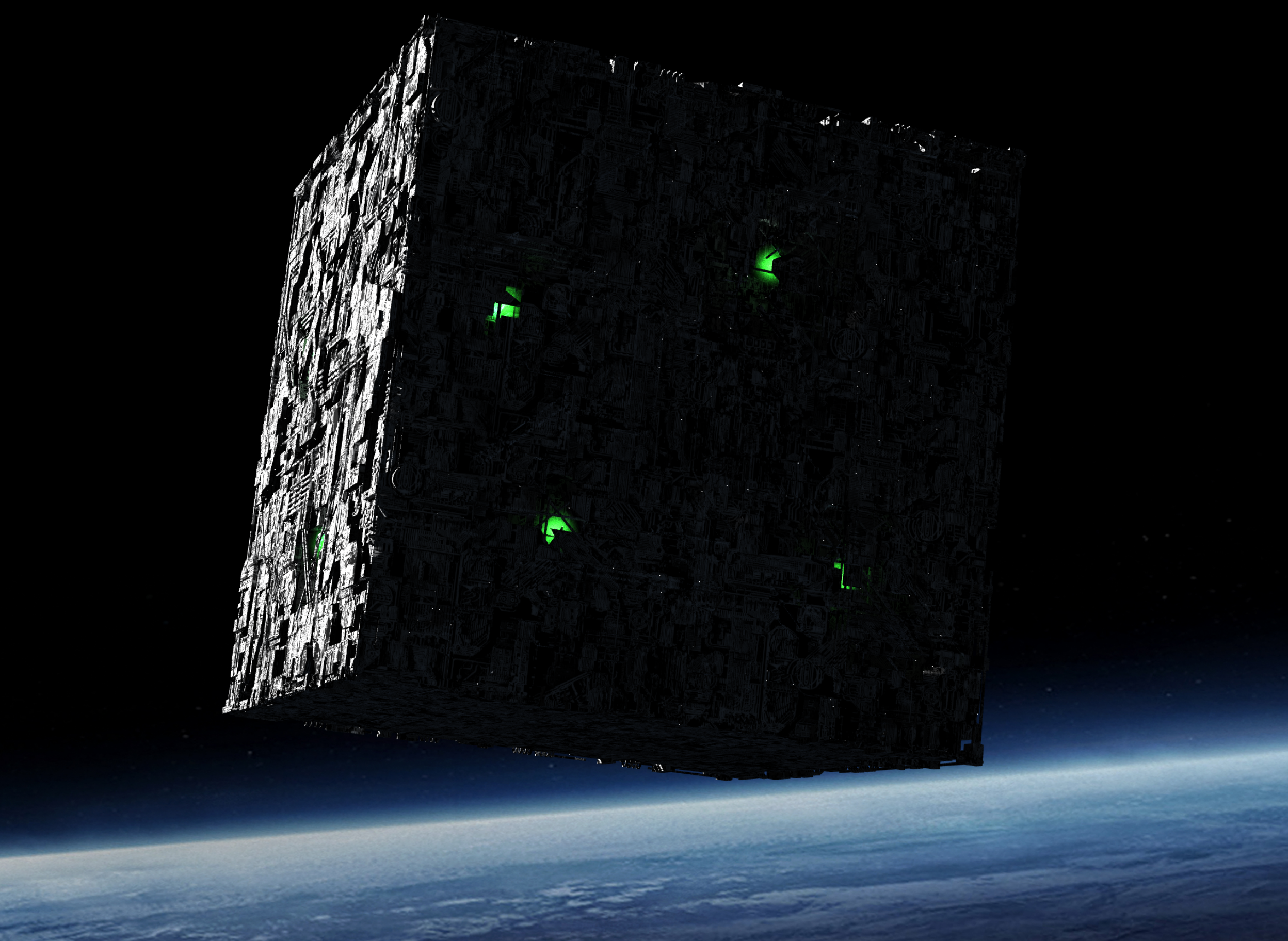


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ENGAGED
THE BORG

THE ORAL HISTORY OF
THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359



ANDY POULASTIDES & ERIC V. MUIRHEAD



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THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED ON STARDATE 77219.9 AFTER INITIAL PUBLICATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE COPPELIUS AFFAIR AND ARTIFACT MASSACRE ON STARDATE 76338.9, AND THE REPEAL OF THE FEDERATION'S BAN ON SYNTHETIC LIFE.



CHAPTER 9 C O D A

■ 445 Jean-Luc Picard

JEAN-LUC PICARD

LA BARRE, EARTH

Stardate 77219.9 – 2400

The message came out of the blue and did not include any information other than an invitation to sit down for tea at my convenience the next time I was on Earth. Signed "JLP."

I was shocked, stunned – speechless. For the past 30 years, Jean-Luc Picard had made a point to actively avoid me and my colleagues. During the Holland Commision, he had an aide send any documents or logs we requested. He answered direct questions via subspace. but always declined the opportunity for an interview. When I started to work on my book I received no response to my attempts to reach out to his office.

I really don't know why he has extended this invitation. If he disliked something that was printed, I'm sure his office would have communicated with the publisher. It took me some time to build up the courage to accept the meeting, but finally the day has arrived.

Stepping off the transporter pad, I'm suddenly hit with a wave of nostalgia. It is close to 30 years since I was last here, but the smells and sounds of the small provincial village in the west of France hit me as I step out of the station onto the market street. There is little doubt in my mind that it remains largely unchanged since the 20th century at least.

With the autumnal sun shining I decide to walk up to the Chateau Picard. As I stroll along these narrow country roads, nodding a greeting to the passing locals, I can see the Chateau up ahead looking much as it did on my last visit.

Upon arrival I am greeted by a Romulan housekeeper. She introduces herself as Laris and leads me through to Picard's study. It is a treasure trove of objet d'art and artifacts of a 70-year career. Behind a desk is a large painting of the Enterprise-D and sitting there is Admiral Jean-Luc Picard.

He smiles warmly and greets me, offering me tea. He gestures for us to move over to a couch and we sit. On the table before us are a number of PADDs and books, including my own. I can feel my pulse thumping as Laris enters with a tray and places it down on the table before leaving. Picard pours a cup of tea for me, and then one for himself. I must confess I have never been a fan of tea, but the opportunity to share a cup with Jean-Luc Picard is too great to pass up. I sip at the bitter liquid and smile in appreciation, not knowing where to begin. Fortunately, I don't have too.



I'm sure you are wondering why, after all these years, I reached out – why I finally asked you to come and see me. If I am being completely honest with you, I'm not entirely sure myself.

Robert DeSoto has always spoken very highly of you, as has Will Riker, and many others whose opinions I trust. But given the nature of your work and my experiences with the Borg...I hope you can understand my reticence.

[I open my mouth to respond but he holds his hand up.]

Please let me finish, I need to say this.

When the Borg took me from the Enterprise and assimilated me into the collective...it was not only a violation of my body, but of my mind. Of the very core of who I am. They used me as a weapon. They made me watch as they destroyed the fleet at Wolf 359. They made me complicit in the slaughter of thousands of starfleet officers – many of whom I considered friends – and came within a hair's breadth of assimilating Earth. They did all of this with me as their figurehead. The name they gave me, "Locutus," is derived from Latin. It means "one who speaks."

Guinan once told me that many who face the threat of the Borg consider them more akin to a storm or a plague. They are able to take a measure of comfort in knowing that it is nothing personal – they haven't been singled out for this doom. All you can do is try to weather it or get out of its way.

But the Borg singled *me* out. Of all the individuals that they had encountered, they singled me out, and they came halfway across the galaxy to violate me. They used me to commit unspeakable atrocities. After my crew rescued me, I hoped that I would be able to put this behind me – file it away as another life experience and try to move on. But I couldn't.

I knew death and destruction would be possibilities when I joined Starfleet. I have suffered loss before, been forced to destroy starships that threatened my ship, I have sent people to their deaths, and have even lost friends...but in those instances I was in *control*. As Locutus, I was complicit but I was unable to resist.

For years I had nightmares. Every time I closed my eyes the collective was there lurking, just beneath the surface. At times, I felt like I could hear them whispering just at the edge of my consciousness. I thought the only way I could continue was to push it all deep *deep* down and to lock it all away. The idea of talking to anyone about my experiences was not something I was able to contemplate.

That all began to change once we rescued Hugh. He was so incredibly young when we first encountered him, but all I could see in him were the Borg and all the pain they had inflicted on me. I saw in him an opportunity to hurt them

back by using him as a weapon – just as they had used me. I came so close to committing *genocide*. All in the name of the greater good – something that I would never have considered under any other circumstances. But because it was the *Borg* and because they had hurt me, I felt my hatred justified – that I would be doing the galaxy a service to rid it of this menace.

But my crew befriended this Borg and gave him a name. It made me pause, and I realized that my hatred had blinded me. I was close to becoming the very thing the Borg had tried to mold me into: single-minded in my quest for destruction. We returned Hugh to the collective at his own behest. I thought that was the end of it and tried not to add his face to the ghosts that would visit me at night.

We encountered him again, hardly a year and a half later. He was now free of the Borg: working to try and come to terms with reality outside the collective he'd known his entire waking life, trying to help unify the others from his clade that were also severed from the hive. At the time, I was still hesitant to confront my relationship with the Borg. I considered them first and foremost as a threat. But here was a young, self-made man who'd taken it upon himself to try and to help find a better life for his fellow xBs, and to help them embrace their newfound identities as individuals. And in turn, they built not only a city, but a *community* on Ohniaka III, all of their own accord .

With the Reclamation Project, Hugh dedicated his life to the service of others and to helping his fellow xBs – all while also having to process and come to terms with his own burgeoning individuality in the face of ignorance, fear, and suspicion. Even from within our Federation that has *long* prided itself on being a welcoming and tolerant society. As recent events have shown, we still have large blindspots when it comes to synthetic life – including xBs.

I must take a certain amount of personal responsibility here. Although I have long championed the rights of all sentient and sapient life – including synthetic – the Borg have never entered into that equation. I am perhaps the most prominent xB in the Alpha Quadrant, but I have never considered myself as such. Indeed, I have strived almost everyday since being freed from the collective *not* to be defined by my time with the Borg. So many others are not afforded that luxury.

After Wolf 359, Starfleet took any drones that they recovered and kept them

in stasis, unsure of what to do with them. Eventually, a deal was struck to send nearly 800 dormant drones to Ohniaka III. Starfleet lacked the resources or the understanding to help rehabilitate them, but Hugh's community of xBs offered them a *chance*. Some of these were Starfleet officers taken during the battle who, in addition to the trauma of assimilation, discovered their families and loved ones did not know how to come to terms with their return after so long away or with the physical and emotional scars they now carried. I could have done *more* to speak for these people, to advocate for them before Starfleet, but I was still fighting my own demons, and remained largely ignorant of their plight – by my own choice, I admit.

When the second Borg cube attacked Earth, I was forced to confront the collective directly. Things came to a head and I very nearly lost control. It was only the kindness of a stranger who witnessed my behavior as the Borg attempted to claim the *Enterprise-E* that forced me to accept that my experiences with the Borg had, indeed, affected me and were now a part of my identity. In the early '80s, I sought out representatives from Ohniaka III on Earth, and with their and Hugh's aid, I was able to find some measure of peace with the past. That is not to say that I was *wholly* rid of those demons.

Today, I am finding it difficult to talk about this. Even now, in this space, and to you – who I *know* understands the plight of what many connected to the Borg have gone through. It has taken me a long time – and no small amount of help from others – to accept that what transpired was not my fault, despite my stubbornness. That it was alright to feel the anger, to feel the loss, and to know that those feelings would never go away. Thanks to the wonders of Dr. Crusher, I bear no physical scars, but the emotional and psychological ones will remain with me for the rest of my life.

I suspect that was why Hugh chose to keep his physical scars after he had his Borg implants removed. Thanks to longstanding dermal damage, not all former Borg have that choice. But those scars – they were a way to show to the world what he was experiencing internally. He showed solidarity with many of the xBs who did not have access to the same medical care that is afforded those of us in the Federation.

I still struggle with that part of myself. I know that I always will. No one escapes the trauma of assimilation, but knowing that Hugh was out there was

a comfort. That he understood and was willing to shine a light into those dark places within xBs to help keep the shadows at bay. So much so that I felt that I didn't have to speak up about my experiences. I mean, who wants to hear the thoughts of an irrelevant old man speaking for a people he has spent a lifetime denying?

But now, Hugh is...

[He looks away up towards the painting of the *Enterprise-D*. He is silent for a moment before he returns to me.]

I watched Hugh and other xBs put themselves in harm's way to protect their xB comrades, including me. I feel now, more than ever, that it is important to speak up, not for me, but for *Hugh*, and the others like him. Like *us*. I still don't know if anyone would be interested to hear what I have to say, but I feel it is my duty to speak, to acknowledge that while the Borg as a collective are a very grave threat which must be taken seriously, the *individuals* within the collective are not there by choice. It was a realization I had, upon meeting Hugh again for the first time in many years: they are not monsters. They are *victims*. Often when they are freed, xBs face fear and abuse from people who fear the collective and what they represent. These are free, sentient beings ostracized from the societies they came from. This should not be the case, and we all must seek to do better.

I hope that, by sharing my experiences with the Borg and making my anguish plain, it will show others who have been in such places that it can pass. And to them, I say: you *will* survive it. It will be a terrible, enduring struggle that you must wrestle with, as well as find shelter from it in good company. But you *can* make peace with it, after that proverbial night of tumult. You *can* lead a life where your experiences with the Borg – though forever a part of you – do not *define* you.

THE END



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.

