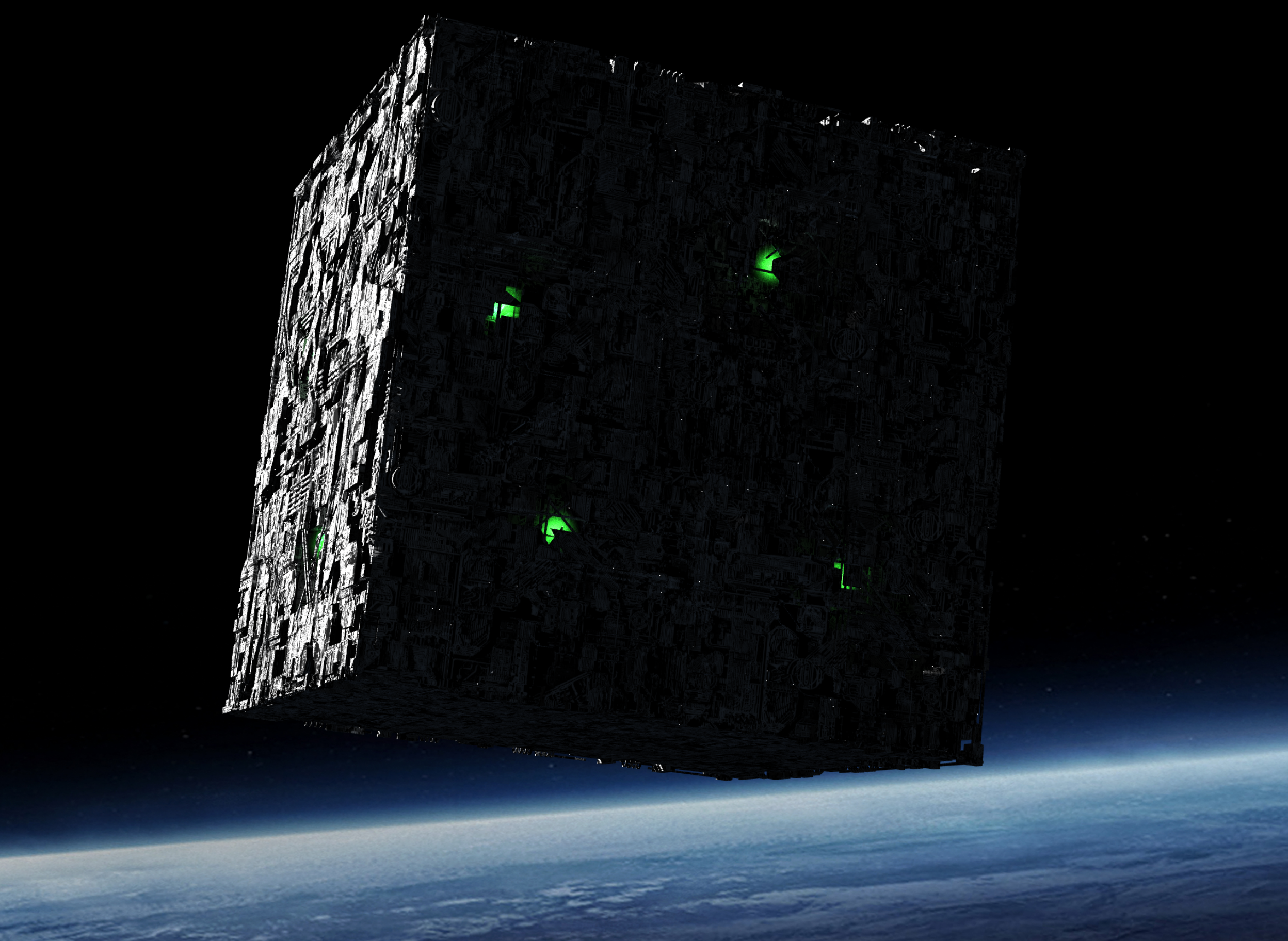


— WE HAVE —
ENGAGED
THE BORG

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



ANDY POULASTIDES & ERIC V. MUIRHEAD



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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 3 EARTH

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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 Torrissi 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 Bizarro 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



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.

