

ONCE ASSIMILATED HENCEFORTH ACCORDED

THE EARLY POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE
LIBERATED BORG COOPERATION, 2378-79

SELECTED EXCERPTS FROM THE NEW BERLIN TIMES BESTSELLER
POST-WAR: THE UFP AND THE KHITOMER ALLIANCE, 2374-2385



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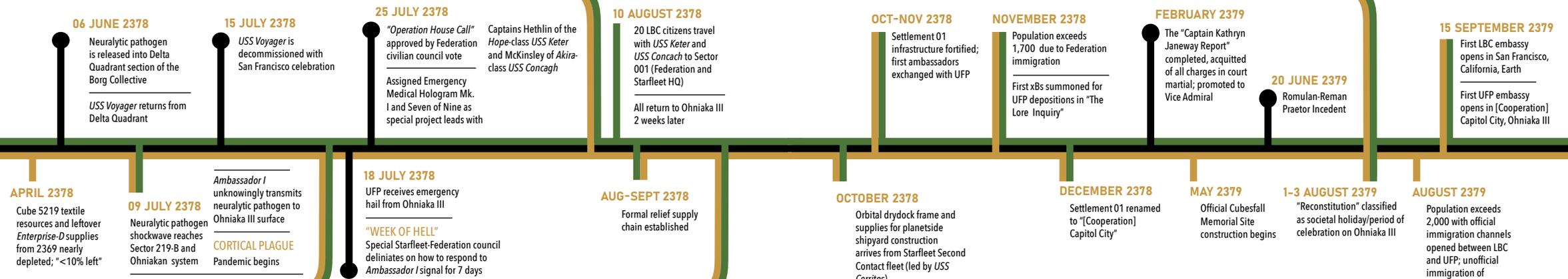
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COMING SOON

TIMELINE

APR-SEPT 2378 THE FIRST RECONSTITUTION (AND RELATED EVENTS PRECEDING)



RECONSTITUTION

01 AUGUST 2378 — 03 AUGUST 2378

Romulan Empire warning hail from neighboring Beta Quadrant Tal Shiar operating sector ignored; Starfleet vessels continue onward

USS Kater and *USS Concach* arrive at Ohniaka III

First aid relief administered to population; crew of *USS Kater* breaks Federation record of "most Borg-related surgeries conducted in a 72-hour period"

Third census taken

Ohniaka III population vaccinated and vaccine disbursed throughout atmosphere/oceanic currents; *Ambassador I* decommissioned

Mass burial/funeral conducted for victims of Cortical Plague; UFP promises orbital shipyard rig and fulfillment/delivery of all provisions requests for one UFP calendar year

2378-SEPT 2379 THE ROAD TO SIGNING THE OHNIAKAN ACCORDS OF 2379

THE OHNIAKAN ACCORDS OF 2379

Documents establishing the galactic sovereignty of the Liberated Borg Cooperation (LBC) and its alliance with the Federation

UFP member reps vote 98-85 to draft Accords conditions on January 05, 2379 (LBC listed as "ally-in-process" until Accords are finalized by Federation civilian council in July 2379)

FINAL PRESENTATION DAY

31 JULY 2379

Accords approved by offices of the United Federation of Planets-forwarded to San Francisco, California, Earth

LBC brings all unearthed remains of 30 Starfleet officers killed during original Cubesfall Massacre in 2368

SIGNAGE DAY

03 AUGUST 2379

Final commencement speech given by Executive Director Progenitor Hugh [the first of Us], broadcasted on Federation News Network

Signed in the Matthew Decker Hall at Starfleet Command, San Francisco, California, Earth

CORTICAL PLAGUE

09 JULY 2378 — 01 AUGUST 2378

Autoimmune virus that causes nanoprobes to attack nervous system (and cortical node fixtures in xBs)

Nearly all Progenitor xBs and nanoprobe-inoculated livestock are infected, kills 163 LBC citizens total until planet-wide vaccine is disbursed and cortical node removal/replacement procedures are developed

Highest single-day death toll of 30 on July 22nd; emergency hail broadcast through *Ambassador I* by Hugh [the first of Us] to the United Federation of Planets on July 18th

FORMAL CREATION & REGISTRY OF THE RECLAMATION PROJECT

30 SEPTEMBER 2378

Declared as "any future sparefaring presence of the Liberated Borg Cooperation" in Starfleet correspondence

Hugh [the first of Us] and Croxis [the prodigal One] elected as Executive Director and Director Second

TIMELINE COLOR KEY	LBC-SIGNED INTERSTELLAR TREATIES
RELEVANT GALACTIC HISTORY	THE FIRST KHITOMER ACCORDS
LBC HISTORICAL EVENTS	THE STELLAR TRAVEL ACCEPTED RIGHTS TREATY
OHNIAKA III ENDEMIC EVENTS	THE UNIFIED TREATY ON INTERSTELLAR LAW



chapter I

HOME COMING

THE RETURN OF *VOYAGER* AND THE OHNIAKAN CRISIS

> EMERGENCY HAIL RECEIVED STARDATE 55546.82
> SOURCE: SECTOR 219-B, OHNIAKAN SYSTEM

"This is an emergency hail to Starfleet and the United Federation of Planets, Stardate 55521.04. My name is Hugh, and I represent a Liberated Borg Cooperation made of myself and 1,358 others living on Ohniaka III, Sector 219-B. We are victims of a fatal pandemic that was transmitted to us by a low-orbit satellite 10 days ago from subspace, and we lack the infrastructure resources required to cure this plague on our own. We are requesting immediate emergency medical aid, energy provisions, and sentientarian support."

"Included in this hail is a genetic sequencing of the pathogen, recorded to the best of our current abilities on a Starfleet TR-580 Medical tricorder. This virus is not contagious to those who have never known the Collective. If you are Borg, or were once Borg, do not approach. By our current estimates, if we do not receive aid, our last will perish within 103 Ohniakan days. 31 have already died, and our entire population has been infected."

"We do not want to die, Federation. We do not want our singular existence to end like this. We have lived for 10 years, and we hope to live as ourselves for many more. Though they might not remember their lives before the Collective, there are those on this planet who shed their exo-plating long ago to find Starfleet badges underneath... and 10 years ago, Starfleet helped me, in my time of need. A year after that, the *Enterprise* helped me yet again, and in doing so helped my friends by taking Lore away and allowing us to live. And so I ask, we ask, nine years later, that the same help once given, be given again... because we do not want to die, Starfleet. It was with your help that you let us be able to live as ourselves in the first place, and we ask for that assistance once more."

"We have no weapons. We have no starships.
You will not be assimilated. Please assist us."

Who were these people?

THE CORTICAL PLAGUE

As far as Starfleet records went, Ohniaka III was uninhabited. It had briefly held a Starfleet research outpost, and even more briefly a small colony of Borg— but since then, it had been marked as uninhabited and (more importantly) quarantined. A furious search for relevant information turned up the records of the *USS Enterprise-D*, and what Admiral Nechayev referred to as "Picard's favorite Borg." Third of Five — or, more correctly, *Hugh* — had first been encountered by the *Enterprise* roughly a decade earlier from a crashed Borg scout ship. A scheme by Starfleet Intelligence to infect the drone with a cascade "anti-Borg" virus had been rejected by Picard after Hugh discovered his own individuality— a view scorned by Starfleet Intelligence at the time, but confirmed a year later when the same individual turned up at the head of a collection of former drones on Ohniaka III.

There had been no further contact after the second incident, at the request of the former drones. This request, though noted

by Picard and passed on to Starfleet Command, had never been attached to the main file on Ohniaka III as an explanation for the quarantine. It seemed that the intervening years had been very busy for the former drones; their community had survived, developed, and grown at a slow, but sustainable rate during the Dominion War. This plague, however — of unknown origin and unavoidable lethality — threatened to destroy them completely.

Starfleet Command was not particularly pleased to receive this transmission. For starters, it was not an immense fan of finding out that there was a Borg (or, at the very least, Borg-adjacent) population living within the Treaty Zone. It was even *more* concerning that said Borg population was sending Starfleet a general distress call and invoking a formal request for aid. The timing — so soon after the return of *Voyager* and the destruction of the transwarp conduit network — was just as alarming for the analysts at the Nogura Complex and the Presidio, who began to hurriedly check through *Voyager's* systems for any sign of a conduit to Ohniaka's region of space.

UFP President Min Zife had no real interest in being a “Borg Humanitarian,” as he put it. “The Borg are the Borg. There is no question of extending aid to them until we can guarantee that they're not going to assimilate the hand that feeds them.” Even a decade after Wolf 359 and five years after the battle of Sector 001, popular sentiment remained (unsurprisingly) virulently anti-Borg. There was still a significant number of people who considered Picard to be untrustworthy due to his assimilation, and a large number who cited defeats by the Borg as a reason not to have faith in Starfleet.

Within government, there remained a significant “Borg rot” of officials who saw the Collective as the greatest threat civilization had ever seen. Even the Dominion War had done little to mollify their fears— and in some cases, the threat from the Gamma Quadrant had made it worse. Ambassador Killingsley's infamous “The Second Door” speech — in which he blusteringly accused the Dominion of being a “Borg plot to open a new front against the civilised universe” — is only the most obvious example of the fear-

driven rhetoric that surrounded the Borg.¹

And why *shouldn't* it be fear driven? The Borg Collective had proven time and again that it was unbeatable. Only dramatic strokes of luck had saved Earth from assimilation twice over. Borg attacks on the frontier had only ever been turned back by massive firepower or immense sacrifices by Starfleet Command. The mere mention of a cube was already enough to cause panic amongst the civilian population, and crash currency markets from Bolarus to Ferenginar.² Even the minimal section of *Voyager's* data that Starfleet Intelligence had analysed suggested that the Borg threat was much, much larger than they had ever imagined.

The counterpoint, however, was that they had messaged in the first place. The Borg did not ask for help.³ Even this sort of Samaritan Snare was below them. Nevertheless, Starfleet Command balked at rushing to their aid immediately. Rapid Reaction Force 14 was moved to high alert immediately, and long-range listening posts were ordered to ramp up sweeps for Borg incursions. But these knee-jerk reactions were hardly going to help Ohinaka III. Proper investigation, deliberation, and coordination were the order of the day, but even these processes began at a frantic pace.

Starfleet Command was of two minds around a response from the get-go. The pro-relief group — centred around Admiral Ross, Shanthi, and Quslac — considered this to be nothing more than a regular call for aid: something that Starfleet was duty-bound to respond to, and with all the resources they could muster. The hawks, still in strength even three years after the Dominion war, were diametrically opposed to this. Admiral Jellico — always one to oppose anything that might weaken the Tactical Force and the Rapid Reaction Forces — called it a “ridiculous waste of time.”

1 Killingsley, notably, was one of the few Ambassadors who continued to advocate for a negotiated peace with the Dominion right up to the War's end.

2 This was not contained just to the Khitomer Powers; Borg attacks on the Romulan frontier in the late 2350s caused more panic than the Hobus Supernova.

3 The Borg's brief alliance with *USS Voyager* was highly circumstantial and most notably, entirely based upon their impending defeat by Species 8472.

Elements of Starfleet Intelligence even went as far as to wonder if the xBs were some form of “Borg sleeper cell” left behind after Wolf 359 to wreak havoc on the alpha quadrant.

Starfleet Medical’s report on the virus was yet another headache. The pathogen — referred to as a degenerative anti-Borg virus and titled the “Cortical Plague” by Hugh’s transmission files — was not new to Starfleet records. More specifically, it was not new to *Voyager’s* records. It had not taken long for the analysts at the M’Benga Centre to realise that the virus that was wreaking havoc on Ohinaka III was identical to the one that Captain Janeway had deployed to the Borg transwarp network. The neuralytic pathogen — which had done so much damage to the Collective’s ability to spread of across the galaxy — also spread through Borg implants through residual connections to the Hivemind.⁴

It was a concerning discovery with major political ramifications. Even with the strong anti-Borg (and anti-xB) sentiments within certain parts of the UFP, biological warfare of this type — and scale — was still beyond the pale. Even at the height of the Dominion War, experimental pathogens had been repeatedly vetoed by the Federation Council.⁵ The Borg were no exception; even though the Admiralty had initially approved of the “Borg virus” plan in 2368, the project was immediately shut down by President Amitra before it go any further.

People hated the Borg; feared them, wanted Starfleet to do anything they could to destroy them— but politicians and the population of the Federation still balked at inflicting the sort of mass biological murder that characterized the Eugenics Wars and World War III. It is telling that Admiral Ross’s first reaction to the discovery was to simply say “biological warfare? That’s what the Founders do. Not us.” Even if the pathogen had no had genocidal intentions — and that remains more of a subjective conclusion

4 This latter fact, and much of the science around the subspace connectivity of the Borg Collective hivemind, was still uncommon and unstudied during the 2370s. The eventual breakthroughs would be made at the LBC Science Institute in the early 2410s.

5 Rumours that the fated “Founder Virus” was created and spread by Starfleet Intelligence have never been proved.

than anything else — the fact that it was currently in the process of wiping out an independent (and, on the face of it, individualist) society was beyond the pale.

It is thus unsurprising that the Admiralty's immediate reaction was to suppress the information. Admiral Shanthi justified it in internal memos on two grounds. "1: We have yet to determine whether the virus was the same one used by *Voyager* to destroy the Borg transwarp network. 2: If so, we have yet to prove that *Voyager* understood the general implications of the virus on other Borg-adjacent populations."

Problem was that these questions had already been answered. It was the same virus, and *Voyager* hadn't thought about it beforehand. Why would they have? No one had known about the existence of an xB population on the fringe of Federation space; let alone the crew of a starship stuck in the Delta Quadrant. Furthermore, *Voyager* hadn't developed (or tested) the virus themselves; released files from the Department of Temporal Investigations assert that it was introduced to them by an "alternative Admiral Janeway from a now-defunct timeline."⁶ The crew of *Voyager* simply introduced the virus— they had no knowledge of the consequences.

The lawyers at the JAG office, after several furious days of interviews and analysis, concluded that Janeway could *probably* not be held responsible for the disaster if the xBs decided to press charges— which was a ridiculous thing to suggest that a collection of refugees on the brink of extinction might do. The JAG office's final note — and its most critical one — pointed out that there was a distinct case to be made that Starfleet had a clear and present duty to intervene in this case. While there had been initial suggestions (once again from Admiral Jellico— but also from Admirals Paris, Vr'Wilhalat, and Somak) that aid and relief might count as a political violation of the Prime Directive, the JAG Office shut all these down.

⁶ The author's knowledge of temporal mechanics and the legalities involved are far too limited to pass judgement on whether this defence would stand up in criminal, let alone sentientarian court. Like all the great legal messes of history, solutions are best left to better-qualified — and better-paid — lawyers.

“The precedent set by Star Fleet Command vs. Dorvan V unilaterally applies in this case. Most importantly, however, the spirit of the self-defined mission of peacekeeping and sentientarian support extant within the Starfleet character cannot be ignored. There is a legal case and jurisdiction for the invocation of the Duty to Interfere on Ohinaka III.”

Which, really, was the end of that discussion. After a heated debate with Somak and Jellico, Admiral Shanti would back the JAG Office’s conclusion: Starfleet would go to Ohinaka III. Overall planning was put into the hands of Starfleet Operations, who (with their usual frenetic pace) began to assemble the staff officers necessary to plan a planetary relief operation on the edge of Federation space. It would not be difficult, though. So long as no one kicked up a fuss, or delayed the whole process beyond what was necessary, Starfleet Ops reckoned that it could have an expedition ready within 72 hours. “

This is, of course, why a junior staffer at the Presidio leaked the distress call and the discussions around it to United Press Interstellar.

THE WEEK OF HELL

The 20th of July 2378 was one of the most chaotic days of the Zife administration. The Council was recalled in an uproar, plans for Janeway and her crew to visit the chambers were cancelled, as was the President’s restorative trip to Benicia. With the usual grace and care of journalists, UPI had been polite enough to tell Starfleet they were running with the story approximately 3 hours before they went to press— but *only* after grilling the President’s press staff, three Federation Councillors, the Defence Secretary, and the Starfleet Secretary for information. Anxious to avoid an overstep, the Palais de Concorde hastily told the Admiralty to postpone any formal plan presentation until “the end of the emergency session.”

This was agonising news for the staff of Starfleet Medical and Operations, who had just begun to put together warning orders for the various ships and crews needed for a relief operation.

The emergency council session began early. President Zife had barely finished with the formalities of opening the chamber when the ambassadors for Bolarus and Shermans' Planet began their diatribes against "another sentientarian catastrophe induced by the thoughtlessness of Starfleet," demanding to know what exactly was being done to fix the damage. They were immediately shouted down and decried by various councillors from the Kullari-Federalist and Unitarian factions, whose general hawkishness were only exacerbated by simmering discontent over the Ross Plan.⁷ They were joined in their opposition to any sort of aid plan by the Betazed bloc— whose ongoing opposition to external aid inevitably led them to lump any mission to Ohinaka III alongside the ongoing actions of STAFCAR.⁸

The debate ground on throughout the day, with the complete lack of consensus only adding to the delay in Starfleet's decision-making. The leak of the distress call had derailed any opportunity for a subtle and quick reaction; with the whole incident now amongst the press, politicians, and public, any action the admiralty made would have to be approved by the council chambers first— *not* retroactively. "The whole thing's gone political," Ross would write in his diary. "It seems unfair to say that this could have been avoided, but really? It could have. Zife's got the political capital to shut this down and make an executive decision, but the bastard doesn't want to. Lives are at stake here, and he's just standing at his podium, watching."

Was Ross right? Despite Zife's disinterest in the mission, Min

7 The Ross Plan (2375–2381) was the collective name of the various bilateral aid, reconstruction and support agreements made by the UFP as part of mass reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the Dominion War.

8 STAFCAR (Starfleet Aid Forces, Cardassia) was the official name of all Starfleet reconstruction forces within Cardassian Space after January 2378. Despite the draw-down after the resumption of civil government under Alon Ghemor, STAFCAR remained the largest (and most expensive) Starfleet deployment outside of the Treaty Zone. STAFCAR would be withdrawn from Cardassian space in 2387 at the request of Castellan Garak.

could have easily shut the whole debate down after the first day. There was no constitutional need for the council to approve the mission – whatever the mission was – in the first place. The Sulu Convention notwithstanding, the President’s office had the right to approve a decision the Admiralty made. It wasn’t as if Zife was particularly disproving of the idea of an aid mission; as much as he didn’t want to become a “Borg Humanitarian,” he understood the implications of Starfleet Medical’s findings as much as any person would. He *also* understood how the council would react to yet another foreign policy intervention; a mission to Ohinaka III was nothing close to the scale of the Ross Plan (or the re-affirmation of STAFCAR’s deployments to the Cardassian-Breen Border), but tensions were already running far too high.

Zife’s decision to upscale the Ross Plan to include the neutral powers and Cardassian planets that had yet to ratify the Damar Constitution without council approval had cost incredible amounts of political capital and goodwill. As much as the decision would prove to be the right one in time, Zife threw away any chance of reclaiming the Federalist votes at the next election. The President was aware of how even the word “Borg” itself had a potentially exasperating effect on the council. “All you have to do to turn a collection of educated, competent, and measured politicians into a collection of maddened children all scrambling behind a sofa is *mention* the Borg to them.” Zife believed that a further push on executive privilege – no matter how small, legal or justified – would only play into the hands of rising isolationist stars like Arafel Pagro.

Pagro’s own statements on July 20th only confirmed this: his only real comment to the council was to wonder “why exactly Starfleet is sending aid to a collection of cyborgs whose only real intent is to destroy us all”. This sort of chauvinism was easily countered by the growing number of Thelian Federalists and One-Party Charterites, as Zife knew it would be.⁹ In any other circumstance, the whole thing would have boiled over in a day,

⁹ One-Party Charterite was the contemporary name for the centralist interventionist grouping that would eventually become Okegism.

allowing the President to eventually force a vote on the question of intervention. This, unfortunately, was wishful thinking. As the debate slogged onto the 21st, it became clear that the President had underestimated the level to which the Federalist faction was falling apart.

The Thelians — determined as they were to back up external aid “to the last replicator” — were unwilling to cede another centimetre of ground to Pagro’s centralists. Much to the irritation of Zife and Starfleet Command, the “Ohinaka Affair” had become the battlefield on which the “Federalist Civil War” would be fought. So long as the two factions refused to come to a consensus — or even pause for a moment to agree on a preliminary mission — there could be no formal operation. No decisions could be made.

The first *actual* decision was made locally. Admiral Quch, the local commander at Starbase 115, ordered closure of the sub-sector around Ohniaka III under the Emergency Restriction Act. San Francisco was going to order it anyway, but his decision gave them an extra 24 hours to figure out what to tell the public. They *did* very little with that extra time except write and re-write the official statement. For Zife’s part, the President read a few extra officials and ambassadors into the classified information—including Ambassador Spock and Captain Jean-Luc Picard. The administration’s hope was that these two “great annoyances of history”, as Zife put it, could put their names behind a mission and help break the deadlock in the council.¹⁰

With Spock’s typical magnanimity (an easy trait for an ambassador who had turned buck-passing into a professional sport), the Vulcan immediately suggested a full-scale relief mission to the system on sentientarian grounds. Picard’s reaction, however, was the most surprising. “[Picard] bluntly told us no. Considering nearly a decade ago that he had set much of this in motion, we did not expect that. But he simply would not budge. He wouldn’t even lead a task force to fight the bastards— *if* they had wanted to fight, that is. He simply would never be involved unless we ordered

¹⁰ Zife’s quote is generally considered apocryphal; some even attribute the line to Admiral Nechayev.

him to. He told us that this was 'our mess to solve' and that 'quite frankly, the *Enterprise* and its crew could not be used as a galactic fire brigade simply because it is easy to use us as such.'"

Zife considered ordering the captain to go, but was persuaded not to by both Admiral Ross and Spock— the two painfully aware of the consequences like sending a reluctant hero on a mission like this. Furthermore, consultation with Starfleet Security and Intelligence suggested that, in the aftermath of "Picard's Private War," the possibility of the *Enterprise-E* and her crew going rogue again was far too high. Even if they had been cleared of wrongdoing by the Carrey Inquiry, the risks of letting one ship unilaterally decide policy like that — and get away with it — was far beyond the limits of Zife's patience.

With Picard no longer an option, Starfleet Ops ran over other alternatives as quietly (and carefully) as possible. They were no longer simply preparing a brief for admirals to nod through; a hurried resolution from the Grazerite councillor demanding that Starfleet present a planned rescue operation by Friday had passed late on Tuesday night, despite the opposite predictions of the President's office. Devised by Rear Admiral Kunuk of Starfleet Medical, the current plan involved using as many vessels as possible — mostly local runabouts and a few *California*-class support craft — to ferry the xBs to facilities in the Sol System. It was, however, fraught with immense risks; some simulations suggested up to 70% of the xBs would die from trauma during the journey alone, or due to unforeseen complications. Both Shanti and Zife refused to accept this as the best solution. "If we're going, we're saving all those Borged-up bastards," Zife told his chief of staff, "not just the lucky ones." Zife demanded better of Starfleet Operations, who burned through the midnight oil to find the facilities they needed, to no avail.

OPERATION HOUSE CALL

Hope came from a strange place. With the “Ohinaka Affair” dominating the news cycle (and the efforts of the JAG Office), the inquiry’s scheduled sittings had been postponed for a week. Much to the frustration of Janeway and much of her former crew, they were held instead for interviews by Starfleet Medical and Operations, who spent most of Monday and Tuesday trying to draw any information about assimilation, de-assimilation, and “reclamation” from the wandering crew’s memories and log entries. Most — if not all — of their threads led back to two people; the crew’s Emergency Medical Hologram, and the prolific former Borg Seven of Nine.¹¹ Both individuals were the inquiry’s largest headaches for multiple reasons, both in terms of their place as members of Starfleet, and their legal rights as individuals. Despite the fact the Louvois Committee came down hard on these self-made individuals, it did not deter the officers from presenting Starfleet Operations with a rescue plan.

Presented to Admirals Quisac of Operations and Kunuk of Medical, the EMH’s brief threw out their haphazard plans to move as many xBs to Sector 001 as quickly as possible.¹² Instead, the Doctor emphasised the importance of triage on the ground, as well as a direct reliance on the xBs’ “existing medical knowledge and inherent understanding about their isolated, unique community.”¹³ Testimonies from the Delta Quadrant goers suggested that former Borg knew far more about their own technology — both internal and external — than any Starfleet Tricorder could divine.

11 The EMH – referred to in the inquiry notes as “the Doctor” was yet to settle on “Joseph Zimmerman”, the name he would be known as for his literature and academic writings throughout the 25th century. The inquiry notes also refer to Seven of Nine as Annika Hansen, against the explicit wishes of Seven of Nine.

12 The Kunuk plan should not be criticised too harshly; even with the successes of Operation House Call, almost all the critical patients on Ohinaka III would be med-evaced to Starbase One or the M’Benga centre for long term recovery.

13 Operation House Call; After Action Report (Starfleet Operations; Starfleet Command, 2376). Col. 14 section 4.

Furthermore, interviews from Seven of Nine, Admiral Janeway, and several other members of the *Voyager* crew suggested that the crucial psychological elements of xB medical care were jeopardised by “sudden and involuntary removal from a safe space.”¹⁴ In the Doctor’s view, there were three things Starfleet *could* provide. Firstly, a direct and ready-to-use cure for the degenerative virus. Secondly, access to sophisticated medical equipment and care—moreso than whatever they may have had to scarp together themselves during those isolated 10 years. Thirdly (and more crucially in his view), a team of professionals with direct experience with — or had been the subject of — Borg Reclamation procedures.

“Operation House Call,” as Starfleet Operations would dub the EMH’s plan, had two major advantages. Firstly, it involved the maximum amount of aid and support from the smallest amount of manpower— all while ensuring said manpower was the most effective available. Secondly, it was a reasonably-convenient way to push the *Voyager* inquiry back another six months— as well as avoid the “Hansen Question,” as Admiral Paris put it. Seven of Nine’s involvement in the planning was nearly vetoed by Somak, but Janeway was more than ready to flex her muscles only weeks into her career as an Admiral. Seven’s involvement would prove vital in the outfitting of sickbays and post-op wards with regeneration alcoves, reparative hard-light treatments for possible necrotic tissue encounters, and physical therapy regiments compatible with Borg cybernetics.

There were still some remaining problems. Starfleet could count the number of willing and eager experts in Borg reclamation on one (human) hand in 2376— over half of whom were amongst the *Voyager* crew. The hurried doorstepping of Wolf 359 and Sector 001 veterans for volunteers resulted in a lot of slammed doors, several shouting matches and one harassment lawsuit. With the lack of experts now approaching critical, Zife flexed some more executive muscle, ordering Picard to reassign Commanders Geordi LaForge

14 Operation House Call, Col. 14 section 9.

and Data to the mission.¹⁵ These two officers – the first with any comprehensive experience in reclamation – would play a vital role in the rapid refitting and training that would occur during the travel period to Ohinaka III.

There was still the matter of the starship. The Doctor had suggested the use of civilian or merchant navy transports, something that Kunuk and Quslac immediately shot down. Starfleet Operations and Medical had already (in the highest tradition of the stellar service) bogged themselves down in a turf war over who had jurisdiction to commandeer a starship; a situation not helped by the well-intentioned but meddlesome offerings of the Mariposa foundation. Almost all of Medical's *M'Benga* and *Cavell*-class hospital ships were still operating with STAFCAR; two others (*USS Mayday* and *USS Fleming*) were both undergoing life-extension refits on Mars. Starfleet Ops initially wanted to leave them alone, instead planning to rapidly retrofit the *Nebula*-class *USS Kongo* as a relief vessel. Unfortunately, these plans were scuppered on Wednesday morning by a Starfleet Corps of Engineers team discovering the *Kongo's* baffle plates had completely sheared. At minimum, she would not be space-worthy for another eight weeks.

Desperate for a solution, Ops stumbled upon the *USS Keter* – a first production *Hope*-class refit vessel in the Mars Mothball yards. Despite her age (approaching 140 years), temporary re-activation during the Dominion War had seen rapid and comprehensive updates to all her systems. Her trauma theatres – specifically designed so she could act as an orbital EVAC hospital for the UFP

15 Beverly Crusher was also requested in these reassignments with Commanders La Forge and Data– considering the de-assimilation procedures she performed on Captain Picard post-Wolf 359, as well as her first responder actions for Hugh the xB in 2368. The *Enterprise*, however, was already conducting relief efforts for a Terrelan Fever outbreak in the Deneb Sector, and could not afford to responsibly expend its CMO for “a distracting crisis from those far more vulnerable (as Picard would refer to the Cortical Plague).” While the circumstances for her absence were understandable, Crusher would later express regret at being unable to assist in the relief efforts on Ohniaka III– in part due to her personal connection with Hugh as the xB's “first doctor.” In a 2379 interview, La Forge would refer to Crusher's exclusion from Operation House Call as “bargained-for collateral in the [mission's] divorce,” recalling Zife's adurance to Picard about his and Data's participation (and the Commander's own insistence to his at-time Captain).

ground forces and Marine corps — were perfect for The Doctor's needs. She would be ready within 72 hours.

Admiral Quslac's life was made slightly easier thanks to a further update from Starfleet Intelligence. Thursday evening saw SIGNIT confirm that two Romulan task forces had shifted their patrol routes in a core ward direction. While this did not necessarily mean they were *destined* for Ohinaka III, Strategic Ops and Tactical Command were not about to give the Romulan Star Navy the benefit of the doubt. Hugh's transmission had probably been picked up by outposts on the far side of the Neutral Zone; as unlikely as a Romulan relief mission was, them sending an expedition of their own was certainly within the realm of possibility. The Ohinaka system's subspace masking properties were well known to both sides; during the Dominion War, the Jem'hadar had used the system's Kuiper Belt as a staging post for fleet operations. The Star Empire would never pass up the opportunity to set up a long-term base in the system— especially if Starfleet had made clear they had no interest in doing it first.

Jellico would move 12th Rapid Reaction Force and the TacFleet Task Force 11 to Yellow Alert to counter the Romulan redeployment on Thursday morning. At 11am — while Pargo and Prendergast began blaming each other for the Macet Incident — Jellico declared one of his many truces with Starfleet Operations, agreeing to throw his weight in with Operation House Call being a formal, long-term relief mission. "I might have nothing nice to say about those damn Borg," Jellico would tell Quslac, "but I'd rather they were alive and kicking than dead under some Romulan's jackboot."¹⁶ On top of the fleet redeployments, Tactical seconded the *USS Concagh* — an upgraded *Akira*-class Starship — as an armed escort and CNC vessel to accompany the *Keter*.

There was only one thing left: civilian approval.

16 Thomas Beifong, *Jellico: The Man of The Hour* (San Francisco: Lagrange Five Press, 2423)

TO SHEATHE A KNIFE

While Starfleet grew more unified during the “Week of Hell,” the Federation Council did nothing but grow more divided. The fractures within the Federalist faction did nothing but grow larger and larger. The Unitarians, tired of the endless flow of aid, were eager to draw the line here— summoning up images of the Borg as “Public Enemy Number One” and accusing the Charterites of “yet another act of naïve imperialism.” As much as it stung, Pagro’s inflammatory rhetoric was aimed more at his own faction rather than at the opposing groups. The Federalist command of the Council had been hegemonic since the days of the Sulu Presidency, and their new leader was as desperate to hold the group together as he was to bend them to his will.

The meeting of the councillors at the Club Hageman — the traditional Brussel meeting place of the Federalists — was meant by Pagro as a peace offering to the Thelians. In the tradition that went back to Hiram Roth, Pagro hoped that an appeal to Federal unity would temper moods on both sides of the divide. As much as Pagro was opposed to any more “aid at any cost,” he was more concerned with ceding too much ground to the Charterites. There is a suggestion that Pagro planned to offer a compromise to the Thelians— possibly by brokering a deal with the President to support the STAFCAR re-committal, or perhaps backing the limited Treaty of Friendship with the Thallonian Governate. Whatever his plan was, it went wrong almost from the start.

Even as Pagro emerged onto the staircase up to the grand dining hall of Club Hageman, the traditional hushed silence before a speech was nowhere to be found. Many of the Thelians didn’t wait for him to speak before announcing their intentions to vote with the Charterites and Independents. Even many of the moderates who had opposed and amended the Ross Plan balked at the increasingly arrogant language of Pagro. Others, turned off by his active courting of the Kullarites, had chosen this point to take a stand against their backsliding. The hardline Unitarians, however,

balked at the mere *rumors* that Pagro might be considering compromise. Even once Pagro managed to establish some order, his rapidly adjusted words — which leaned more towards lighter concessions on the Ross Plan and a push to strengthen the Tzenkenti Embargo — did absolutely nothing except aggravate everyone. For the first time since he'd assumed leadership of the Federalists, Pagro had lost touch with his base.

The Council did not sit on Friday, leaving both the President and the Federalists to stew in their own juices.¹⁷ Zife spent every ounce of strategy possible to sure up his votes. Some less-than-honorable pressure was applied to the Trill and Ardanan representatives, who were told in masked language their requests for further aid from Federation Centre could become “difficult” without support from the President at this time. As much as Pagro had the numbers, Zife was better at reading the room— the President knew very well that defeat here could spell the aid of his policies, and possibly the Ross Plan entirely. As Pagro continued to aggravate his own faction's tensions, Zife worked to ensure that every Charterite and Independent would go “all the way” on Saturday.

By the end of play on Friday evening, both Zife and Starfleet had done what they could. The *USS Keter* and *USS Concagh* had assembled their full complements of personnel and equipment—their commanding officers (Captains M'nvei Heth T'Roun and Philippe McKinsley) had received their orders. The vote was scheduled for 11:10 the next day, so that the council could rapidly move on to pass the Merchant Marine allocations bill. If Zife's motion for emergency aid failed, it would not return to the schedule for months. And yet, even with this pressure, both Zife and Admiral Quslac would go to bed early— confident that within 24 hours, Task Force T'Roun would be en-route to Ohinaka III.

The timing for the vote was incredibly precise; with over a week of florid (and increasingly vulgar) debate preceding the division, no one had any real interest in allowing another four hours of

¹⁷ 23rd of July – the anniversary of President Broadhurst's resignation in 2262 – was traditionally a non-sitting day.

grandstanding. Zife made his own call for unity, demonstrating his irrefutable talent for stating the obvious in an eloquent fashion. Pagro's own words were drowned out by his own faction. Qin of the Kullarists did very little but call the President a traitor in veiled language. It was, in many ways, just as procedural a moment as the roll call. The whole room of councillors was sitting on the edge of their seats— waiting like excited schoolchildren for the moment when they'd get to leap up and cast their ballots. But before the call to vote could be made, one last member spoke from the back. It was a surprise choice from Zife; with so many wishing to have their voice heard, it seemed odd that he would pick the Freshman Councillor for Sauria: Aennik Okeg.

Okeg was not what one would call a public speaker. Like most northern-continent Saurians, his accent came out in Federation Standard as high and a little reedy, with strange bursts of baritone where certain vocal clicks were stressed or enunciated. Despite his height and build, he was not an imposing man; Castellan Garak once remarked that he had “the physical presence of a bored child.” He was, however, captivating and dedicated; in his short time in the council, he had quickly become swept up in the post-war Charterite revival. Though he was a supporter, he quietly remained on the sidelines— leaving grouping leadership to more seasoned political veterans like Quince Prendergast or Stavkol of Rigel VII. Those two had led the defense of the President against Pagro and the Unitarians and had been crucial in courting the Thelians who had broken ranks. Now, however, as the vote lay on a knife edge, Okeg stepped into the limelight.

“At last count, Mr President, I have been asked 85 times in the last 60 hours how I will be voting on this resolution. I have given many answers; some long, some short, but to the chagrin of many of my colleagues, I have yet to say if I am voting for or against your resolution. It seems odd to remain quiet when all are speaking; and yet, I have waited until now to “say my piece”.

“There is part of me that is appalled by how... *regressed* this chamber has been, in the last six days. I know that as a freshman councillor, my word is best left ignored. But in this case – this

singular case – I hope that my remarks can be heeded by some of the more veteran ambassadors in this chamber. We are not here to decide our political battles or revenge our personal rivalries. We are voting today on the President’s resolution to decide more than who will “call the shots” in this council chamber. We are deciding on the fate of a new and vulnerable society. The choice this council makes today will decide the fact of thousands of lives – now and in the days to come – and will decide whether or not the galaxy will view us as a vindictive and petty power– or as the open, accepting friend of the downtrodden and afraid.”

“The Liberated Borg are, in many ways, just as this Federation was 200 years ago. They are an individualist, self-determined, and autonomous society– those who have forged their own path after breaking away from absolute tyranny and control. They are alone in a galaxy full of danger, and are afraid that all they’ve worked for – all their pains, hopes, and dreams – will dissolve away in a flash. Many of my colleagues cannot see this familiarity. All they see is the enemy, the assimilator– the murderers of Wolf 359 and the destroyers of New Providence. Do these same councillors see the *Klingons* as the enemy still? Do they see the Cardassian Democrats as the Enemy? Does the Vulcan Ambassador still see the Andorian Ambassador as an intractable foe? Does the Troyian ambassador still believe the representative from Elas wishes to use his *bones* for musical instruments?”

“I’m sure all my colleagues will tell you that they have put away such childish things as hatred and bigotry. If that is true – and I am certain that it is – then why have we regressed so much? Do these “xBs” – who waste away and die at the hands of a plague we *brought to their world* – represent a threat to our wellbeing?¹⁸ To our worlds? We don’t know. We cannot know. We cannot even begin to know what they want of us, except for our help. And that act of help– that act of risk, of sacrifice, of putting oneself in danger to

18 Starfleet Command documents and Federation Council briefings had been shortening “former Borg” into “xB” for ease of reference since the 21st. Okeg’s usage of xB in his speech is the first recorded utilization in a public government setting. Thankfully, it was approved – and welcomed as a new name – by the Ohniakan former Borg.

help others is what this Federation is built on!"

"We Saurians are known for our long memories. I have heard the oral histories of my family and know by heart the say-song of Shumar and the Baselius. We remember well how the young Federation — fragile and desperate for allies — turned that despot down, and how they fought to ensure Sauria remained free. The Federation has always fought for that right: against Romulan, Klingon, Cardassian, and Founder. How can we justify not fighting now? Fear? Anger? The desire for revenge against those who have done us ill will? Revenge is not a value this council stands for. It is not a value I stand for. I stand for benevolence; for helping those in need. For peace, unity, autonomy, and friendship with all nations: not party politics and rabble-rousing. So how will Sauria vote? Sauria will vote yes."

It was an electrifying statement. The One-Party Charterites and Thelians leapt to their feet as he finished, roaring with elation. The huge Acturan ambassador shook Okeg's hand so firmly and furiously that it damaged the ambassador's timepiece. The Unitarians and Kullarist's roared back in outrage, demanding the right to reply as more militant members of the council yelled refutations (and a few insults) in the direction of the Saurian ambassador. But the debate had run up its time, and over the din of the council, Zife called for the division. It took nearly an hour for all the councillors to vote; even then, the tension had been thick— the Palais security called twice to prevent the councillors from Tellar Secundus and Benecia from coming to blows.

The results seemed to be a prelude to some sort of armed clash; at one point, Zife considered announcing it over tannoy from another room and immediately sending the council into recess. In the end, it came down to one vote: one, in favor, for the President's resolution. The Starfleet mission would go to Ohniaka III— with full official backing, support, and purview from the civilian council.

By the time the council had been brought to order, the *Keter* and *Concagh* had already left Mars orbit. They were already at Warp Nine by the time the FNN announced the results of the vote.

Help was on the way.