrection. The Borg threat was still viewed as more of a long term problem and there was a feeling that now with knowledge of their capabilities and with advanced warning we would be better placed to face them; "*rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cygno.*"

♦ I'm sorry, a what?

It means "a rare bird in the lands and very much like a black swan." A swan is a large type of bird that was common on Earth before the nuclear wars. In ancient Rome and throughout the Middle Ages swans were white and the idea that a swan could be any other color was simply impossible. That was the way of it throughout all of Europe until an explorer found a black swan in Australia, on the other side of the planet. In an instant the world shifted. Something

impossible had happened and what had been true in the morning was now false.

♦ I still don't think I understand.

My point is, that even while the Holland Commission was in progress there was a view within Starfleet that the reason we lost at Wolf 359 was the technological superiority of the Borg and not because of the failures within Starfleet. That's not to say that we could have stopped the Borg with conventional means, but our response was sorely lacking. They saw the Borg as a black swan; it was something impossible until it wasn't and then it was just a rare event that we would now be prepared for. They were still hesitant to consider that the golden age of peace might not reign until the end of history, but may have been just a high point in a cycle. The same cycle that has been playing out for countless years for all the powers of the quadrant.

This was exacerbated when Cardassia signed Amrita's peace treaty and gave up Bajor. Now, not only had we defeated the Borg but there was peace with Cardassia and Bajor was finally free. You can see why we started to slip back into old habits. The more tactical vessel projects were put on the backburner and we slid back towards business as usual.

You would be forgiven for imagining that with the discovery of the wormhole to a region of space completely unexplored, we might display some caution. But the call of the frontier is ingrained into every Starfleet officer and so we drove headlong into the Gamma Quadrant. It was only when the *Odyssey* was lost that Starfleet finally understood the galaxy had changed and immediately put the *Defiant* and *Prometheus* programs back into production along with upgrades to the rest of the fleet.

We also revised the training regimen and started to implement fleet deployments and secured logistical supply lines. They even reformed the Marines. Yet, despite all that, we were still caught flat-footed by the Dominion. Partly because we still didn't know how to wield Starfleet as an effective fighting force, and also because the Dominion engaged in covert ops and diplomacy – something the Borg never did.

There were challenges of course. Jim Leyton's coup used up a lot of the goodwill Starfleet had managed to garner following 359, but without the wake

up call – or rather, the bloody nose the Borg gave us – we would have been at least five years behind where we were at the start of the conflict. As it was, we took close to a year just to find our footing. Imagine if the Dominion had shown up in 2365. I think they would have steamrolled over the entire quadrant in under 18 months.

AKELLEN MACET

◀ CDS *TRAGAR*, BAJOR SYSTEM ▶▶ Stardate: 56539.2 – 2379 ▶

The Cardassian Union has something of a tumultuous relationship with the United Federation of Planets. During the later 23rd century, relations were cordial and there were even overtures made about Cardassia joining the Federation, but a military coup and the formation of the Central Command put an end to any possibility of an alliance.

When Cardassia annexed Bajor in the early 24th century, the Federation placed them under sanctions and this led to some 50 years of tensions and skirmishes – referred to by some as the Cardassian War, although there was no formal declaration of war by either side. President Amitra made ending this dispute the cornerstone of her administration and these efforts were almost completely derailed by the arrival of the Borg in 2366. Despite this, tensions continued to rise, culminating in Cardassia aligning with the Dominion in 2373 and a devastating war that ended up costing millions of lives.

*While visiting Deep Space Nine I was given the opportunity to speak to Gul Macet, captain of the Galor-class ship *Trager*, to get his impressions of relations between Cardassia and the Federations during the 2360s. His resemblance to his infamous cousin Skarin Dukat is uncanny – hence the interview taking place on his ship rather than on the station itself.*

Your people have a saying, that the flapping of an insect's wings can cause a hurricane on the other side of the planet?

♦ Yes, it's called the **Butterfly Effect**.

Ah, the butterfly is the insect?

♦ Yes.

I see. Well, the Borg are perhaps somewhat *large* for insects, but the analogy still holds true. Your defeat at Wolf 359 led to huge ramifications within the Cardassian Union. In 2366 we were desperate for peace. The war was never popular with the people of Cardassia, but the longer it continued the more entrenched we became. The more desperately the Central Command needed a win to show that it had been worthwhile, that there was meaning to all the death and suffering the war had visited upon our people. But the Federation and Starfleet refused to engage in a meaningful way. They simply enforced the

sanctions that had been visited down upon us after the annexation of Bajor. The border skirmishes were not sufficient to appease the hawks in the Central Command and led them to push for more aggressive forays into Federation space. But there was a feeling within the military that any attempt to go toe to toe with Starfleet would result in our decimation.

This view persisted for close to two decades and was accepted as fact. The sanctions devastated our economy which led to us seeking alternative sources for resources – including Bajor – but as the mines there ceased to yield materials in sufficient quantities to sustain the Cardassian war machine it became inevitable that we would have to accept the reality of our situation and sue for peace.

So when Amitra's administration started to make overtures of a negotiated peace rather than dictating terms the Central Command saw an opportunity to salvage some dignity.

When the Borg invaded Federation space and the final peace talks were canceled it was a devastating blow. We wondered if the overtures had merely been a ruse all along to make us use up more resources and to put pressure on us from the civilian population who were tired of the hardships they were enduring. Once we received word that the Starfleet had destroyed this invader and Amitra again reached out to conduct the peace talks the Central Command would have likely signed away Cardassia Prime. They immediately agreed and the peace treaty was ratified less than a month after Wolf 359.

Only when the true extent of Starfleet's defeat at Wolf 359 became understood did the Central Command begin to question everything they had believed about the Federation. We conducted our own analysis of the battle from what data we had and it quickly became apparent that Starfleet was not some undefeatable juggernaut. While its larger ships were impressive, they were too few in number and too widely distributed to be effectively deployed.

There grew this sense within some quarters of the Central Command that we had rolled over and showed our belly to a toothless old *keres*.

You might rightly ask how such a failure of intelligence would lead us to this conclusion, especially when the Obsidian Order proclaimed itself as the preeminent intelligence agency in the Alpha Quadrant. In truth, the order was

far more adept at telling those in power what they wanted to hear and quelling dissent within Cardassia's borders. Much like Starfleet, they were able to maintain a reputation that perhaps reality would not support.

Almost immediately there were calls for the treaty to be scrapped and to renew an offensive to seize disputed territory. Fortunately, there was enough opposition within the Central Command to ward this off, at least for a time. But now that the mask of Starfleet's invulnerability had been punctured it was impossible to stop what was to come.

The hawks within the Central Command rapidly rose to prominence by claiming that they had not wanted to agree to the treaty and how under their leadership Cardassia would have never been forced to cede any territory. Immediately they started a program to re-arm, taking full advantage of the reduced sanctions and lack of Starfleet interference with transports crossing the border to begin a program of rearmament.

Many of us were not included in these plans, and if we had been would not have cooperated, but for many in my government they sought power and strength. They felt that the only way to demonstrate and exercise that power was through conflict and bloodshed. Rumors flowed about how the Federation had tricked us into seeking peace in the first place.

That sense of being put upon and refusal to take responsibility for our own actions is what allowed Dukat to rise to power and put us in the thrall of the Dominion. He was able to play the various sides against each other and see his enemies eliminated or exiled until making himself some sort of Imperator. Every time anyone would move to question him or doubt what he was saying he would point back to Wolf 359 and remind them all that they were wrong about Starfleet and that if they had listened to him and his ilk then the Cardassian Empire would have stretched across the quadrant.

Dukat always did have a thing for *melodrama*.

I do not think we were wrong to pursue peace and I'm not convinced that should we have continued to fight we would have been in any better position, but what I do know is that if we did, many millions on both sides would have died and when the Dominion did inevitably arrive we would have had even less chance of defeating them.

BRUNT

NAGAL RESIDENCE, FERENGINAR / Stardate: 53165.5 – 2376

I enter a suboffice of the Nagal Palace's Reception Center. I inform them I'm looking for "Brunt, Former FCA Official." The man I am looking for used to be one of the most feared liquidators in the entire Ferengi Alliance. Now, he's a sub-secretary to an assistant, to an aide to Grand Nagus Rom. Suddenly, a short Ferengi behind one of the 10 desks lining the lime-colored walls flashes me a lascivious grin and taps a latinum-plated coin receptacle in front of him. Expecting this, I remove a slip of gold-pressed latinum from my jacket and place it where he's gesturing. His grin somehow grows even more devious.

How may I assist you? You look like you could provide our nagus with a number of new and wonderful business opportunities.

♦ I am the one who contacted you about the interview for the Federation report on Wolf 359? I'm here to receive your statement.

Oh, it's you...

[His grin turns into a glowering frown.]

It began prior to the Borg's invasion and under the leadership of that dodgering old coot Zek. The Ferengi Alliance was positioning itself to open new markets in the Federation. There was a lot of opposition to this move, given how backwards your society was. There would be numerous challenges to establishing trade with a society that did not use currency. But it was felt that it would make you easier to exploit and opening up this potentially lucrative market went a long way to aid in the recovery from the great monetary collapse.

The FCA spent several years studying possible markets for exploitation and to ensure the best possible return for the investors. The Federation had

been this enigma for decades. How do we gain access to this market without losing our sovereignty and identity? We had observed how the Federation works: Starfleet would arrive proclaiming overtures of peace and harmony. It would then move to what you call “second contact” where the worth of the civilization was weighed, measured, and decided if it was suitable to join the Federation and what it would cost. If they did not measure up, we saw time and again Starfleet would impose sanctions and restrictions citing the “Prime Directive” or some other obscure piece of legislation to justify their bigotry. Still, as the 62nd Rule states “the riskier the road, the greater the profit” and so around 2364 we started to open up these markets, remembering of course the 28th Rule of Acquisition

♦ *Always negotiate from a position of strength?*

That’s right, you don’t see many *hew-mons* taking the time to learn the rules. Frankly, it’s just *rude*. We felt that to ensure the Ferengi Alliance would retain its independence and the sovereignty of our capital markets we had to project strength and to show Starfleet that we were not just another civilization for them to steamroll. [he chuckles ruefully]

Everything was proceeding well and already we were seeing overtures from within the Federation to establish diplomatic ties and open markets to help avoid future conflicts. Oh, it was *glorious*. We had observed from their interactions with the Cardassians how the Federation would bend over backwards to avoid any sort of conflict and I must confess I was swept up in the excitement of it all. New market openings were a cause of celebration on Ferenginar; a sense of hope that finally the worst of the monetary collapse was behind us and another era of growth and prosperity was at hand – portfolios had not looked this healthy in *decades*.

There was a plan to slowly build our influence and start to ease the perceived military aggression over the course of several years, but this fell aside when the Borg attacked.

I think it’s safe to say that Wolf 359 was an unmitigated disaster for the Ferengi Alliance. I would go so far to say that we might never recover from the aftershocks. The invasion immediately called into question the stability of the markets within the Federation and there was a run on the banks. There was also

a real concern that it could undo the recovery and bring about an even larger collapse. I was working at the Ferengi Futures Exchange at the time, and we had to bar the doors to stop investors breaking in. We even had to activate force fields on the windows of the taller towers to stop fund managers throwing themselves down to the streets below – there was still a substantial backlog of vacuum-desiccated remains to clear and to add more would just further harm the stock price.

There was a real sense of horror at the prospect of these Borg. We knew the Federation would be a tough nut to crack but there was profit to be had there, but with the Borg...*nothing*. No room for negotiation, no factions to play against one another, no vices to be exploited. They were the antithesis of everything Ferengi society stood for. Our only hope was to put our faith into the Federation and hope they would prevail, and they did! I know several lucky Ferengi who made what I considered highly questionable wagers with the Ferengi Gaming Commission on the Federation not only surviving but defeating the Borg. They won big – one of them even had his own moon!

Once it was clear that the Federation and its markets had survived the Borg we realized that they had also been applying the 28th Rule and were not in as strong a position as we had believed. Advantage: Ferengi.

Zek accelerated the plans and with the signing of the Cardassian peace treaty we were well placed to capitalize on the Federation's renewed desire for treaties and alliances! I admit those first few years were glorious. Take joy from profit and profit from joy!

This new arrangement allowed Ferengi businesses to set up on any Federation world or outpost, including the Bajoran System – ultimately giving access to the Gamma Quadrant. But while we were all focused on the profits and the latinum we failed to notice the other more insidious side of doing business with you.

It was subtle at first, possibly written off as a few bad eggs or the result of over exposure to *hew-mons*. We dispatched liquidators and at first seemed we were on top of the problem but then Quark happened. [he says the name with a visible sneer] Naturally, Zek wanted to be at the forefront of the new financial opportunities in the Gamma Quadrant and the drive to grow the economy. Rule 45: expand or die. But Quark had been seduced by your Federation ideals, your

sense of “fairness,” of “equality,” of “decency”! By the time we realized the risk it was too late. Our economy was so interlinked into that of the Federation to withdraw would have caused a collapse not seen in our lifetimes.

Now look at us: Rom sitting on the nagus’s throne, females wearing clothes and earning profit, *CHARITY!* On Ferenginar itself! There is even talk of a universal living wage if you can imagine!

I take it back, we didn’t survive the Borg. We didn’t die at Wolf 359, but that was where the wound was inflicted, and we never recovered. You can add the Ferengi Alliance to that wall you have on that station there. Now if you will excuse me I have to go prepare dinner for the nagus.

ELIAS VANTAVEL

DAWES STATION, CERES

Stardate 45378.4 – 2369

My shuttle arrives at Dawes Station, a construction and repair annex of the Antares fleet yards located on Ceres. Two Excelsior-class and one Ambassador-class starship are undergoing upgrades as I arrive, while a much smaller ship is under construction. I don't recognize it. It doesn't have the standard configuration of a primary hull and two exterior nacelles that have dominated Earth ships since the pre-Federation era.

Captain Vantavel is a large, burly man with sharp, brown eyes and thick Rasputin-like eyebrows. He's animated, like a whirling dervish when he talks about ships and their systems. His massive bulky hands look like they've been torn apart and rebuilt from years of getting in to repair the guts of systems. But he knows the office so well, he deftly avoids knocking over any of the dozens of ship models on his desk and credenza. He has the energy of three warp engines, which is appropriate since he's a Starfleet engineering duty officer. EDOs will never command starships by choice. They're interested in the dynamics of the ship and how to make them operate optimally. They can, however, command bases, specifically ship repair facilities.

Do you know what this is?

[Vantavel pulls a long metal object off the wall and hands it to me. It's nearly a meter in length but heavier than I expected - I nearly drop it. At one end is an attachment with serrated edges.]

Yeah, I thought you'd be surprised. It's not some lightweight composite – that's why it's heavy. It's steel. This is a giant pipe wrench. It's what they used when they were building old navy ships on Earth centuries ago. But we don't use those anymore. Our tools and materials have evolved, but designing and building a ship still comes down to just a few factors: what do you need the ship to do and how much power will it need. There's only so much power a starship can have and you can't build one that uses omicron radiation. For a century, Starfleet has functioned on the assumption of peaceful exploration. I never liked the design of our starships – from a combat perspective that is. You saw a few of the models out there.

We've been saying for years that our ship designs are vulnerable to attack. Look at the struts for the nacelles. Those are tritanium but given the right

circumstances, an enemy can hit those and knock the wind out of your sails permanently. What are you going to do if you're the USS *Shitsalot* 20 light-years from the nearest starbase and one of your nacelles is separated from the secondary hull? You're dead in the water until a tugboat comes out to get you.

Look, I love the old birds: the *Excelsiors*, the *Ambassadors*, and the *Constitutions*. Hell, I served as chief engineer on the *Yamaguchi*. Absolutely loved tending to those engines. But Wolf 359 was a completely different game. You have a Borg cube that is about 3,000 meters on each side. Do you know how much power that thing has? Now throw any one or a dozen or a hundred of our ships against it. The Borg lasers cut through the nacelles of half a dozen ships, spun them out of control, and then picked them off one by one. We had exploration ships not combat ships. Like I said, I've been banging this drum a long time. I can send you copies of articles I wrote for every construction symposium for the past decade. We needed a complete redesign of our ships.

[Vantavel pulls up a screen to show the blueprints for the strange craft I saw being built.]

She's the next generation, She's basically a weapons system encased by a thicker hull with interior warp nacelles. I picked up this idea from a naval history course at Starfleet Academy.

[He expands the blueprints. I can now see the registry number: NX-74205.]

Think about it this way. A ship is limited by its power source. That power has to feed weapons, shields, sensors, life support systems, transporters, medical, food replication, sewage treatment, and a few other things. A ship is powered, but is also *limited* by its engines. If you want a big *Galaxy*-class, then you need a big engine because you have everything but the kitchen sink in those big boys. It's an exploration ship that has defenses, but also over a thousand people. It even has a bar and an arboretum. Those need power. And the more power you devote to those "nice-to-haves," the less you have for the fundamental defensive and offensive capabilities.

After the *Enterprise* encountered the first Borg cube, we knew we needed a tough little ship. One of the officers who helped work on it with me says it has teeth. This is *Defiant*. We've minimized all shipboard systems to make it the first purpose-built warship in Starfleet history. Nearly all its power goes to its weapons and defensive systems. Sure, it'll have a science station but it's

extraneous compared to any other starship. No, this little ship will stand up in a fight against a Borg ship at least as long as its bigger brothers and sisters and we'll be able to build a hell of a lot more of them.

It's double-hulled. That's why it can take a beating more than our other ships and the double-hull protects the warp nacelles. We actually invested using a substance harder than duranium or tritanium. Ever hear of the doomsday machine? It was a planet killer that destroyed the old *Constellation* and nearly the *Enterprise*. It was said to be miles long and it had a hull of neutronium. A substance that hadn't been encountered before. At least it wasn't in our databases then and we've checked the records of partners and planets with whom we established contact since.

Anyway, this was the only source. My team came up with a crazy plan. What if we could extract the neutronium from the doomsday machine and apply it to this new class, this *Defiant*? I got permission from Starfleet Command to take a runabout and a repair ship with me. The great thing about my team is that they didn't think it was a crazy idea. They just wanted to give us a real edge against the Borg – or any other threat.

The bulk of the machine is stored at a secret facility. I can't disclose the location of course, but *damn*, it was an impressive structure. We took the runabout inside. Starfleet had sent ships before to get as much information on it, but we were looking at it from a different perspective: how to exploit it. The three of us got into spacesuits and were sent gear from the repair ship. We tried everything we could to pull apart the material, but whoever built it wasn't going to let us cannibalize it. We spent four days and finally had to give up on it. Too bad. Can you imagine what that could have done to really revolutionize our ships' survivability?

I can give you the timeless line about how we need bigger, more powerful ships. That's not what we learned, despite what we do at this facility. We learned about loss. 11,000 Starfleet personnel dead. You hear about the number or the families of those lost. Starfleet sent out a priority message ordering all EDOs to assist in the aftermath of Wolf 359. 40 ships – or at least what was left of them. With some ships it was a rescue operation, with others it was just a salvage op. I went aboard each ship personally. Life support was gone on most of them, so we were in suits. At first we looked for survivors, then we just went into recovery mode.

When we build ships and launch them with fireworks and fanfare, we don't realize how bloody they can be. Pieces of Humans, Vulcans, Denobulans, Andorians, Tellarites...at least what we assumed were the various races based on blood color or skin tint and texture. Then there were the frozen bodies. There were so many just floating in space as their ships lost hull integrity. My crews couldn't handle those. We waited for a hospital ship to recover them. But I'll never forget what I saw there or why we can never let that happen again.

EVELYN HOFFMAN

USS *THUNDERCHILD*, EN ROUTE TO ORGANIA

Stardate: 51642.7 – 2374

On stardate 50893.5, some six years after the events of Wolf 359, Deep Space Five detected a Borg ship entering Federation space at high warp on a course that would take it directly to Earth.

Unlike six years ago, Starfleet was now prepared for the threat the Borg represented, and immediately put into place a series of measures that had been implemented in the wake of the 2366 incursion. One of these measures had been the reevaluation of the Akira-class ships. Originally conceived as a replacement to the venerable Miranda-class, the program was abandoned at the behest of the Amitra administration, and only the two test articles (Akira and Kaneda) were built. The Kaneda was pressed into service by Admiral Hanson and performed exceptionally well before being crippled and then destroyed. In the aftermath, Starfleet ordered construction of the Akira-class to be accelerated, and many ships – including the Thunderchild – served with distinction when faced with the Borg in 2373 and during the Dominion War.

I was the exec on the *Thomas Paine* in '66 and we had been mustered in Sol in the Oort cloud. After Wolf 359, we were just expecting to die. Last year, though, we felt more confident – we knew the Borg would be a formidable force, but not one that was insurmountable.

I think the big difference was this time we had a sense of what to expect. When the first cube showed up it was just so far beyond our comprehension I don't think anyone really understood the threat. There was no living memory of things like the doomsday machine or V'ger – those were just stories we were taught about at the academy; our day to day was watching out for Ferregi Marauders or Cardassians on the border.

After Wolf 359 and with the formation of Strategic Operations, there was a massive shift inside Starfleet. We received briefing packets and updated tactical profiles almost weekly as they learned more from the wreckage at 359 and started to understand just what had gone wrong. When I was given command of *Thunderchild* in '70, one of the biggest changes was the amount of time we spent training for the Borg to return.

Admiral Hayes instituted a sweeping reform of the way the fleet was

organized and contracted the Zakdorns to run war games and joint exercises; they brought in captains who had seen action along the Cardassian border to talk us through their experiences. They even brought in instructors from the Klingon Elite Command Academy to help formulate new training regimes to get Starfleet captains to start thinking more tactically. There was a lot of pushback from some quarters – some captains reigned in protest, feeling the move to a more “militaristic mindset” betrayed the very ideals of the Federation and Starfleet. On the whole, my experience was that most of Starfleet recognized that we had grown far too complacent and now risked losing the Federation to external threats.

We also reviewed the flight recorders from the ships lost at 359. That was rough having to watch our friends and colleagues go up against the Borg, but what was harder was the knowledge that in their position we would have done the same thing. I think a large part of the problem then was we didn’t think we could lose. Now we knew that we could, we had to make sure that we *didn’t*.

Tensions had been growing out near the Bajor System and war was looking inevitable. *Thunderchild* was heading to Deep Space Nine to begin patrols along the Cardassian border when the word came in from Admiral Hayes that they had lost contact with Ivor Prime and they suspected the Borg. We changed course even before the confirmation came through. One of the changes that had been instituted was the subdivision of Starfleet into 12 fleets with pre-designated muster points. We were assigned to the Ninth Fleet and so headed directly to our muster point in Stameris while Admiral Hayes and the 12th were in the Typhon Sector.

The Borg ship was “hauling ass” as my grandmother would say, remaining at high warp and it wasn’t stopping for anyone. Once the fleet had assembled we moved to intercept. There could be no waves of attack, no single ships moving within weapons range of the Borg. Our doctrine now was to rush the cube en masse and ensure the Borg would be unable to focus their fire on any one ship. We tapped into the priority channel and could hear the engagement begin. When the Borg cut over the comms with their litany it sent a chill right down to my core but we weren’t afraid, we were determined. A lot of us were more than a little resentful that we’d never had had a chance to avenge the fallen at 359. This was our chance.

We moved to join the attack as the Borg passed the Ophiucus System and continued to pile on the pressure until we arrived in Sol. Our casualties had been surprisingly light with the Borg largely ignoring us – so focused on getting to Earth – but once we dropped out of warp things started to get more dicey. At sublight speeds our ships were more maneuverable but we couldn't open up the ranges like we had at warp. We started losing ships. Even the *Defiant* was taking a beating. We tried to move to give them some cover, but that's when the *Enterprise* swooped in from nowhere.

I will admit, I was a bit conflicted seeing her arrive. On the one hand, the *Sovereign*-class is a beautiful machine and we could have really used its firepower, but we all knew who her captain was and there were some questions as to how wise it would be to put him in this position. It wasn't because Picard had been Locutus. Starfleet had specifically ordered any captains that had been at Wolf 359 not to engage and advised us to offload any crew that had been on ships lost at 359 before we moved to the muster points. The very last thing you want to do is put someone who had gone through such a traumatic experience back through it again. It creates an unstable element and you don't want that in the middle of a combat environment.

Endeavour went down as *Enterprise* arrived. Old Amasov had been desperate to have a shot at the Borg ever since 359. He went down with the ship, but he managed to get Hayes into an escape pod. With the loss of the admiral and the tactical overview there was the risk that the Borg would be able to push through and we would lose cohesion, but Picard stepped up and showed us all why it was a mistake to ever question if he should have been there. I don't know what sort of insight he had about the cube or its inner workings, but he ordered the entire fleet to concentrate our fire on one part of the cube. The sustained fire and the extra kick from *Enterprise* and its quantum torpedoes finally spelled doom for the Borg.

This was different to the one from '66, that one seemingly just exploded. I know it was something to do with the crew of the *Enterprise* but it didn't feel earned. There was no catharsis, no justice for the ones we lost at 359. But this one? Yeah, we did that, we showed the Borg that we can adapt just as well as them, and resistance is *never* futile.

TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT FROM THE VOYAGER INQUIRY

ACCESS INCLUDED AUDIO FILE "8.07"

Following the rescue and recovery efforts and after reviewing the logs recovered from Wolf 359, the question lingered of what had happened to the ships taken by the Borg. Starfleet believed that in addition to the *USS Hood*, the *USS Roosevelt*, *USS Selaya*, and *USS Righteous* had been taken by the Borg and their ultimate fate remains unknown. Some answers came in 2379 following the return of the *USS Voyager* which had been trapped in the Delta Quadrant since 2371. The following is an excerpt from the debriefing of Captain Kathryn Janeway upon the ship's return to Earth.

FLAG OFFICERS PRESENT

Vice Admiral Jeremiah Hayes
**CHIEF OF STARFLEET
STRATEGIC OPERATIONS**

Vice Admiral Thomas Henry
CHIEF OF STARFLEET SECURITY

Vice Admiral Alynna Nechayev
CHIEF OF STARFLEET PERSONNEL

Captain Kathryn Janeway
CAPTAIN OF USS *VOYAGER*



HAYES: Thank you, Captain. I am sure the DTI will have more questions in relation to the actions of this Braxton, but those will have to be conducted under a closed session as per the Temporal Prime Directive. I would like to turn your attention to stardate 50614.2. This was your first encounter with the Borg?

JANEWAY: Technically that would be stardate 50541.6. We encountered the remains of the Sakari civilization on what we had believed to be an uninhabited planet. Over the course of our investigation we discovered the remains of a Borg drone. We had known this was coming from the

moment the Caretaker transported us to the Delta Quadrant and now we were finally approaching Borg space.

We soon came across the Nekrit Expanse, a vast sparsely-populated nebular region that was considered impossible to chart due to the plasma storms, electrodynamic turbulence, and electrokinetic storms. Attempts to go around could have added years to our journey. I ordered scouting parties in shuttles to travel ahead of *Voyager* to identify any potential routes to get us through faster and that was when we had our first encounter with active Borg, albeit separated from the larger collective.

Commander Chakotay and Ensign Kaplan picked up a distress call and moved to investigate – the signature appeared to be Federation in origin. Upon arrival on the planet, they were attacked and Ensign Kaplan was killed. Chakotay was taken by a group of former Borg drones led by one Riley Frazier, a Human who claimed to have been science officer on the *USS Roosevelt*.

HAYES: Do we have confirmation on her identity?

HENRY: We have been able to confirm there was a Lieutenant Commander Frazier on board the *Roosevelt* when it went missing at Wolf 359 and *Voyager's* transporter's biometric logs confirmed her identity to within 92 percent probability.

NECHAYEV: Was there any sign of the *Roosevelt* or the other ships lost at 359?

JANEWAY: No, we did locate the cube that the drones claimed to have come from, but scans did not detect any sign of the *Roosevelt*. Chakotay reported four other officers from the ship on the colony.

HAYES: Thank you, please continue.

JANEWAY: Frazier was heading up what she described as a “cooperative” made up of a number of the former Borg. Chakotay observed Humans, Romulans, Klingons, and many other species from the Alpha, Beta, and Delta Quadrants. Presumably, there were some Gamma Quadrant species, but we aren't caught up with the latest reports. It appears that since becoming freed from the collective old grudges and enmities between species started to reemerge, fracturing the community and plunging the planet into a civil war.

Riley wanted us to help her extract a piece of equipment described as a neuroelectric field generator to restore the link between their minds. After consideration, I refused the request. It would be tantamount to forcing former drones back into a collective against their will, regardless of the promises made by Frazier. I offered supplies and even to take anyone who wanted to leave with

us on *Voyager*, but she declined. My suspicions were confirmed when she was able to use that same technology on a more limited scale to force Chakotay to activate the cube and its remaining Borg. She claimed that after the generator had established her new collective that they destroyed the cube, but we have no way to verify that and we did not have the resources to force the matter. We dropped warning buoys advising any ships to avoid the system and of the presence of Borg and continued towards the Alpha Quadrant.

NECHAYEV: I find it very disturbing that a Starfleet officer, one who was taken at Wolf 359 no less, would be complicit in returning to a collective and imposing it on thousands of others.

JANEWAY: I have since spoken to Seven about this, and based on discussions with her and my own observation of Borg that have been freed from the collective there is an addictive quality to the neural link. When we disconnected her from the collective it was a constant struggle to stop her running back for at least the first 18 months.

HENRY: Yes, speaking of Seven of Nine, would you mind explaining to us the events of stardates 50984.3 through 51007.8? I have reviewed the logs and there are a number of items I would like clarification on, including these "Undine" (Species 8472 as per your log entries) and your decision to offer aid to the Borg in exchange for passage through their space.

HAYES: Thank you, Thomas. Before we get to that, let's break for lunch. We'll resume at 14:00. I know we are all very eager to hear the captain's account. Until then we are in recess.

END OF FILE

THOMAS RADEMAKER

UTOPIA PLANITIA, MARS

Stardate 57871.3 – 2380

For over 200 years, Utopia Planitia has been at the cutting edge of starship design and construction. The yards were where all six of the original Galaxy-class ships were built and later the Intrepid-class ships. Today, in the aftermath of the Dominion War, a lot of the yard's facilities are turned towards refit and repair of ships that were damaged in the conflict but there are still dedicated teams continuing to push the envelope of starship designs into the 25th century and beyond. Thomas Rademaker heads up the yard's Vesta-class development project to bring slipstream capable ships to the fleet.

I don't want to sound melodramatic, but it's the single biggest technological development since Zephram Cochrane's warp flight! The Borg attack was a tragedy – whatever else I say I just want to make that very clear and I don't want to dismiss the cost in lives – but it pushed almost every aspect of our technology well beyond the bleeding edge.

We knew they were technologically advanced – officially we'd known that ever since J-25 – but there was only so much we could glean from scans. We knew they had extraordinary regenerative abilities and they were able to communicate and process information at near subliminal speeds. But it was all so abstract that without being able to study it in person it was like showing someone from 20th century Earth a tricorder and then trying to ask them to explain its workings.

After the cube had been destroyed there was a lot of debris to be sorted through, but once again it was so utterly alien to anything we are familiar with even now. We're barely beginning to understand a lot of what we have there. So much of the Borg's technology is subsumed from their assimilated victims that we can't really comprehend how it communicates with such disparate systems. It also doesn't help that a lot of the more exotic components have been whisked away to places unknown; I heard the word "temporal" uttered, so likely the DTI.

Even with the resources of all that wreckage and the scans we have made,

it would be years, likely centuries, before we made any great breakthroughs in our understanding of the technology. No, the real boon came when they towed the *Hood* into Inbhir Ghòrdain.

She had been boarded by the Borg and partially assimilated during the attack. They had been able to purge the plasma manifolds into the engine room itself – nasty stuff. But it stopped the Borg cold, so they cut their losses and ran. What we were left with was the Borg technology already integrated into our systems!

Once the ship was in dock we were able to get teams on board to see just what the Borg had done. From the logs of the surviving crew and from the flight recorders we could see the Borg were primarily focussed on the engine room and the deflector dish. The engine room made sense: if you control the engine room you de facto control the ship and can bypass the bridge entirely, but why the deflector? That was a mystery to us. Presumably it had something to do with the propulsion method they used to get the *Hood* from Wolf 359 to Bolus in a matter of hours. That's a two week trip at high warp so you can imagine we were very eager to understand just what was going on there.

Unfortunately, the plasma purge had destroyed much of the engine room and the ship's computer had initiated a data cascade as a result of the security program their chief engineer had activated so we didn't have the full picture, but this was *huge*. We had the pieces, we just needed to understand how they went together. We started running simulations and models to understand exactly what the Borg had done. Ironically, it appeared to be very close to the transwarp experiments of the 2280s for which the *Excelsior* itself served as the testbed. Those experiments ended in failure, but the spaceframe was sound and we're still using them a century later...which should tell you something about the engineers back then.

We figured out that the Borg had crosslinked the warp drive into the main navigational deflector, which they then focused into a boundary layer of spacetime we're calling the quantum barrier. The deflector, in effect, bored into the barrier and then in conjunction with the warp engines created a quantum field around the ship – think of it as a wormhole with no fixed point. The ship can then move via its impulse engines through this boundary layer allowing the ship to travel huge distances relative to the observer in realspace. It will absolutely

revolutionize spaceflight! Imagine being able to travel from Earth to the far Delta Quadrant in a matter of *months*! And it would give Starfleet a massive tactical advantage: we would be able to deploy ships and reinforcements from across the Federation practically instantaneously.

Unfortunately, there were still some considerable hurdles for us to overcome before we could look to deploying the slipstream drives on Starfleet vessels. The destruction of the *Hood's* engine room meant we did not have access to whatever modifications the Borg had made to the warp core. We had images and sensor data from the flight recorders and there was a pile of molten scrap that was removed from the ship, but that was no good. We had to try and work backwards to figure out just what the Borg had done. There was also a computational part of the puzzle: from the logs we had and from our computer models the field would need near continuous modification and alignment to remain stable. If the field were to break down the ship would be unable to enter the slipstream or – even worse – would be thrown violently back into realspace resulting in the loss of the ship. Most of the isolinear based systems were just not fast enough for the speed of data transmission that was required. We discovered the Borg used some sort of bioneural interface between the drones and the computer to facilitate the computations. That alone was a great breakthrough and we were able to synthesize a gel pack system to replace the isolinear systems. These were installed into ships starting with the *Intrepid*-class.

We also discovered that to enable a ship to easily move into the slipstream the stellar dynamics of the spaceframe were important. The Borg had taken two *Excelsior*-class, an *Ambassador*, and *Kilimanjaro*-class ships, but they had made no attempt to take *Miranda*, *Nebula*, or *Galaxy*-class ships. Now this is speculation on our part, but we surmised it might have been that these hull types did not fit the profile to allow the Borg to modify them for the technology.

We continued to work on the project for several years. We had our pathfinder, the *Spirit*, in which I managed to do short slipstream hops but we couldn't maintain the field for any length of time. We just couldn't get the geometry right. We continued testing the *Spirit* without any real breakthrough until 2376 when Starfleet was able to establish communication with the starship *Voyager* which had been stranded in the Delta Quadrant since 2371. When the ship's logs were collected we discovered they had encountered a slipstream capable craft and what was more it had been deliberately designed to mimic a Starfleet design.

This was the eureka moment because we could get a sense of the optimal shape for a ship to move into slipstream. We decided the easiest thing to do was to build a copy of the ship and to test the technology directly, so we built the *Dauntless* and you know what? It only worked!

We conducted a series of mission tests and proof of concept operations with the ship. It performed flawlessly, but because we had worked backwards from this alien design it wasn't fully optimized for the sort of missions Starfleet wanted. *Dauntless* is a good ship and is still in the fleet but we were able to put what we had learned into the next generation of Starfleet slipstream ships: the *Vesta*-class.

The first of which was launched last year. We have two more on the slips, and plans for five more in the class, but that's just the start. From the data collected from *Voyager* we learned they were able to retrofit the technology to allow the *Intrepid*-class hull to perform short hops through slipstream, with some more work it's our hope we can retrofit the technology to certain ship classes and truly open up the galaxy for Starfleet. We'll be able to push the frontier out further than ever before, there's even talk about an expedition to the Andromeda Galaxy! With slipstream it would be possible to make the journey across intergalactic space in under a decade!

We're still learning more every day from the Borg technology we now have access to, and with the help of the xBs on Ohniaka III we might be able to improve the quality of life for *all* species.

GUINAN

USS ENTERPRISE, QUALOR SYSTEM

Stardate 46231.8 – 2369



I do wonder, sometimes, what it would be like. To see the galaxy through the eyes of the Borg – I don't mean being assimilated or anything like that. I mean...what do they see when they look out into space, do they even do that? Take them for example.

[She gestures over to the large viewports at the look out from the prow of the ship, while many people are sitting and enjoying their drinks there are a number of people who are just staring out into space.]

Do you think the Andorian is seeing the same thing as the Benzite? Or the Xindi? It's not just a question of biology and eyes and brains processing the information differently; we are all shaped by our experiences, by our history, by our cultures. We may not speak in metaphors like the Tamarians, but our collective experience is just as important to how we interpret the world around us. I don't think the Borg have that. I think each drone just sees the galaxy as resources to be consumed and drones to bring into the hive.

For all of the pompous windbag that he is, Q was right about one thing: it is wondrous out here.

In a way, the Borg could be viewed as a cautionary tale for the Federation. They take beings from any culture they find and integrate them into the whole, but they don't *celebrate* those differences. They don't seek to *understand*, just to assimilate.

There have been times in Humanity's past where there were voices calling for anyone who looked different to them or thought differently to be destroyed. They fought bloody wars over it; I was there and it wasn't pretty.

But, eventually, you learned to not only tolerate those differences but to embrace them and celebrate them. It made you stronger and when you

ventured out into space and encountered other species your first instinct has always been to run towards them in the spirit of friendship rather than conquest. Let me tell you, that is very rare in this galaxy. The Federation is made up of many worlds and of many people, but the kernel at the center, the seed that grew into what we have around us now, that was Humanity. On a road not taken you might have ventured into space and conquered all you encountered, but whatever that “Terran Empire” might look like it would be brittle and would never endure.

The Borg don’t feel, they don’t love, they don’t care, they just *are*. That’s why we’re still here, because Starfleet values the individual. This crew risked it all and bet on the entire future of the Alpha Quadrant because they believed in Captain Picard. There is an old Vulcan saying: *“the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few,”* but logic is only part of the equation. Emotions are real and are important; they let you continue to fight against what you know to be wrong even when logic tells you you cannot succeed.

This won’t be the last we hear from the Borg, they will be back. When you get down to it, it’s a small galaxy, you’re going to bump into each other again, but if Starfleet and the Federation remain true to their ideals and doesn’t forget their core principles, then I don’t think you have too much to worry about from them. Now if you will excuse me I have to get back to the bar, but feel free to stay a while. Maybe take in the view.

[With a smile, she gets up and walks back to the bar where already a number of patrons move to order. I take my drink and move over to the large viewports looking out at the nearby star and the majesty of the space beyond.]



EPILOGUE

USS *HOOD*, WOLF 359 MEMORIAL STATION

Stardate 73403.2 – 2396



When I woke up this morning on board the *Hood*, it was a Starfleet vessel with a crew and a mission. Now it is a museum and a memorial. Outwardly nothing has changed and yet the ship feels almost alien to us as we walk through the airlock and step back onto the ship. All around us are civilians and dignitaries who are being escorted around and given a tour of the memorial station's newest exhibit.

We pass numerous groups being given tours by veterans; they stand back respectfully as the veterans explain what various systems would do or what a room was used for. Some are telling tales from their time on the ship, not just from Wolf 359 but some from the Battle of Chin'toka and other battles from the Dominion War. We stand towards the back and listen respectfully. Some nod respectfully at Admiral DeSoto, who smiles and returns each nod before we move on.

As we walk down one of the corridors, we suddenly find ourselves face to face with Captain Riker. He is older than I remember (which is to be expected) but I heard he had lost his son recently. Something like that would age anyone. There is more gray in his beard and hair and he seems somehow smaller than the man I first interviewed in the immediate aftermath of the Borg attack. His wife, Deanna Troi, comes around the corner holding the hand of their daughter. She looks around 10 with mousy blonde hair, and hides behind her fathers leg.

Riker and DeSoto smile warmly and they embrace. Troi then gives the admiral a kiss on his cheek as they embrace, Riker comes over to me and gives me a handshake. "It's good to see you here, the admiral tells me that you finally finished your book."

I can feel the blood flush to my cheeks but I smile and nod in affirmation. "Just finished before we left Sol Station, the advanced copies should be ready to go by the end of the year. I'll make sure they send one to you."

Deanna comes over and plants a kiss on my cheek. "It had better be a signed copy" she says teasingly. "Let me introduce you to our daughter Kestra." The young girl who is standing behind her father peers around his legs and offers a half-hearted wave. I return it with a smile.

"I was sorry to hear about Thad," says the admiral as he places a hand on Riker's arm. In an instant the mood shifts and the smiles drop from Riker and Troi for just a moment.

Riker nods and smiles appreciatively. "Thank you. It's been hard and it will take time, but we're okay." The admiral gives Troi another hug and whispers something to her. I can't hear what exchanges they share but she smiles and nods without saying a word. I feel rather awkward being a witness to this clearly private moment and start to look for a suitable exit but Riker seems to sense my discomfort or perhaps looks to change the subject for his own ease.

"Came to say your goodbyes?" he asks as he turns back to the admiral.

"Yeah, I figure I won't be out this way much, so best to say my goodbyes now. Did you come out on the *Titan*? Or the *Enterprise*?"

"Neither, we took a shuttle from Nepenthe to Starbase 17 and then took a commercial transport here," Troi responds.

"So, do you still remember your way around the old girl, XO?" asks DeSoto, teasing his former first officer.

"Absolutely, Sir," Riker responds with a grin.

"Then lead on: let's give her the once over one last time." We follow Riker's lead as he sets off towards the turbolift.





We spend the next couple of hours walking around the ship. Robert and Riker are busy in conversation and I spend my time talking to Deanna Troi. We had spoken several times before and corresponded during the Holland Commission, where she often deputized for Captain Picard when he declined to be interviewed. When we reach the engine room we encounter another tour group being shown the now inactive warp core and the plasma injectors. Parts of the computer systems here have been modified to resemble the blues and teals that the computer took on following Alison Obena's act of self-sacrifice to save the ship.

As we talk, I notice Kestra has moved away from us and found some young Tellarite pups. They're engaged in some game of tag around the back of the engine room and as their game intensifies so does their laughter. It is at odds with what took place in this room and Troi goes to collect her daughter.

She comes back with a sullen-looking Kestra, not happy to be told off in front of her new friends. The Tellarites' father has also come to collect his pups, DeSoto and Riker come over to see what the commotion is. Troi starts to apologize for the commotion but Desoto smiles and raises a hand.

"It's okay Deanna, it's actually nice to have children laughing on *Hood* again. I haven't heard that in a long *long* time."

"Maybe so, but this really isn't the most appropriate place for playing tag?" she says looking down at Kestra.

"True, but what happened here was so little girls like Kestra could continue to play tag." He crouches down so he is eye level with the girl. "Hello, Kestra, do you remember me?"

The girl nods her head enthusiastically. "You're Uncle Robert."

"That's right, I used to be your dad's boss a long long time ago. Would you like me to tell you a story?"

The girl hesitates for a moment, then comes forward and the admiral stands up and takes her hand. "I would like to tell you the story of a very dear friend of mine. Her name was Aly and she was the best engineer I ever knew. She taught your Uncle Geordi everything he knows..."

They walk out of engineering hand in hand, the girl enthralled by the tale.

Riker places his arm around his wife and kisses her on the cheek. Troi puts her arm around him and they follow the pair out, leaving me alone in engineering. It feels strange to be in this space now restored to an impression of what it looked like in 2366. I'm wondering what I should do with the rest of my time before departure when the door opens and the admiral comes back in, now carrying Kestra.

"Come on - keep up, or you're going to miss the story."

He winks and cocks his head towards the door with a smile. I return the smile and follow them both as he continues his tale of how Alison Obena and a young Commander Riker used to stop him having any fun on away missions...





THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED ON
STARDATE 77219.9 AFTER INITIAL PUBLICATION IN
THE AFTERMATH OF THE COPPELIUS AFFAIR AND
ARTIFACT MASSACRE ON STARDATE 76338.9, AND THE
REPEAL OF THE FEDERATION'S BAN ON SYNTHETIC LIFE.



CHAPTER 9 C O D A

■ 445 Jean-Luc Picard

JEAN-LUC PICARD

LA BARRE, EARTH

Stardate 77219.9 – 2400

The message came out of the blue and did not include any information other than an invitation to sit down for tea at my convenience the next time I was on Earth. Signed "JLP."

I was shocked, stunned – speechless. For the past 30 years, Jean-Luc Picard had made a point to actively avoid me and my colleagues. During the Holland Commision, he had an aide send any documents or logs we requested. He answered direct questions via subspace. but always declined the opportunity for an interview. When I started to work on my book I received no response to my attempts to reach out to his office.

I really don't know why he has extended this invitation. If he disliked something that was printed, I'm sure his office would have communicated with the publisher. It took me some time to build up the courage to accept the meeting, but finally the day has arrived.

Stepping off the transporter pad, I'm suddenly hit with a wave of nostalgia. It is close to 30 years since I was last here, but the smells and sounds of the small provincial village in the west of France hit me as I step out of the station onto the market street. There is little doubt in my mind that it remains largely unchanged since the 20th century at least.

With the autumnal sun shining I decide to walk up to the Chateau Picard. As I stroll along these narrow country roads, nodding a greeting to the passing locals, I can see the Chateau up ahead looking much as it did on my last visit.

Upon arrival I am greeted by a Romulan housekeeper. She introduces herself as Laris and leads me through to Picard's study. It is a treasure trove of objet d'art and artifacts of a 70-year career. Behind a desk is a large painting of the Enterprise-D and sitting there is Admiral Jean-Luc Picard.

He smiles warmly and greets me, offering me tea. He gestures for us to move over to a couch and we sit. On the table before us are a number of PADDs and books, including my own. I can feel my pulse thumping as Laris enters with a tray and places it down on the table before leaving. Picard pours a cup of tea for me, and then one for himself. I must confess I have never been a fan of tea, but the opportunity to share a cup with Jean-Luc Picard is too great to pass up. I sip at the bitter liquid and smile in appreciation, not knowing where to begin. Fortunately, I don't have too.



I'm sure you are wondering why, after all these years, I reached out – why I finally asked you to come and see me. If I am being completely honest with you, I'm not entirely sure myself.

Robert DeSoto has always spoken very highly of you, as has Will Riker, and many others whose opinions I trust. But given the nature of your work and my experiences with the Borg...I hope you can understand my reticence.

[I open my mouth to respond but he holds his hand up.]

Please let me finish, I need to say this.

When the Borg took me from the Enterprise and assimilated me into the collective...it was not only a violation of my body, but of my mind. Of the very core of who I am. They used me as a weapon. They made me watch as they destroyed the fleet at Wolf 359. They made me complicit in the slaughter of thousands of starfleet officers – many of whom I considered friends – and came within a hair's breadth of assimilating Earth. They did all of this with me as their figurehead. The name they gave me, "Locutus," is derived from Latin. It means "one who speaks."

Guinan once told me that many who face the threat of the Borg consider them more akin to a storm or a plague. They are able to take a measure of comfort in knowing that it is nothing personal – they haven't been singled out for this doom. All you can do is try to weather it or get out of its way.

But the Borg singled *me* out. Of all the individuals that they had encountered, they singled me out, and they came halfway across the galaxy to violate me. They used me to commit unspeakable atrocities. After my crew rescued me, I hoped that I would be able to put this behind me – file it away as another life experience and try to move on. But I couldn't.

I knew death and destruction would be possibilities when I joined Starfleet. I have suffered loss before, been forced to destroy starships that threatened my ship, I have sent people to their deaths, and have even lost friends...but in those instances I was in *control*. As Locutus, I was complicit but I was unable to resist.

For years I had nightmares. Every time I closed my eyes the collective was there lurking, just beneath the surface. At times, I felt like I could hear them whispering just at the edge of my consciousness. I thought the only way I could continue was to push it all deep *deep* down and to lock it all away. The idea of talking to anyone about my experiences was not something I was able to contemplate.

That all began to change once we rescued Hugh. He was so incredibly young when we first encountered him, but all I could see in him were the Borg and all the pain they had inflicted on me. I saw in him an opportunity to hurt them

back by using him as a weapon – just as they had used me. I came so close to committing *genocide*. All in the name of the greater good – something that I would never have considered under any other circumstances. But because it was the *Borg* and because they had hurt me, I felt my hatred justified – that I would be doing the galaxy a service to rid it of this menace.

But my crew befriended this Borg and gave him a name. It made me pause, and I realized that my hatred had blinded me. I was close to becoming the very thing the Borg had tried to mold me into: single-minded in my quest for destruction. We returned Hugh to the collective at his own behest. I thought that was the end of it and tried not to add his face to the ghosts that would visit me at night.

We encountered him again, hardly a year and a half later. He was now free of the Borg: working to try and come to terms with reality outside the collective he'd known his entire waking life, trying to help unify the others from his clade that were also severed from the hive. At the time, I was still hesitant to confront my relationship with the Borg. I considered them first and foremost as a threat. But here was a young, self-made man who'd taken it upon himself to try and to help find a better life for his fellow xBs, and to help them embrace their newfound identities as individuals. And in turn, they built not only a city, but a *community* on Ohniaka III, all of their own accord .

With the Reclamation Project, Hugh dedicated his life to the service of others and to helping his fellow xBs – all while also having to process and come to terms with his own burgeoning individuality in the face of ignorance, fear, and suspicion. Even from within our Federation that has *long* prided itself on being a welcoming and tolerant society. As recent events have shown, we still have large blindspots when it comes to synthetic life – including xBs.

I must take a certain amount of personal responsibility here. Although I have long championed the rights of all sentient and sapient life – including synthetic – the Borg have never entered into that equation. I am perhaps the most prominent xB in the Alpha Quadrant, but I have never considered myself as such. Indeed, I have strived almost everyday since being freed from the collective *not* to be defined by my time with the Borg. So many others are not afforded that luxury.

After Wolf 359, Starfleet took any drones that they recovered and kept them

in stasis, unsure of what to do with them. Eventually, a deal was struck to send nearly 800 dormant drones to Ohniaka III. Starfleet lacked the resources or the understanding to help rehabilitate them, but Hugh's community of xBs offered them a *chance*. Some of these were Starfleet officers taken during the battle who, in addition to the trauma of assimilation, discovered their families and loved ones did not know how to come to terms with their return after so long away or with the physical and emotional scars they now carried. I could have done *more* to speak for these people, to advocate for them before Starfleet, but I was still fighting my own demons, and remained largely ignorant of their plight – by my own choice, I admit.

When the second Borg cube attacked Earth, I was forced to confront the collective directly. Things came to a head and I very nearly lost control. It was only the kindness of a stranger who witnessed my behavior as the Borg attempted to claim the *Enterprise-E* that forced me to accept that my experiences with the Borg had, indeed, affected me and were now a part of my identity. In the early '80s, I sought out representatives from Ohniaka III on Earth, and with their and Hugh's aid, I was able to find some measure of peace with the past. That is not to say that I was *wholly* rid of those demons.

Today, I am finding it difficult to talk about this. Even now, in this space, and to you – who I *know* understands the plight of what many connected to the Borg have gone through. It has taken me a long time – and no small amount of help from others – to accept that what transpired was not my fault, despite my stubbornness. That it was alright to feel the anger, to feel the loss, and to know that those feelings would never go away. Thanks to the wonders of Dr. Crusher, I bear no physical scars, but the emotional and psychological ones will remain with me for the rest of my life.

I suspect that was why Hugh chose to keep his physical scars after he had his Borg implants removed. Thanks to longstanding dermal damage, not all former Borg have that choice. But those scars – they were a way to show to the world what he was experiencing internally. He showed solidarity with many of the xBs who did not have access to the same medical care that is afforded those of us in the Federation.

I still struggle with that part of myself. I know that I always will. No one escapes the trauma of assimilation, but knowing that Hugh was out there was

a comfort. That he understood and was willing to shine a light into those dark places within xBs to help keep the shadows at bay. So much so that I felt that I didn't have to speak up about my experiences. I mean, who wants to hear the thoughts of an irrelevant old man speaking for a people he has spent a lifetime denying?

But now, Hugh is...

[He looks away up towards the painting of the *Enterprise-D*. He is silent for a moment before he returns to me.]

I watched Hugh and other xBs put themselves in harm's way to protect their xB comrades, including me. I feel now, more than ever, that it is important to speak up, not for me, but for *Hugh*, and the others like him. Like *us*. I still don't know if anyone would be interested to hear what I have to say, but I feel it is my duty to speak, to acknowledge that while the Borg as a collective are a very grave threat which must be taken seriously, the *individuals* within the collective are not there by choice. It was a realization I had, upon meeting Hugh again for the first time in many years: they are not monsters. They are *victims*. Often when they are freed, xBs face fear and abuse from people who fear the collective and what they represent. These are free, sentient beings ostracized from the societies they came from. This should not be the case, and we all must seek to do better.

I hope that, by sharing my experiences with the Borg and making my anguish plain, it will show others who have been in such places that it can pass. And to them, I say: you *will* survive it. It will be a terrible, enduring struggle that you must wrestle with, as well as find shelter from it in good company. But you *can* make peace with it, after that proverbial night of tumult. You *can* lead a life where your experiences with the Borg – though forever a part of you – do not *define* you.

THE END



ADDITIONAL RELATED MATERIAL REGARDING
THE INVESTIGATION OF THE BORG INCURSION
OF 2366 AND THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359

CHAired BY ADMIRAL (RET) LANCELOT HOLLAND, PMV, CME, SC

HOLLAND COMMISSION MEMBERS

IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE EXECUTIVE ORDER 260623, THE
UNDERSIGNED PRESENT THE REPORT OF THE BORG INCURSION
OF 2366 AND THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359.

LANCELOT HOLLAND
ARCTURUS

DAVID HARPER
EARTH

KARIE S. ADAIR
EARTH

STEPHANIE LEWIS
EARTH

STE'JOHN
VULCAN

JAMES AMEY
MARS

SIO SH'WEBSTER
ANDORIA

THOMARONE
TELLAR

RACHELLE STRANGE
CESTUS III

STEPHEN VAN DOREN
BETAZED

ZOË GOLD
TRILL

BRANDON T. MCCLURE
LUNA

TIMOTHY LEE
EARTH

ADJUNCT REPORT 1

EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEMS, 2131 – 2367

The use of **ESFAC (EMERGENCY SUBSPACE FEDERATION ALERT CODE)** during the Wolf 359 crisis has raised several questions about the existence of and proliferation of Emergency Alert Systems within Starfleet and United Federation of Planets. As such, the commission has attached this adjunct report outlining the history of and use of previous Emergency Alert Systems (EAS) since the 2140s.

UEDEFCON (2141-2161)

UEDEFCON (UNITED EARTH DEFENCE CONDITION) was an outgrowth of the alert system of the United States of America. It acted as a military-civil defense code across Earth, Luna, and their orbital environs. As such, it provided no coverage to the rest of the solar system or any extrasolar colonies, which were expected to provide their own defensive system in conjunction with Starfleet patrols.

The system was only ever activated on three occasions: immediately after the Xindi Probe attack (2153), during the Terra Prime incident (2154), and during the outbreak of the Earth-Romulan War (2155). Its use in 2155 underlined the problems with the system: without a method of emergency transmission outside of the Sol System, it took several weeks for the furthest colonies to receive news of the conflict.

ADJUNCT REPORT 1, CONT.

FACON (2161-2246)

FACON (FEDERATION ALERT CONDITION) was little more than a large version of UEDEFCON. The joint military-civilian alert system applied to threats to Federation member worlds and any region within the defined boundaries of the Federation Treaty Zone. It was, however, completely dependent on Starfleet's own subspace relay network for transmission – and was not designed to cope with the rate of expansion seen in the century after 2161.

Starfleet Command would move to FACON 3 during the first Orion Police Action (2191) and the Kzinti Crisis of 2211, but otherwise, the FACON system would remain defunct; local alert warnings and readiness protocols superseded a fleet-wide one. The problems with this were made all too apparent during the 2245-46 colonial crisis, where due to poor communication and the lack of Federation-wide alerts, relief efforts were unable to prevent mass loss of life on Tarsus IV, R'Vel, and Darvan V.

FASUS (2246-2276)

FASUS (FEDERAL ALERT SYSTEM — UNITED SERVICES) was a response to the colonial crisis. The refined system operated across all sectors and regions of space, and was the first authorized to override civilian broadcast networks in emergencies. The FASUS alert conditions also gave Starfleet regional commanders power to act without central authorization in times of crisis. FASUS would first be tested during T'Kuvma's War (2256-57). Despite a generally successful mobilization, Starfleet would still perform poorly due to lack of war preparations. These measures would be expanded after 2257.

FASUS would be activated six times:

- Battle of the Binary Stars (FASCON 1)
- First Caleb IV (FASCON 3)
- Acamar (FASCON 2)
- Kobax (FASCON 2)
- E4 Incident (FASCON 2)
- Four Day's War (FASCON 1)

ADJUNCT REPORT 1, CONT.

ESFAC (2276—)

ESFAC (EMERGENCY SUBSPACE ALERT CODE) was developed as a direct reaction to the V'ger Incident (2273) and the failure of Starfleet Command to adequately react to the arrival of the V'ger cloud over Earth. ESFAC was designed to provide an immediate, direct and short warning of the threat type, scale, and authorized response. Developed in part by Admiral Heihachiro Nogura, the system was built around a two-word code system that could be rapidly transmitted across all subspace transmission systems within the Federation. ESFAC could even hijack non-Federation transmitters in a crisis, though this ability has never been used.

ESFAC was designed to be used as a prelude to any FASUS condition downgrade. However, as FASUS fell into disuse after the end of the Klingon Cold War, ESFAC was increasingly used on its own, but even that use was limited. Before Wolf 359 its last use was "PURPLE BRACE" in 2330 on the outbreak of hostilities with the Tzenkethi Empire.

Despite its advantages, ESFAC fell out of usage by the 2330s. The long period of peace and massive expansion of the Federation Treaty Zone had negated the need for a rapid-response emergency system. Sector-wide Yellow and Red Alerts were more practical than a specific emergency status. The rapid expansion of Federation membership also undercut a system designed to prevent repeats of V'ger and the Cetacean Probe Incident. The large, increasingly decentralized UFP viewed an alert code designed to defend the core worlds as an unacceptable act of favoritism. Starfleet, unwilling to test its waning political power, let the system fall into misuse.

2-WORD CODE SYSTEM

FIRST WORD: EMERGENCY TARGET

SECOND WORD: EMERGENCY INSTRUCTIONS

ADJUNCT REPORT 1, CONT.

CODE SYSTEM INDEX

FIRST WORD • COLOR

NAVY • Federation-wide
 EMERALD • Romulan Border
 GREEN • Orion Sector
 SCARLET • Klingon Border
 MAUVE • Tholian Region
 KHAKI (2330-) • Cardassian Border
 CRIMSON • Earth
 RED • Mars
 AZURE • Andor
 COPPER • Vulcan
 BROWN • Tellar
 PEARL • Alpha Centauri

SECOND WORD • MISC.

BLOCKHOUSE • Begin Preparations
 For General Hostilities
 RESOLVE • Commencement
 of General Hostilities.
 BRACE • Enemy Attack Expected
 in next 48 Standard Hours
 ENERGIZE • Begin Offensive
 Into Occupied Territory
 TACIT • Emergency
 Recall to Location
 RESTRAINT • Withdraw
 All Forces From Region
 BUOYANT • Prepare for
 mass casualty event

ESFAC USES

CRIMSON RESTRAINT

Whale Probe Incident

SCARLET BLOCKHOUSE

Khitomer Crisis

EMERALD BRACE

Tomed Incident

PURPLE BRACE

Tzenkethi Offensive

CRIMSON TACIT

Wolf 359

ADJUNCT REPORT 1, CONT.

[illegible]

CRIMSON TACIT

CRIMSON TACIT

CRIMSON TACIT

CRIMSON TACIT

CRIMSON TACIT

ADJUNCT REPORT 1, CONT.

ALL STARFLEET PERSONNEL

X1A.34 • CRIMSON TACIT

THIS IS A QUADRANT WIDE ALERT FOR ALL FEDERATION TERRITORIES. FLEET ADMIRAL SHANTHI HAS DECLARED THREAT CONDITION CRIMSON TACIT. UNKNOWN HOSTILE PRESENCE CONFIRMED IN FEDERATION SPACE HEADING FOR SECTOR 001. EARTH UNDER RISK OF PROBABLE ATTACK.

ALL STARFLEET PERSONNEL IN SOL SYSTEM TO REPORT TO COMMAND AT FIRST AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITY. ALL SHIPS WITHIN FOUR DAYS WARP OF SOL TO PROCEED HERE AT MAXIMUM WARP. ALL OTHER CONSIDERATIONS SECONDARY, ALL OTHER ORDERS RESCINDED. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO APPROACH HOSTILE CRAFT. HEAVY ENEMY RESISTANCE REPORTED. REPEAT. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO APPROACH HOSTILE CRAFT. FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS TO FOLLOW ON CODED CHANNEL SABLE ONE.

SOL-BASED STARFLEET PERSONNEL ARE DIRECTED TO PREPARE SYSTEM UNDER V'GER PROTOCOLS. COMMENCE ANY AND ALL NECESSARY COUNTERMEASURES IN COOPERATION WITH SYSTEM DEFENSE FLEET AND ALLIED FORCES.

ALL STARFLEET PERSONNEL OUTSIDE SOL THEATER ARE DIRECTED TO MUSTER AT PRE-APPOINTED STAGING AREAS AND COMMENCE DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS AT FIRST AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITY.

IN ABSENCE OF FURTHER INSTRUCTION,
INDEPENDENT ACTION IS AUTHORIZED.

ADJUNCT REPORT 2

THE V'GER PROTOCOLS: CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT PLANS SINCE 2273

CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT

The inquiries of the Holland Commission have highlighted the importance of – and lack of preparation for – the activation and usage of existing continuity of government protocols in the event of a dire emergency. In fact, several members of the commission were not aware that many of the protocols for the continued survival of the United Federation of Planets and Starfleet even existed before the inquiry began. As such, the commission has prepared this document to outline existing plans, codenamed the V'ger Protocols, put in place between 2273 and 2320.

THE V'GER PROTOCOLS

The near destruction of Earth's population by the V'ger cloud in 2273 was the third event in fifteen years that highlighted the lack of continuity of government plans within the United Federation of Planets. While discussions for evacuating the government and admiralty existed in 2257 (and 2267), it was only the complete failure of Earth's defense grid in 2273 that made it all too apparent that the federal capital and government were vulnerable to both a military and post-civilizational attack.

Under the direction of Admiral Nogura, Starfleet Operations began to collate protocols for the evacuation of key civilian and military officials to other locations. At this point, the plans – titled "Survival of Decision-Making Institutions" (SODI) – was only one track, based around the rapid evacuation

ADJUNCT REPORT 2, CONT.

of Earth by warp shuttle and fast starship to Babel, where government would be continued using the Babel conference facilities. Starfleet Command would relocate with remaining staff to the Laikan School of Tactics, which had prepared a C2 [Command and Control] facility in its lower levels.

By 2284, a purpose built C2 site had been prepared on Babel (codenamed the "Soval Center"). Other minor facilities were prepared on the other four founding worlds, Delta Vega, and on Starbases 6,14, and 17. Rising tension with the Klingons after the Genesis Incident and the detonation of the first isolytic weapon saw the creation of a secondary facility on Janus VI (codenamed "Mount Seleya").

The Vger protocols, as they were known, were cemented in 2286 into a four-option plan for continuity of government, divided as follows:

SITUATION ONE: "THE KENNEDY OPTION"

The Kennedy Option is based around the successful evacuation of the federal government and Starfleet Command. Generally, surrounding material suggests this plan was the most expected in a general war with the Klingon Empire, in which there would be significant (more than seven days) warning of an attack into the Sol System.

In this situation, the civilian and military government would be evacuated by the United Earth Defence Forces and Starfleet to Babel. The president would most likely declare a state of emergency, with full legislative powers given directly to the Security Council.

Starfleet would also raze the Presidio Complex and other Starfleet facilities from orbit or the ground in order to deny them to the enemy. Orbital facilities (including Earth Spacedock and the San Francisco yards) would be scuttled with photon charges.

ADJUNCT REPORT 2, CONT.

SITUATION TWO: “THE SURAK OPTION”

The Surak Option is based around the reaction to a lightning strike against Earth in which Earth and Sol System is captured without enough warning to evacuate the government.

In this case, representatives of the four founding members are to send new representatives to Babel to form a new Security Council, along with the highest-ranking member of the federal cabinet, who will serve as the new president until the crisis passes. All elections and political activity are also suspended until the crisis passes, or earlier if the council deems it necessary.

The highest ranking member of Starfleet, along with assembled staff members, is ordered to proceed to Janus VI and resume operations from there. Seniority will go to the leadership of KLICOM and remaining members of the Admiralty Board. It remains unclear as to whether or not the Surak Option would have required Starfleet to destroy planetary targets without the prior evacuation of civilians, but the tone of Admiral Nogura’s writing suggests that the priority remains the denial of any strategic assets to the enemy.

SITUATION THREE: “THE XINDI OPTION”

The Xindi Option is considered the most likely option, especially during the 2280s; in fact, its protocols were activated during the Cetacean Probe Crisis.

It is based around the unsuccessful or incomplete evacuation of Earth in a situation where the senior leadership of the UFP and Starfleet are captured or killed, but the threat is self-contained to Earth itself. Generally, the notes around this plan between 2280 and 2305 suggest that this was intended as a preparation for natural disaster, xenonatural incursion, or terrorist attack.

In this case, the evacuated elements of the government are immediately moved to Mariner City on Mars on an interim basis to coordinate relief efforts on Earth. After the moment of crisis passes, the surviving or provisional Security Council will vote on moving to another member world or staying on Mars.

The Xindi Option, despite being the only ever put in action before 2367, is vague; mainly because (exempting the Cetacean Probe) no one really expected it to be relevant. Even when it was activated in 2285, most of the planning was made defunct by the Probe’s paralysis of every starship within the system.

ADJUNCT REPORT 2, CONT.

SITUATION FOUR: “THE DEGAULLE OPTION”

The DeGaulle Option is the least well detailed and explored – namely because the circumstances of its use are so limited. It supposes plans for a partial or complete evacuation of government and military leadership from earth, but in a situation where the remaining UFP is on the verge of collapse or conquest. It outlines the plans for the creation of either a) a “Federal Redoubt” in the region of the Vega Colony or b) the evacuation of the UFP Treaty Zone entirely to a friendly government outside of the combat zone. What the preferred place of exile was remains nebulous: records from the late 2280s suggest Bajor, Benzar (before their accession to the UFP), or even the Cardassian Republic.

This option seems to be the one taken least seriously by the civilian and military leadership. Generally, the viewpoint was that in any general interspace war, the UFP would continue to fight until it is physically unable to do so. As such, any situation in which earth fell and the Federation was captured would be one in which the survival of the existing government was unlikely.

While some elements were expected to survive – either in the form of deep space “vessels of national survival” or foreign embassies – the total survival of an evacuated government in the ilk of the “Free Polish” or “Free French” governments of the 20th century world wars was considered near-impossible.

STATE OF V’GER PROTOCOLS IN THE 24TH CENTURY

With the signing of the First Khitomer Accords and the Treaty of Algeron, the need for continuity of government protocols almost entirely disappeared after the end of the 2310s. The massive expansion of the UFP and the general lack of peer-level opponents made the possibility of an attack on the Federation almost inconceivable.

Gradually, and then rapidly, the large array of facilities and protocols that existed in 2293 were wound down. The Janus VI complex was sealed off and used as a data collation center; the Soval Center on Babel was converted first into extra accommodation, and then into a museum. The exact location of some of the facilities on Delta Vega, Terra Nova, and other worlds was lost.

With the experience of the Borg crisis, this commission recommends that continuity of government protocols be immediately re-assessed for the dangers of the 24th century, whether they come from the Alpha, Beta, Gamma, or Delta Quadrant.

ADJUNCT REPORT 3

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STARFLEET INTELLIGENCE AND STARFLEET COMMAND, 2293-2367

The dysfunctionality of the relationship between the intelligence services and Starfleet Command has been a startling revelation of this commission. As such, the commission has attached this adjunct summary of the deterioration of interservice relations to explain the historical situation.

The Holland Commission would like to thank Professor El'rik Zh'uhead of the Starfleet Academy Department of History and Dr. Li Tamara of the Grankite School of Tactics for their contributions to this report.

THE DECLINE OF STARFLEET INTELLIGENCE

History considers 2287 to be the apex of Starfleet Intelligence [SI]. This was the year where it managed to both analyze the Klingon isolytic weapon before the imperial government did, and successfully extract three Romulan defectors without the knowledge of the Tal Shiar. Neither of these activities would have been possible without the strong interservice relationship between SI and Starfleet Command. This relationship, painstakingly built since the First Battle of Caleb IV (2259), allowed for Starfleet to operate with the most accurate tactical and strategic intelligence analysis in the quadrant. However, by 2320, that relationship was essentially nonexistent: SI's reputation for quick, comprehensive and well-sourced information was in tatters, and its operatives and leadership across the Federation fractured.

Starfleet Intelligence's decline is often blamed entirely on the organization. While it escaped the blame during the Khitomer

ADJUNCT REPORT 3, CONT.

Conspiracy (which instead fell on the chief of Starfleet Operations), it had no choice but to take responsibility for the Tomed Incident. The intelligence blunder there by the Romulus office was entirely unavoidable, caused almost entirely by a single agent's misjudgement of the veracity of a very reliable, but deeply unpalatable source. It was a testament to the organization's own hubris: that its thousands of analysts, data banks and algorithms knew better than a connected individual with a less than respectful career choice.

Tomed was followed by a landslide of equally costly disasters: the Tavar Snatch (2319), the Tzenkethi Succession Crisis (2322), and the Tong Beak Incident (2326). All of these flashpoints did not paint SI in a good light, whether it be the surprise capture of an entire spy ring at Tavar or the misidentification of a Cardassian order at Tong Beak. By the late 2320s, Starfleet Command no longer viewed SI as a highly reputable source. Many regional commanders were resorting to the early 23rd century practice of relying on local scouts and informants over the centralized intel reports. Starfleet Intelligence was also failing to draw on the high quality of officers it relied upon in the 2280s, '90s, and 2300s. The ambitious academy graduate sought a frontier career over a desk job in the bowels of the presidio.

Starfleet Command and the civilian government, however, cannot escape blame. It was the admiralty – under Presidents Kiiwean and Sulu – that broke up the central sector and regional command staff, along with the intelligence attachés. The decision to essentially destroy nearly 80 years of institutional knowledge for political purposes had a massive impact on the interservice relationship. In many ways, it made sense: Starfleet Intelligence had been built up and shaped to oppose Klingon Imperial Intelligence, the Ministry of Internal Security, and the Romulan Tal Shiar. By the inauguration of President Sulu, Imperial Intelligence and MIS no longer existed, and the Tal Shiar had (ostensibly) disappeared behind the Neutral Zone. With no foes, there seemed no need for a massive intelligence network. Furthermore, the leadership of SI was increasingly considered a political liability: obsessed with perceived, shadowy threats at a time when the UFP was the only superpower in the known galaxy.

By the 2330s, outside of some frontline ops and the infrequent meetings of senior admirals, there was no direct contact between mid-level leaders in the fleet and SI. Where there was contact, it was shrouded in suspicion.

ADJUNCT REPORT 3, CONT.

Frontline officers believed that SI was full of paranoid, reactionary spooks; SI officers thought that frontline commanders were idealistic idiots. The distrust only continued to cost lives. Most notably, intelligence on the Cardassian Fifth Order's intention to attack and destroy the Federation colony on Setlik would not be passed up the chain of command. Only one vessel, USS *Rutledge*, would be in range to respond – instead of the six that could have been redirected if the report had been passed on to sector command.

The debacle only confirmed the view that SI was no longer an effective information gathering force. In many senses, SI already believed that it no longer had a role as part of an integrated intelligence organization. Instead, it was one of many complimentary (but, effectively, competitive) intelligence groups with the UFP – having to tussle with the Vulcan Security Force, the Andorian Department of Information, and the Regulan Defence Forces for funding, sources, and operational backing.

Even internally, SI was foundered by rivalries. By the 2350s, it had functionally returned to the parochial intelligence kingdoms of the 2240s. The removal of Signals Intelligence and Transmission [SIGNIT] to Starfleet Operations in 2351 saw SI lose its remaining functional department to another branch of the service, only exacerbating the rot. When the Bluegill infiltration was exposed, SI discovered that Beta Quadrant office and its internal affairs department both had separate files on the parasites – neither of which were cross-referenced or linked. When interviewed by this commission, Starfleet Intelligence leadership admitted that they only discovered the extent and resources of project Corvidae during the Wolf 359 crisis: 18 years after it began.

Starfleet Command must, however, shoulder the blame for the collapse of Starfleet Intelligence. The disbanding of its staff, compartmentalization of its officers away from decision-making bodies, and the deliberate measures taken to attract highly-skilled personnel away from intelligence work only exacerbated and cemented existing dysfunctionality. There are, of course, political explanations – the commission is aware of the difficulties of maintaining institutions that are traditionally associated with authoritarianism and oppression within the United Federation of Planets – but these are not excuses. Starfleet's failure to maintain an integrated intelligence network almost certainly contributed to a situation where information relating to the Borg was either not passed up the chain of command, or ignored by leaders who no longer valued the work of their own intelligence organization.

ADJUNCT REPORT 4

FEDERATION-CARDASSIAN RELATIONS, 2250–2367

Formal first contact between the United Federation of Planets and Cardassia would occur in 2250, when the Cardassian warship *Rutar* encountered the *USS Madiba* during a rescue operation. Intelligence records, however, suggest habitual and unofficial contact dating back to the foundation of the Federation, mainly through political refugees and merchants on Orion and Barolia.

At the time of contact, Cardassia was governed by a tripartite republic, with power shared between the military, judiciary, and civilian government (the *Detapa Council*). While the government had some xenonationalist tendencies, it was democratic enough to be considered a friendly neutral throughout most of the Klingon Cold War, though with some reservations. Distance from the Federation core, along with the direction of prevailing subspace currents, made communication and trade difficult. As such, contact was limited across most of the 23rd century.

Warp dynamic breakthroughs, combined with the *détente* after the *Khitomer Accords*, allowed the Federation to begin expansion into the Alpha Quadrant, bringing UFP and Cardassian interests into contact for the first time. This coincided with the rise of the military junta – known as the *Central Command* – to power on Cardassia, which displaced the civilian government in favor of the armed forces and the *Obsidian Order*, the security apparatus of the Cardassian state. The new junta began to aggressively expand the Cardassian Union, invading several neutral worlds – most notably occupying the *Bajor System* and subjecting its population to brutal military rule. The Cardassian ideology of authoritarian fascism was opposed to any political agreement with the Federation, and despite several attempts at negotiations in the 2320s and 30s, no convention was ever reached. Instead, the Central

ADJUNCT REPORT 4, CONT.

Command chose war, attacked Federation colonies along their border, and seized territory to feed their military machine and support their population.

The Cardassian Border Wars (2330s-2367) remain the longest conflict of the 24th century. They were characterized by violent border raids, planetary offensives, and surprise attacks by the Cardassian military, which hoped to take advantage of local superiority and strategic initiative to inflict untenable blows on the Federation's will to fight. Starfleet Command's ability to respond to the Cardassian was limited by a lack of modern ships and an operational tempo that prevented force concentration and active counteroperations.

The arrival of the New Orleans, Nebula, and ultimately Galaxy-class vessels in the late 2350s and early 2360s would give Starfleet the edge over the Central Command's aging fleet of *Galor*-type cruisers. A conclusive ceasefire would be declared on 44861.5, though unauthorized actions by Captain Maxwell and several authorized operations by the Cardassian Central Command have undermined the ongoing peace conference on Parliament, the planet authorized to host negotiations.

Current proceedings on Parliament point towards a final treaty within the next 18 months, which will almost certainly include territorial exchanges, the dismantling of various military outposts, and the creation of a demilitarized zone. Starfleet Intelligence reports also suggest that a withdrawal from Bajor is almost certain to occur by the end of Earth year 2369.

ADJUNCT REPORT 5

PROJECT CORVIDAE

Project Corvidae (2350-2364) was a level 5 classified Starfleet Intelligence opProject Corvidae (2350-2363) was a level five classified Starfleet Intelligence operation, aimed at providing over-the-horizon information, analysis, and crucially warning on the movements and intentions of “Unknown Hostile C” – later identified as the Borg.¹

Corvidae was based around three underlying concerns. At its heart were long-lasting concerns about threats from the far side of Romulan space, based on the assumption that Romulan expansion was being limited by a threat similar to the “Kinshaya” that limited Klingon expansion into the Beta Quadrant. Starfleet Intelligence – aware of exploratory command’s intentions to push deep space missions beyond the Typhon and Shackleton Expanses – was worried about the dangers that would befall a vessel moving into the Beta/Delta Quadrant border regions.

Secondly, existing rumors back to the late 21st/early 22nd century pointed towards the existence of *something* out beyond the Romulan Star Empire that was beyond description, and beyond the capabilities of most warp-capable powers to contend with. The rumors had three consistencies. The “beings” were 1) technological in nature 2) not an organized government 3) completely uninterested in any dialogue beyond surrender. The arrival of El-Aurian refugees from that region in the 2290s and 2300s further confirmed that suspicion; many of their accounts would be vital in plotting the routes of Corvidae vessels.

Thirdly, Starfleet Intelligence was able to confirm that significant Romulan assets were being moved deeper into the Beta Quadrant, outside of Federation telescope range. The fact that many of these vessels did not return was even more troubling. If Starfleet – and the Federation – were to expand into the Beta Quadrant and eventually explore the Delta Quadrant, it would need to know what it was facing –

1 “Unknown Hostile A” was the Tholian Assembly; UHB was the Tzenkethi Imperium.

ADJUNCT REPORT 5, CONT.

to avoid stumbling to a threat in the same manner it had with the Romulans and Klingons in the 23rd and 24th centuries.

Corvidae was a targeted intelligence operation designed to look like a sporadic civilian exploratory mission. Its ships, manned in many cases by scientists who had no knowledge of the possible danger they were in, were given "computer-identified" courses along with briefs on the technologic scale of the Borg based on unconfirmed El-Aurian reports. None of these reports, however, mentioned assimilation at all – or even the nature of Borg collective mentality, or even what their ships looked like. All this information would be collected by the nearly three dozen Corvidae vessels, sent out through the Ron'Govia Gap, and through various subspace currents into the Delta Quadrant. They had orders to conduct direct, close, and precise studies at the micro and macro level: from fleet movements down to biological development. No assessment of danger was given to the Corvidae volunteers.

Corvidae was never approved by Starfleet Command or the president's office, and would only be discovered in 2366 – three years after it was closed down. Despite the scale of the project, almost no substantial intelligence was recovered by SI. Only one vessel, SS *Piapiac*, would ever be seen again. She was recovered by the KDF and returned to the UFP. Internal study suggests that she was boarded by the Romulans.

Closed hearings of the commission on Project Corvidae
have been classified under Article 14, Section 31.

VOYAGER INQUIRY

DEPARTMENT OF TEMPORAL INVESTIGATIONS REPORT ON BORG INCURSIONS, 2063/2152 (SD 55694.4)

Recent depositions from the crew of *USS Voyager*, combined with the debrief of the *USS Enterprise* (1701-E) command personnel after the battle of Sector 001, have allowed the Department of Temporal Investigations to finalize its assessment of Borg involvement in pre-Federation history, and their temporal capabilities.

USS Voyager's encounters with the Borg and their "queens" confirms that the queen species – internally referred to in the collective as "Species 125" – have some form of temporal resonance or awareness, like that of *EI-Aurians*. This attunes them to temporal changes and interference, and also allows them to find the best points in time – past and future – to alter for their own gain. It is unknown where or how the Borg acquired the technology to create temporal rifts, but the deposition of xB Annika Hansen (adopted name "Seven of Nine") suggests that it may be related to their transwarp tunnel network. Further interviews with xBs conducted during and after Operation House Call support this statement, along with the view that the Borg collective was generally "attuned to any interference with history."

It appears that the temporal incursion initiated by the Borg from 2371 to 2063 was not the primary intention of their invasion, but an auxiliary plan by that queen to ensure the complete survival of the collective. Jean-Luc Picard's testimony confirms that long-standing records of a "cyborg attack" on Dr. Zefram Cochrane's launch Center (dismissed as rumor and myth for centuries) were correct, and that Dr. Lily Sloane did, in fact, encounter the Borg on a "supership from the future" (*USS Enterprise-E*).

VOYAGER INQUIRY, CONT.

While Picard believed that the Borg were destroyed entirely in that encounter, further ultra-secret reports from the Amundsen Foundation and the private records of Dr. Phlox of Denobula confirm that the “cybernetic kidnappers” encountered by NX-01 (*Enterprise*) in 2152 were almost certainly surviving Borg from 2063. It is possible that the Borg cube encountered at J-25 was responding to a call from aid transmitted from Earth in 2152.

As such, this Borg temporal incursion represents the most significant bootstrap paradox encountered by the DTI since its inception in 2267. It is, however, a closed loop: so long as the reports from Starfleet Intelligence, Ohinaka III and *Voyager* on the total collapse of the transwarp network are true. As far as the DTI can assess, Borg time travel is dependent on access to transwarp conduit technology. As long as the collective is disconnected from the network, further incursions by the Borg are unlikely – if not impossible. It is also unclear as to whether other unconfirmed or poorly documented encounters with cybernetic species, such as Kirk’s “doomsday machine” or the so called “Andromeda Androids,” were, in fact, Borg incursions.

BIOGRAPHIES

J.P. HANSON (2293–2367)

CAREER

VICE ADMIRAL (2361–67)

Chief of Starfleet Tactical

NAVIGATION OFFICER (2332–36)

USS Gabriel Lorca

VICE ADMIRAL (2353–61)

Commander in Chief, Sector 163

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER (2328–32)

Aide to Admiral Thelin

REAR ADMIRAL (2348–53)

C-in-C Starbase 154

LIEUTENANT (2321–28)

Starfleet Academy Command School

CAPTAIN (2345–2348)

USS Qingdao

LIEUTENANT (2321)

Strategic Planning Office

CAPTAIN (2340–44)

USS Lutleth

LIEUTENANT (2314–21)

USS Enterprise-B

FIRST OFFICER (2336–40)

USS Ojibwe

ENSIGN (2311–14)

USS Enterprise-B

John Patrick Hanson was, in many days, the last rear-guard of the Shukar era. Born in 2293, six months after the Khitomer Accords were signed, he entered Starfleet as part of the last generation of “turtlenecks” – the military-minded generation of officers educated to fight the Imperial Klingon Navy and the Romulan Stellar Fleet. Hanson did not come from a naval family – his mothers had been senior brokers in a New Armstrong

BIOGRAPHIES • HANSON, CONT.

insurance firm – but, to quote Hanson, he had “true space legs.” He reveled in his experience at the academy, earning a reputation amongst his peers as a martinet: a reputation he spent the rest of his career shaking off.

Hanson’s first posting out of the academy was the USS *Enterprise-B*. Six weeks afterwards, he manned her forward phaser control room during the Tomed Incident, the last combat with a peer foe by Starfleet until the Battle of Wolf 359. That experience – of helplessness against an enemy capable of doing real damage to his ship, his friends, and his nation – shaped him for the next 50 years.

Hanson would leave *Enterprise-B* as a lieutenant in 2321. After a short time at the Strategic Planning Office (Whitehall), he took a teaching position at Starfleet Academy with the tactical school. It was during this time that he first met Jean-Luc Picard. Making his acquaintance after an academy marathon, they would form a lasting friendship. Hanson would leave the academy in 2328 for a staff position across the water at the Presidio as senior aide de camp to Admiral Thelian.

Thelian – a pro-exploration figure, despite his pacifist views – took the defensive arm of Starfleet seriously, and engendered the importance of a well-ordered fleet into Hanson at a time when it was more fashionable to write off tactical training as “Cartwrightism.” 2332 saw a posting as second officer on the USS *Lorca*, where Hanson came into conflict with its science-oriented command staff, who viewed him as an outsider and a jingoist.

Hanson had a good reputation as a starship captain, one aided by two reasonably successful tours along the Cardassian and Tzenkethi borders at the height of the border conflicts. Hanson’s belief in “joint operations” made his patrol tactics more effective, while cementing the view amongst his enemies that he was a “frigate leader” – a moniker closely associated with the disgraced militarists of the 23rd century. His command skill could not be ignored though, and command were eager to promote him to flag rank.

However, Rear Admiral Hanson proved to be even more of a headache for Starfleet Command, who had not expected his defensive stance to follow him

BIOGRAPHIES • HANSON, CONT.

into senior positions. Starbase and then sector commander along part of the Cardassian border, his attempts to form a consistent rapid reaction force were repeatedly shut down by his superiors. His relationship with them was almost wrecked entirely during the Stargazer Inquiry, where his defense of Jean-Luc Picard nearly cost both of them the chance for future promotion. Having survived the politics of the tribunal, Hanson would finish his tour on the frontier and move (at his request) to Starfleet Tactical.

Hanson was shocked to discover the department that had once monopolized three facilities across Earth reduced to eight staff and a “broom cupboard” in the Presidio. He would fight an uphill battle across the early 2360s for more resources, staff, and a say in policymaking. All three would only be granted in the aftermath of the J-25 Incident, the lasting effects of this rapid re-expansion of Starfleet Tactical would not be felt until long after Hanson’s death at Wolf 359.

Admiral Hanson was the last of a generation of officers who held the tactical role of Starfleet on par with its exploratory one. He was not a visionary, however his tactical blunders during 359 itself underlined the inadequacy of even his combat experience and training. Still, he was right to understand that Starfleet was dangerously undercutting its military role. His words and warnings would be vindicated in the decade after his death.

BIOGRAPHIES, CONT.

TEBOK I'UMASHA TR'VALUSS

CAREER (GENERALLY SHROUDED IN UNCLEAR SOURCES)

ADMIRAL (2376-79)

Second Strike Group

FLEET SUB-COMMANDER (2365-72)

Second Strike Fleet

CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF (2375-76)

Imperial Expeditionary Force

CAPTAIN (235?-65)

Susse-thrai

Like most Romulan leaders, the life of Tebok – captain, fleet commander, and later admiral – is shrouded in the dual mysteries of Romulan civil society and the collapse of the political order after the Hobus Supernova. What is known suggests that Tebok was the archetypal officer of the late Romulan Empire: devoted to the Romulan way of life, and to the duty he had to the Star Navy. Sometimes called a “senator’s commander,” Tebok’s career was never shaped by his own political ambitions – at least, not overtly.

His career before the 2350s is relatively unknown. He was a graduate of the Calderah Military Academy and received decorations for service in the Norkan Campaign and the Ni-Vanus Operation. Several documents from the 2360s and ’70s – both supportive and derogatory – suggest that he acquitted himself well under the command of Admiral Jarok, though whether the two were close is unknown. The fact that Tebok’s career was unaffected by Jarok’s defection suggests that the two were not as close as the former’s detractors argued.

His service in the mid-2350s seems to have taken him to the outer reaches of the Beta Quadrant, where the Romulan frontier expeditions contacted the furthest out Borg vessels. It is unclear whether he received his command at this point, but declassified intelligence reports suggest that by 2360, Tebok had been the commanding officer of the *Susse-thrai* for a substantial amount of time.

In 2364, he was out of favor – most likely due to his opposition to Romulan plans to seize Klingon territory in the region of Mar-Tal – and was assigned to trace a Borg sphere through the Neutral Zone. During this mission, the *Susse-*

BIOGRAPHIES • TEBOK, CONT.

thrai encountered the USS *Enterprise*-D. On his own authority, Tebok initiated communications – opening the first conversation between the Federation and Romulans since the Tomed Incident.

His bluff with the *Enterprise* seems to have paid off for his career. By 2367, he was a fleet sub-commander (equivalent to a fleet captain or commodore) with the Second Strike Fleet. When the New Providence colony was attacked, Tebok and his flag squadron would track the Borg cube and *Enterprise* and then across the border on the orders of the Romulan High Command. Aboard the *Susse-thrai*, Tebok would witness the tragic events of the battle of Wolf 359 from his flag deck, cloaked on the strict orders of the Romulan Senate. His experience, however, did give him the hook he needed to return to political favor: the data around the failed solar probe detonated by Admiral Ross.

Tebok would successfully make the case for stellar weapons of mass destruction to the Romulan Senate, who jumped at the opportunity to develop a weapon to outmatch the Federation and the Klingons. While the “sun-bending” project would be taken over by elements in the Tal Shiar, it would mark Tebok’s ascent to political power: a rise that only quickened after his opposition to the doomed mission to the Founders’ home world.

When war came with the Dominion in 2375, Tebok found himself as the chief of staff to the Imperial Expeditionary Force, and would work alongside Ross, Jellico, and others to bring the full weight of the Romulan military machine against Cardassia during the final months of the war. As commander of Second Strike Group post-war, Tebok would form part of the brief but infamous Romulan Army of Occupation before its withdrawal in 2377. His opposition to the withdrawal would see him pushed to the side lines of the spiraling political crisis of the late Romulan Empire. His deft handling of the Qando Dup Rebellion spared him from the purges of the Shinzon regime, but his ambivalence towards the Reman – and his refusal to back Commander Donatra’s counter-coup – left him out in the cold after Shinzon’s death. Tebok was retired by the Senate with great ceremony, but with a warning to stay out of political life.

Tebok would leave Romulus in 2383 for a villa on the colony world of Anvus. His retirement – and the writing of his memoirs – would be interrupted by the Hobus Supernova and the massive evacuation of the imperial core. He now lives on Nimbus III.

BIOGRAPHIES, CONT.

JEAN-LUC PICARD
(2305—)

CAREER

REAR ADMIRAL (2382–85)

Deputy Chief of
Starfleet Operations

CAPTAIN (2372–81)

USS Enterprise-E

CAPTAIN (2364–2371)

USS Enterprise-D

CAPTAIN (2362–63)

Liasion to the Federation
Diplomatic Corps

CAPTAIN (2359–61)

Aide to the Starfleet
Liasion to the President

CAPTAIN (2333–55)

USS Stargazer

FIRST OFFICER (2333)

USS Stargazer

LIEUTENANT (2329–33)

USS Ignatius Sancho

ENGISN (2328–29)

USS Reliant

Jean-Luc Picard is, in many ways, the consummate Starfleet officer. In other words, his career was as unusual and unique as James T. Kirk's. The child of a family of traditionalists, Picard eschewed his family's generational winemaking for a career in Starfleet. Although he failed to gain entry on his first attempt, Picard succeeded in his second attempt in 2323. He subsequently became one of the most outstanding cadets in his class. A skilled archaeologist and sportsman, Picard was also well-known throughout his class year for being a playboy and somewhat infrequent troublemaker: he was almost removed from the academy after an incident his senior year.

Picard's career almost ended only six months after he graduated when he was stabbed through the heart by a Naussican in a bar brawl. While he recovered, the near-death experience appears to have brought focus to his

BIOGRAPHIES • PICARD, CONT.

life, which allowed him to soar through the ranks aboard USS *Reliant*, *Ignatius Sancho*, and *Stargazer*. In 2333, Picard assumed command of the latter vessel when the captain was killed on the bridge. Starfleet awarded Picard a promotion to the post of captain, making him one of the youngest officers ever to attain the position. He would remain captain of the *Stargazer* for over 20 years, building up a reputation as a reliable officer and talented diplomat on the frontier.

In 2355, the *Stargazer* was seriously damaged in a battle with an unknown enemy vessel, later discovered to be a Ferengi ship. Picard managed to destroy the enemy vessel using the *Stargazer's* warp engines in a unique tactical maneuver (later named the “Picard Maneuver”) but was forced to abandon the *Stargazer* aboard a shuttlecraft, where he and the other survivors traveled for weeks through deep space before being picked up by passing Federation starship.

The loss of *Stargazer* was not received well by Starfleet, and Picard's court martial was a tenuous and close-run affair. He was acquitted, however, and assigned to the chief of staff's office as a temporary aide in the interim while a new ship was found for him. Bureaucracy turned weeks into months. Disillusioned with Starfleet after the trial, Picard took a leave of absence and departed for the University of Alpha Centauri, where he completed a Doctorate in Archaeology and several independent excursions. He returned to the service as part of the Starfleet Liaison Office in the Palais de Concorde.

Very little of his time on their staff was spent in Paris; most involved work across the quadrant, where he would meet many of his future friends and shipmates. This work also continued during his brief time at the Diplomatic Office, during which he was earmarked to captain the USS *Enterprise-D*, one of the six *Galaxy*-classes scheduled to launch in the 2360s.

Picard's tenure as captain of the *Enterprise* is universally known: from first contact with the Ferengi, through to the discovery of the Iconian home world, and the Klingon succession crisis, the first three years of his tour were storied with triumphs. The Jouret Incident and the Battle of Wolf 359, however, cast a long and deep shadow over the rest of his career. In many ways, Picard was lucky to escape a discharge (and a prison sentence) for his actions under duress during his time as Locutus as Borg. A cloud would hang over *Enterprise-D* for

BIOGRAPHIES • PICARD, CONT.

the rest of her career, only lifted by the ship's stellar performance during the Maxwell Affair, the Ron'Govia Blockade during the Klingon Civil War, and the Unification Incident.

The loss of the *Enterprise* in 2371 was followed by a small power struggle over whether Picard would be allowed to command *Enterprise-E*, only ended by direct intervention from President Jaresh-Inyo. Picard's captaincy of the 1701-E largely vindicated him in the eyes of the Federation public, through his heroics during the Battle of Sector 001, performance as a field commander during the Gorn Crisis of 2374 and then, later, during the battle against Shinzon in 2379. Picard would be promoted to flag rank in 2382, brought in as Deputy chief of Starfleet Operations as part of a "house clearing move" by the new CINC, Admiral Marget Blackwell. The highlight of his time as an admiral was also his downfall: the Romulan refugee crisis.

Picard – who had a long-lasting interest in the Romulan people since his time on the planet with Ambassador Spock – was the loudest spokesperson for their plight in the run-up to and aftermath of the Hobus Supernova and led the Starfleet preparations for the mass evacuation of their population to safe sectors. The First Contact Day attacks of 2385 devastated both Mars and Federation public opinion: shaken by an attack so close to home, the political will for such a major rescue operation evaporated. Picard's resignation in protest was merely punctuation to the "Annus Miserabilis" that was 2385.

Jean-Luc Picard retired to his family vineyard in LeBarre, France, which hosts a large population of Romulan refugees. He has refused any and all interview requests by major news networks, potential biographers, and the curators of these documents.

BIOGRAPHIES • CONT.

PRESIDENT AMITRA

(2267–2394)

CAREER

POTUFP

(2365–69)

SECRETARY FOR
DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS

(2361–34)

HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR COLONIAL AFFAIRS

(2354–58)

COMMISSIONER FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF TRADE

(2345–54)

PANDRALITE JUNIOR REPRESENTATIVE TO
THE UNITED FEDERATION OF PLANETS

(2330–44)

FEDERAL SECRETARIAT
OF INFRASTRUCTURE

(2315–25)

PANDRIL SECRETARIAT
OF INFRASTRUCTURE

(2308–15)

President Qo-Lan Amitra Sib'xau is one of the most infamous presidents in the Federation's history. Her "We Must Negotiate" speech is probably the worst received speech by any Federation politician, challenged only by Samuel Solomon Qasar's "Nothing to Worry Over" speech after Tarsus IV and Lorna McClaren's "Rittenhouse Address." In many ways, Amitra's presidency and its blinkered focus on "peace at any price" was the apex of the post-Khitomer political hubris she represented, and the pacifist federalism that characterized her career.

Amitra was born on Pandril Silus in 2267, three days after ratification of the Organian Treaty. Her parents were both Starfleet officers and committed

BIOGRAPHIES • AMITRA, CONT.

Charterites. Naturally, she gravitated away from their pro-Starfleet attitudes, joining the Neo-Sevrinites in the 2280s and campaigning against allowing the second wave of Acturan “War Born” into Starfleet Academy in the late 2280s. As a student activist at Berkeley College, she would accuse Admiral Cartwright of being a “Militarist Stooge out for war” – a surprisingly correct accusation that would be vindicated only a year later by the Khitomer Conspiracy. She would be arrested three times during the 2290s for civil disobedience – including gluing herself to Admiral Fukuhara’s shuttle – as part of the “Peace without Strength” movement that opposed the slow rate of drawdown after Khitomer.

Despite her career as a radical troublemaker, Amitra was still considered a perfect candidate for civil service on Pandril. When she came up for the state lottery in 2308, she happily accepted a role in the Secretariat of Infrastructure. Despite rubbing most (if not all) of her colleagues the wrong way, she proved to be extremely hard working, and skilled at bringing the various moving parts of regional, planetary, and Federation-wide bureaucracy together to get a job done. Between 2315 and 2325 she worked for the Federation Secretariat for Infrastructure, where her political dislike of Starfleet was fostered into a professional disregard for them. Starfleet was slow to change, and easy to frighten. It was still obsessed with the problems and concerns of the 23rd century, and (in her view) not ready to move into the new, post-cold war era of peace.

Her antipathy towards Starfleet only grew after she was made the Pandrillan junior representative to the United Federation of Planets. With the ambassador tied up in the council, Amitra was deputized for many of the junior committees, including the Starfleet Oversight Committee. Beyond being a general nuisance to the Sulu and Thelian administrations, Amitra clashed repeatedly with Starfleet over its need for newer starships, leading the charge against first the *Ambassador* and later the inordinately expensive *Galaxy*-class projects.

In 2345, she was appointed by President Ravv Wi as commissioner for the Board of Trade. She excelled here as well, enjoying a position of authority that allowed her to put her theories of “STAR peace” [**peace through universal acceptance of free trade and the STAR. treaty**] to practice. It was also yet another theater for her ongoing battle with Starfleet – one that, with the increasingly pacifist trends of the voting populations, she was winning.

BIOGRAPHIES • AMITRA, CONT.

Despite her strong New Unionist views – especially on Starfleet demilitarization – Amitra would be kept on under President T'Pragh, though she would be promoted sideways into the Colonial Commission. T'Pragh – a pragmatic Vulcan of the highest degree – clashed with Amitra over defense policy, especially on the topic of Cardassian peace. Amitra was vocal about her opposition to continued hostilities with the Union. Despite making enemies with a large collection of the admiralty – and having a less-than-favorable reputation with those colonists who lived along the Cardassian border – Amitra remained popular with the core voters of the Federation. She would serve under a *third* president in 2361, becoming President Ito's diplomatic affairs commissioner. She organized the Parliament Peace Conference of 2364 and began ceasefire negotiations with Cardassia in the same year before launching her presidential campaign.

Amitra would be swept to Paris by her promise of “Peace in the Alpha Quadrant.” Peace with Cardassia would be joined by a total commitment to exploration, and a push for the Klingon Empire to pick up the slack of military duties. Opposed by Starfleet and many of the Thelian Charterites, Amitra's position was popular with an electorate tired of the “forever wars” of the Cardassian, Talarian, and Tzenthenthi borders. That popularity did not translate entirely into logical realpolitik; Amitra misjudged the military strength and resolve of the Cardassian government, as well as their objectives in the peace process.

Then the Borg made all that irrelevant. Amitra – forever suspicious of Starfleet and its litany of super-sentient encounters, whether Organian, Cetacean, or cyborg – refused to take the threat of the Borg seriously until the last moment. Her own poor judgment of the situation would hamstring Starfleet's attempts to react appropriately and stretch the distrustful relationship between civilian government and Starfleet to its absolute limit. Her address to the Federation at the height of the crisis – known as the “We Must Negotiate” speech – was met with horror, confusion, and disgust. This, combined with her refusal to acknowledge her role in the debacle, turned much of the Federation against her.

The failure of the peace process with Cardassia only exacerbated the rout. By the time the election rolled around in 2368, it was expected that Amitra's loss

BIOGRAPHIES • AMITRA, CONT.

would out-do even that of Samuel Solomon Qasar, who had been hounded out of office after Tarsus IV over a century beforehand. Even peace with Cardassia was tainted by the leak of the UI-van Report, which documented Cardassian crimes against sapient life during the Bajoran Occupation. The absolute nadir came on her 101st birthday, when she announced she was running for re-election to a crowd of friends and colleagues. The horrified silence in the room afterwards – along with the quiet, firm words spoken to her by her long-time confidant and chief of staff L'Garrey – confirmed her worst fears. Amitra's political career was over, and her legacy in tatters.

In many ways, Amitra should be held in better stead by historians and pundits. Her infrastructure policies in the 2340s and 50s were vital in trying the rapidly expanding Federation together, and the initiation of the peace process with Cardassia was a key contributing factor to the eventual withdrawal from Bajor. However, her shrewd judgment and firebrand radicalism – while endearing and useful as a junior representative or cabinet commissioner – would prove too dogmatic for the office of the president and left too many blind spots at the top.

BIOGRAPHIES • CONT.

TAELA SHANTHI
(2310—)

CAREER

FLEET ADMIRAL (2365–69, 2371–78) Commander-in-Chief of Starfleet	CAPTAIN (2345–55) <i>USS Shukar</i>
ADMIRAL (2361–) <i>USS Enterprise-E</i>	FIRST OFFICER (2340–43) <i>USS Leyte Gulf</i>
VICE ADMIRAL (2356–61) Commander-in-Chief of Starbase 54	CONN OFFICER (2337–40) <i>USS Leyte Gulf</i>
REAR ADMIRAL (2362–63) Commanding Officer, Task Force Shanthi	LIEUTENANT (2332–37) Starfleet Operations
	ENSIGN (2331–2332) <i>USS Kwame Nkrumah</i>

Taela Shanthi defined the mid-24th century as much as she was defined by it. The youngest CINC in Starfleet’s history – and second youngest captain by a mere six days – Shanthi’s career saw her turn the exploratory fleet of the 2340s and 50s into the well-oiled military machine that won the Dominion War.

Shanthi came from a long Starfleet line: her grandfather had commanded the *USS Tokugawa Ieyasu* at the Second Battle of Caleb IV, while her mother had commanded the *USS Kimberly Scott* on its final tour of the Klingon Neutral Zone in 2305. Her childhood was one of the typical “Starfleet brat,” bounced between ship, starbase, and ground facilities across the Tholian border region and the Eminiar Gap. Entering the academy on an accelerated program at 17, she graduated second in her class from the Command School in 2331. After a

BIOGRAPHIES • SHANTHI, CONT.

short term of service on USS *Kwame Nkrumah*, she was transferred to Starfleet Operations and onto Admiral Chekov's intelligence staff. Working with the *Enterprise* veteran in his final period in Starfleet was an important part of Shanthi's formative years. She learned a great deal from Chekov's shrewd judgment and quiet wit – and the way he could run rings around politicians and peers alike.

From 2337 until 2343 she served aboard the USS *Leyte Gulf*, task force leader in the Tzenkethi border war – first as conn officer and then as first officer to Captain Zefram Aaron. Aaron would eventually recommend her for command of the USS *Shukar*, a *New Orleans*-class cruiser operating out of Starbase 152. Shanthi's time as CO of the *Shukar* would see her face off against Tzenkethi, Cardassian, Talarian, and as-yet unidentified Ferengi foes. However, she would never build an acumen as a combat officer like peers such as Ben Maxwell or John Hanson. Instead, Shanthi's acumen as a diplomatic officer – both with new cultures and her own superiors – allowed her to build a reputation as a reliable, trustworthy, and dependable commander. But also as an ambitious one: ready and willing to bend and mold others to her worldview.

Escalations in the Cardassian border conflict would see Shanthi's transfer over to that theater, with a promotion to rear admiral, in charge of a task force aimed at protecting Federation colonies in the coreward regions of the Bajor Sector. While the operation was short, it cemented Shanthi as politically reliable, especially when it came to managing the expectations for defense with the increasingly powerful pacifist "New Unionist" lobby in the Federation Council. Shanthi would be given command of Starbase 54 in 2356, giving her purview over Starfleet operations across the Tholian and Talarian lines of contact. Her negotiations with the assembly were critical to their decision to send a permanent ambassador to Earth in 2358, the first time the Tholians had sent an embassy to a foreign power in their entire history.

Shanthi would return to San Francisco as head of Starfleet Operations on the recommendation of Admiral Aaron. Shanthi, disliking the stuffy and sedentary atmosphere at the Presidio, would spend most of her time at SFO at other facilities – either Utopia Planitia, the Baldwin Centre on Luna, or Starfleet Command Laikan. This preference spared her the horrors of the bluegill parasite invasion that tore apart the senior staff in 2364. Shanthi led the inquiry

BIOGRAPHIES • SHANTHI, CONT.

afterwards, clearing most of the senior staff (but not Starfleet Intelligence, notably) of any wrongdoing. Even so, many of the infected personnel would resign afterwards, including the CINC. On outgoing President Ito's recommendation, Shanthi was put forward as the next commander-in-chief of Starfleet, passing the nomination vote in the council by a two-thirds majority.

Shanthi inherited a new senior staff, but the same semi-dysfunctional fleet – at war with its own mission objectives and its new political master, the radical pacifist Qo-Lan Amitra. Pressure to end the war with Cardassia seemed like the biggest headache, but even that was overcome by the immense and unstoppable threat of the Borg. Shanthi's leadership during the Borg Incursion – hamstrung by political indecisiveness, diabolical intelligence failures, and an implacable, unstoppable foe – proved to be critical to holding Starfleet and the Federation together throughout the disaster. Her leadership afterwards, vindicated by the Holland Commission, would steer Starfleet through the dangers of the Klingon Civil War, the Reunification Crisis, and the Cardassian peace treaty. Exhausted by refitting the fleet (and still feeling responsible for the rapidly spiraling DMZ debacle), Shanthi would resign as CINC in 2368, standing aside for Ruah Brackett.

Shanthi considered leaving Starfleet, but was persuaded by her erstwhile protégé, Rodney Leyton, to stay on. She would take command of Starbase 247 on the fringes of Thallonian space. Leyton's later attempt to overthrow Jaresh-Inyo would shock, but not surprise her, as she had always been suspicious of his disregard for their civilian masters. After the 2372 election, Shanthi would be asked to return as CINC by newly elected President Min Zife. Zife had collaborated with Shanthi during the Tholian negotiations and their mutual respect would prove vital during the heady days to come.

Shanthi's second tenure as CINC would be shaped by the Dominion War. Almost from her first day back in the Presidio, her sole duty was to prepare the UFP for a general interspace conflict of some sort: either the immediate battle with Gowron's Klingon Empire, or the implacable foes in the Gamma Quadrant. Shanthi worked masterfully to ensure that the activation of Starfleet's reserves was completed by the time war was declared, and then to ensure that the political pressures from Zife and the council could be met without jeopardizing the strategic operations of the combined allied fleets. Shanthi would also prove

BIOGRAPHIES • SHANTHI, CONT.

crucial in negotiating the Garidian Agreement, suspending the Treaty of Algeron for the duration of hostilities and allowing the Romulan Star Navy to establish forward bases within certain parts of Federation space.

Shanthi avoided becoming embroiled in the trials of post-war reconstruction, instead devoting herself to ensuring that the fleet demobilized responsibly, focusing on the well-being of discharged personnel. She would also begin preparing to hand over the reins to the next generation of leaders: a move that was halted on several occasions by President Zife, who simply did not trust any of the possible candidates with Starfleet at the time. Eventually, in the aftermath of the Ohinaka III Crisis and the “Week of Hell”, Shanthi would persuade Zife to let her stand down. She would nominate Owen Paris – Chief of Starfleet Operations – as her successor, despite Zife’s reservations.

Shanthi retired to Accra, Ghana, where she lives with her wife and husband. She is an emeritus professor at the University of West Africa, where she teaches interstellar political theory.



ANDY POULASTIDES

LONDON, EARTH

Stardate 2023.05.14



I was 10 years old when I heard Commander Riker utter the fateful words “Mr. Worf, fire!”

The music built to a thundering crescendo, the screen went dark as the credits rolled, and then it was over. How could it be over! They could not leave it like that! What would happen to Captain Picard? How would they rescue him? What would happen next!

Living in the UK in the ‘90s before the internet the wait was almost intolerable but finally after what seemed like an eternity Part II aired on BBC 2 at six and for once it was not preempted by the tennis or snooker and *Star Trek* managed to deliver an episode every bit as thrilling as the set up and a satisfying conclusion to the Part I, but I will always remember two moments specifically in that episode.

The first was the shot of the remains of the fleet from Wolf 359. Until then we had never seen more than two starships on screen at any time – the *Hood* or another *Excelsior*-class dropping off this week’s “Badmiral” or a *Miranda*-class ship adrift presenting a mystery for the crew to solve. But here were the remains of dozens of ships. It felt like the entirety of Starfleet must have tried to stop the Borg and as Shelby listed off the names I wondered what of these ships, what of their histories and the crews on them? I desperately wanted to know more.

The second was at the end of the episode. When Picard had returned to the familiar comfort of the ready room with a cup of Earl Gray, Riker and Shelby had smiled and left but there was this moment where Picard couldn’t sit down to enjoy his tea, and went to stare out of the window. This simple moment suggested that he had been changed by the events of this episode and after this he would never be the same again.

"The Best of Both Worlds" and Wolf 359 maintained a hold on my imagination ever since. We caught a glimpse of the battle in the pilot episode of *Deep Space Nine*, and in *Voyager* there were hints and suggestions about former Borg who had been present at the battle but it was always left largely to our imagination what had happened, and while *Deep Space Nine* showed us many spectacular battles over its run, and *Voyager* had many episodes with the Borg, they were never as compelling or impactful as the sight of those broken starships passing the *Enterprise-D* as it chased after the Borg and its erstwhile captain.

In the following years, with the arrival of the internet, I found many others who shared my love of *Star Trek* and spaceships. I found communities and fans who would happily discuss the minutiae of starships and I discovered that people could write their own *Star Trek* stories. This was something of a revelation to me, but it wasn't something I felt I could do. "I'm not a writer" I would confidently tell myself and I would go back to thinking about Wolf 359 and wondering what it would have been like.

It was about 30 years after I had first watched "Best of Both Worlds" when I met Eric and I realized here was someone who shared my interest and passion for storytelling and *Star Trek*. This was at the height of Covid and discussing *Star Trek* with Eric, and hearing his enthusiasm for my ideas, and desire to see the project realized finally gave me the drive to put pen to paper and start mapping out the ideas that had been swirling around my head for the past three decades. In this book, we were able to draw together 60 years of *Star Trek* history and breathe life into events and characters – some new, some familiar – and to borrow their voices to help to tell their story.

I could not have done this alone. Besides Eric, I would like to thank Annie for her patience in proofreading with my aversion to the Oxford comma, Hye for his spectacular page design and bringing the book to life as well as valuable insights into the xBs, and many others who have offered their support to this project. But most importantly to my wife Amber, who was my biggest cheerleader, and whom I made cry on the Tube several times when she was reading early drafts. I choose to believe because of their emotional impact, not my butchering of the English language.

In closing, I will leave you with the words from another great sci-fi series:

"We are all stories in the end, just make it a good one, eh?"

ERIC V. MUIRHEAD

EL PASO, EARTH

Stardate 2023.03.19



This work seems destined to coincide with real-world military memory. Andy Poulastides and I began what would become *We Have Engaged the Borg* the same week Kabul fell to the Taliban after nearly 20 years of war. Today, as I write these words, it happens to be the 20th anniversary of the start of the Iraq War. These times of reflection shaped the words in this volume more than I can fully articulate in this short note.

When Andy first approached me about helping him write an oral history of the Battle of Wolf 359, I was finishing my tour as an assistant professor of history at the United States Military Academy at West Point. We found each other through our mutual friend, Claude Berube, another history professor at my rival school, the United States Naval Academy (obligatory “Go Army, Beat Navy!” Sorry, Claude). I had recently presented at NavyCon, an online science fiction conference dedicated to discussing contemporary military issues through the lens of sci-fi. My presentation was on the efficiency of the Klingon Defense Force’s expeditionary model vis-à-vis Starfleet’s obsession with large, luxurious capital ships. Andy and I hit it off immediately. He also knew that I had written a series of short stories featuring the experiences of a Starfleet crew occupying Cardassia after the Dominion War, and asked me if I would like to become involved in his Wolf 359 history project. I enthusiastically accepted.

I’ve been a *Star Trek* fan for as long as I can remember. *The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine* were two major reasons why I considered a military career after college. I yearned for a life of meaning, dreamed of finding new family around the world, and wanted to serve as 9/11 had profoundly impacted me just a few years before.

Now, a decade and a half later, I can say that I have found all those things – just not in the way I initially expected. I’ve traveled the globe multiple times.

I've stood on the Silk Road in the middle of Afghanistan between two forts built by Alexander the Great. I've stared across the Demilitarized Zone into North Korea (multiple times). I've worked with allies from six different continents and dozens of countries: each with their own distinct cultures, languages, and religions. I've experienced war and peace. I've been a student, and after being inspired by truly great mentors, chose to become a teacher.

Through it all, *Star Trek* was there. From watching episodes of *Deep Space Nine* in Ghazni Province in the precious few hours between shifts in the command post, to writing my own *Trek*-inspired works to help deal with a lot of unresolved memories and feelings during my first company command.

Trek has always been my way of addressing military experiences in a way to make them more accessible to both me and others. Wolf 359, like the real-world tragedies that have shaped the lives of the millennial generation, changed the trajectory of its world's events. I hope that by reading these pages, you come away with a small, but insightful glimpse at how young veterans (well, maybe not so young anymore) navigated the life-changing events in their own world.

HISTORY BEFORE AND AFTER THE STRUGGLE THAT FOREVER CHANGED THE ALPHA QUADRANT

On stardate 43975.2, Starbase 23 received a distress signal from the New Providence research colony on Jouret IV. The garbled transmission spoke of a large cube-like vessel that had entered the system and destroyed the small number of colony defense ships. The last transmission before all contact was lost showed a massive, black monolithic shape slowly descending over the colony.

Although not widely known outside the upper echelons of Starfleet Command, this was the Borg: a powerful race of cybernetic lifeforms, first encountered a year prior by the USS *Enterprise* (NCC-1701-D, c. J-L Picard) over 7,000 light-years away.

What was to follow over the following days would rock the Federation to its very core: the destruction of 39 starships at Wolf 359, the loss of over 11,000 sapients, and Earth — the seat of the UFP Government and home of Starfleet — threatened with total assimilation.

PRAISE FOR WE HAVE ENGAGED THE BORG

"We Have Engaged the Borg" drops you right into the crisis of 2366: complete with triumph, tragedy, and heroism. The overall story of Federation hubris is matched only by that of individual guts, glory, and sacrifice."

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— SAN FRANCISCO DELTA

"The finest history from below of our generation."

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THE OFFICE OF STARFLEET INTELLIGENCE AND THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF THE UNITED FEDERATION OF PLANETS HAVE APPROVED THE PARTIAL DECLASSIFICATION OF THE "HOLLAND REPORT ON THE BORG INCURSION OF 2366" AFTER 25 EARTH STANDARD YEARS IN ACCORDANCE WITH BOTH THE JONES-XERATHI ACT CONCERNING THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION OF 2359 AND UNITED FEDERATION OF PLANETS EXECUTIVE ORDER 329784. CERTAIN SEGMENTS HAVE BEEN DEEMED STILL SENSITIVE TO NATIONAL SECURITY AND HAVE BEEN REDACTED AND CLASSIFIED UNDER STARFLEET ORDER 212019 AS PERTINENT TO ARTICLE 14, SECTION 31 OF THE FEDERATION CHARTER.

PLEASE SUBMIT ALL INQUIRIES IN WRITING TO EITHER THE DEPARTMENT OF THE STARFLEET INTELLIGENCE OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO, EARTH, OR THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF THE UNITED FEDERATION OF PLANETS, LONDON, EARTH.

