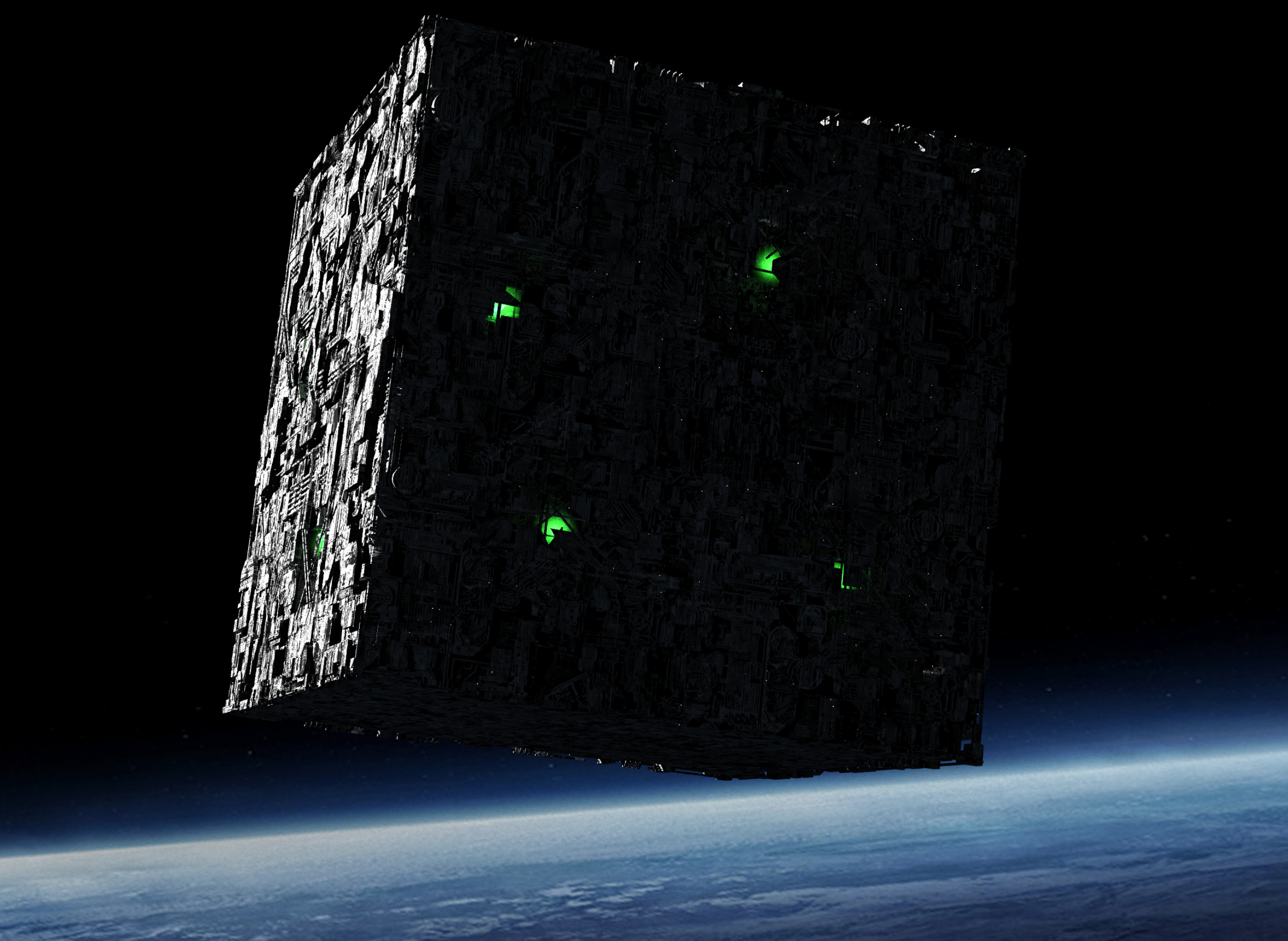


— WE HAVE —
ENGAGED
THE BORG

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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CHAPTER 1

FIRST CONTACT

- 007 • Prelude
- 011 • El'rik Zh'uhead
- 014 • Sonya Gomez
- 018 • Guinan
- 021 • Data
- 024 • J.P. Hanson
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- 032 • Elizabeth Shelby
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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



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.

