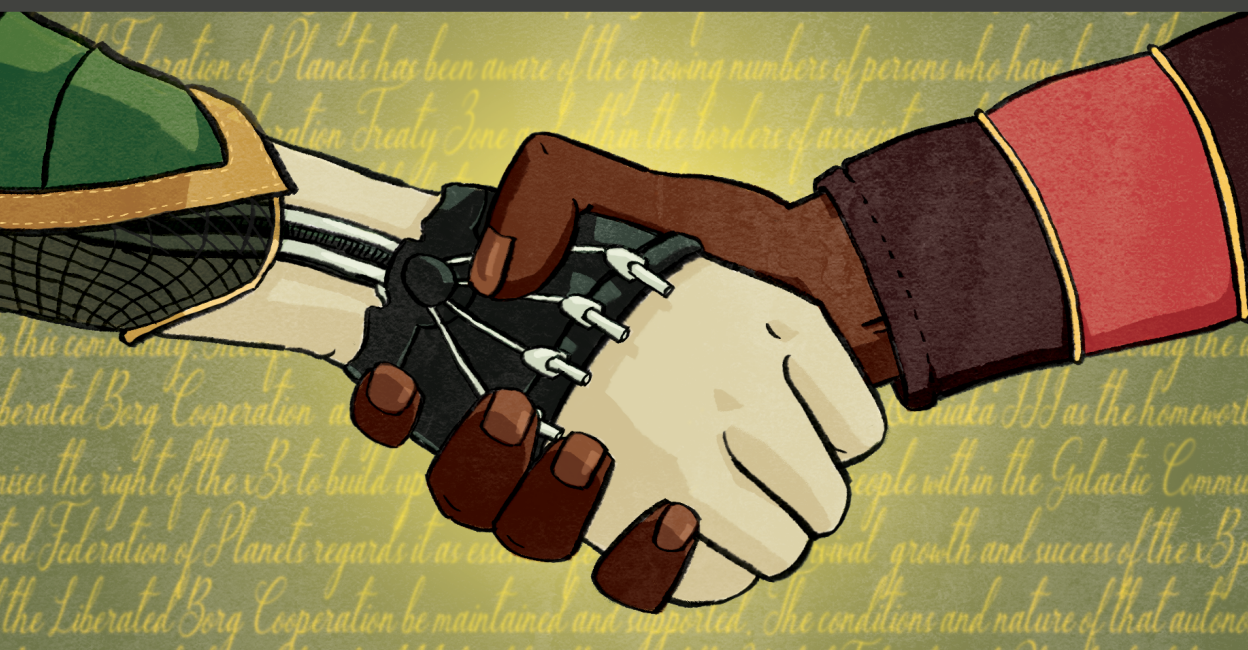


# MERCY OF THE COLOSSUS

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*

**ORIGINAL *POST-WAR* TEXT**  
**DR. SOLORA HASEGAWA**

EXCERPTED MATERIAL ARRANGEMENT & CITATION  
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PART I  
**HOMECOMING**

**THE RETURN OF VOYAGER  
AND THE OHNIAKAN CRISIS**

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# foreword

All things have beginnings: no matter how great or small they might be.

You must understand: it is a strange to experience “smallness,” and therefore know *fear*, when one has known the Borg as we have. In its most reduced form, it seems almost impossible that we’re able to *comprehend* these sensations, much less *live* without them blowing out our processors after the initial confusion. Outside of the obvious allusions I make, be it either living under the ruins of Cube 5219 — the shadow of a vessel that I was once part of — or looking up to the Palais de Concorde’s grand doorways before entering a room full of Federation councilmembers, I have known what it is to feel “reduced”— despite my formerly titanic state of being. In my 28 years of Reclaimed life, I have experienced smallness in a myriad of ways— whether it be mapping seasonal starcharts against our moons’ brilliant reflections, or the loneliness of comforting dying friends from an illness we thought might destroy us all. This sensation can be humbling, but also crushing, when one is not supported by community: if no one is there to help abade the more unpleasant aspects of smallness.

When it was decided we would broadcast an emergency hail to the Federation in 2378, all that fear we thought our people had conquered came barreling back in an almost painful manner: Cortical Plague symptoms notwithstanding. We were barely 1,300 individuals pleading the mercy of billions: billions that we knew carried a righteous vitriol for what the Borg had wrought against them, due to the Collective's own nature. Very little would have stopped anyone from laying waste to our three townships, now that we'd revealed ourselves; if weapons of war weren't what smothered us into oblivion, then *rejection* would've spelled our demise, as Starfleet's out-of-time plague twisted our carefully-crafted bodies against themselves. In truth, that fear ate away at our peace of minds as much as the Cortical Plague did, during the interim of waiting: we had revealed ourselves and our smallness, and we only had each other against a quadrant full of unknowns. After Progenitor Troval and I cut the transmission to a barely-functioning *Ambassador I*, Hugh wept long and hard until it was time for his hospice duty shifts, because my friend knew his face had become synonymous with our deaths: or, by some mercy-given miracle, our salvation.

Thankfully, it seems the Reclamation of Locutus is not the *only* miracle former Borg have ever known.

As enormous trees might grow from tiny seeds, or great beasts of the sea might hatch from the most delicate of eggs, a small state of being does not mean it shall stay that way forever. A once plague-stricken population of 1,300 former Borg can be cured, and eventually swell to nearly 60,000 strong in less than 3 decades. Alien soil can be tilled from young and fertile dirt into a uniquely-cultivated biome: supporting a cybernetic ecosystem born from its caretakers' unintended crashlanding. A rudimentary understanding of political dynamics and personalities can expand into a complex web of social cues and context clues, and a mentorship can grow from seeing the other as mere tools to fulfill an agenda into a relationship with roots so strong that it may yet crack mountains. Though fear born from perceived smallness is terrifying, the rewards one may sew when courage is reaped by brave hands is nothing short of rewarding: with the harvest made that much easier by the many hands of likeminded friends and a community ready and willing to rise to whatever challenges it may face.

I thank Dr. Hasegawa for the inclusion of this material in her original publication. As we lived our idyllic and agrarian lives wholly ignorant to the Dominion War's fallout that smoldered outside the Ohniakan system, it is humbling knowing that our people and our at-time trials were — and still *are* — considered a hallmark in the galactic community's history. A hallmark of what *kind*, now: that depends on whose opinion you ask, I've discovered. Representatives from the former Romulan Star Empire might refer to 2378 as "the year the *Llaetus'le* learned to speak," whereas Starfleet Medical unloading survivor stasis tubes dated from Wolf 359 by the dozens called us a "godsend." However those opinions of our people might fluctuate, I value the correspondence we shared in exchanging relevant records and providing testimonies from those times, and Solora's name is a treasured one among my fellow Progenitors.

I would like to thank Admiral Holland and the members of the Holland Commission for their research regarding the battle of Wolf 359, as well as congratulate their alumni of an author behind the recently-published "*We Have Engaged the Borg: The Oral History of the Battle of Wolf 359.*" Your team's initiative in piecing together important contextual history for that dark and harrowing time was invaluable to bolstering my friend's and I's at-time confidence, because you made us feel as if our perspectives mattered on a stage we were rapidly flung onto. Characters larger than life surrounded us on all sides with wildly-different scripts, intents, and agendas; in a time of such wavering self-confidence, it is comforting to know our accounts offered concrete and stalwart information, and our words went towards helping people who've never known the Collective as we have understand it just that much more.

Additional thanks goes to Tranquility Press' compilers that excerpted these texts into their own individual work. It amuses me that a people like ours — those who value the condensation of identity — have something in common now with a *history book*, regarding our own state's genesis: a collection of events and memories that branched off from a larger, yet still just-as-great mass of history, and into its own published "personhood."

To the Operation House Call personnel, Second Contact officers, as well as any and all benevolent delegates we met during those years and showed

us both patience and kindness: know that I thank you. If I attempted to list you all individually, this Foreword would far exceed an acceptable word count. Former Borg, in most cases, have exceptional memories; if you ever doubt your significance in I and my friends' lives, you need only extend the hands you once reached towards us yet again, if we have not already done so ourselves.

To you, reader: I thank you as well, for choosing to read this book. I cannot speak for the entirety of the Liberated Borg Cooperation — and *revel* in the fact I can't — but know that the curiosity and dedication of your time to learning about our origins and society is something we deeply value. In an era where misinformation regarding our people and fearmongering about these immutable parts of ourselves is found hand-in-hand with prejudiced extremism, education and a willingness to partake in our culture are our most virulent defenses. Thank you for your engagement, and may you understand us more through the aspects that make us individuals: unique experiences fostered by unique communities.

May you enjoy learning about the former Borg of Ohniaka III's early history, after our Age of Isolation. No matter how great, small, or colossal something might appear to be, let this be further proof that we all have unique beginnings— whatever they might be.

◆ RECLAMATION PROJECT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
SECOND PROGENITOR CROSI [THE PRODIGAL ONE]

STARDATE 73342.9 — 2396



**MESSAGE RECEIVED STARDATE 55546.82****SOURCE: SECTOR 219-B, OHNIAKAN SYSTEM, OHNIAKA III**

"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 1,174 others living on Ohniaka III. 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 the Soonien android Lore into custody and allowing us to live freely. And so I ask and we beg, nine years later, that the same help once given, be given again. It was by your help that you allowed us to develop ourselves and our society 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 help us."

**TRANSMISSION PLAYBACK COMPLETE****NOTE: UNABLE TO ESTABLISH SUBSPACE CHANNEL  
FOR REPLY AND/OR HAIL RECEIVAL CONFIRMATION**



**FV**  
NEWS GALAXY

DAY 4 OF UFP OF DEADLOCK OVER AIR

JAG OFFICE: "LEGAL CA... N FOR THE INVOCATION OF"

# HOMECOMING

THE RETURN OF VOYAGER AND THE OHNIAKAN CRISIS



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 ominous 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 transwarp conduit network's destruction — 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 near the Ohniakan 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.<sup>1</sup>

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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.



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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Even this sort of “Samaritan Snare” was below them. Nevertheless, Starfleet Command balked at rushing to their aid immediately. Rapid Reaction Force 14 was immediately moved to high alert, and long-range listening posts were ordered to ramp up sweeps for Borg incursions— especially once it was discovered remotely replying to this hail was impossible due to native EM interference surrounding the Ohniakan system. But knee-jerk reactions were hardly going to help these former Borg: 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.” 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

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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.

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 — was also found to spread through Borg implants by way of residual connections to the Hivemind.<sup>4</sup>

It was a concerning discovery with major ramifications. Even with the strong anti-Borg (and anti-xB) sentiments within the UFP, biological warfare of this type — and scale — was appalling. Even at the Dominion War’s height, experimental pathogens had been repeatedly vetoed by the Federation Council.<sup>5</sup> The Borg were no exception; even though Starfleet 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 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 of these former Borg was beyond the pale.

It is thus unsurprising that the Admiralty’s immediate reaction was the 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

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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.

have yet to prove that *Voyager* understood the general implications of the virus on other Borg-adjacent populations.”

The 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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. “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

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<sup>6</sup> 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 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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 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

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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.

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 Troyian Councillor 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.<sup>9</sup> In any other circumstance, the whole thing would have boiled over in a day, 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

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

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.<sup>10</sup>

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 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

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<sup>10</sup> Zife's quote is generally considered apocryphal; some even attribute the line to Admiral Nechayev.

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.<sup>11</sup> 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 Quslac 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.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the Doctor emphasised the importance

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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, some critical patients on Ohinaka III would be med-evaced to Starbase One or the M’Benga Centre for special care recovery.



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."<sup>13</sup> 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. 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."<sup>14</sup> 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— more so than whatever they may have had to scrap 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

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

14 Operation House Call, Col. 14 section 9.

harassment lawsuit. With the lack of experts now approaching critical, Zife flexed some more executive muscle, ordering Picard to reassign Commanders Geordi La Forge and Data to the mission.<sup>15</sup> 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 *Hiawatha*-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.

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<sup>15</sup> 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 Terrelian 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 and its victims). 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 adance to Picard about his and Data's participation (and the Commander's own insistence to his at-time Captain).

Her trauma theatres — specifically designed so she could act as an orbital EVAC hospital for the UFP 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 patrols 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.”<sup>16</sup> 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.

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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 crack further; 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 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, everything in 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.<sup>17</sup> 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 *Keter* 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 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—

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

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 my colleagues will tell you 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?<sup>18</sup> 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 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 —

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18 Starfleet Command documents and Federation Council briefings had been shortening “former Borg” into “xB” for ease of reference since July 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.

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.

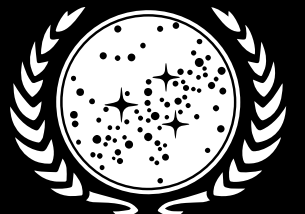
By the time the council had been brought to order, the *Keter* and *Concagh* had already left Mars orbit. They were already at Warp Nine by the time the FNN announced the results of the vote. Help was on the way.



**NEXT**

**PART II**  
**PAVING GOOD**  
**INTENTIONS**

**RECONSTITUTION**  
**AND THE ROAD TO 2379**



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PART II  
PAVING GOOD  
INTENTIONS

**RECONSTITUTION  
AND THE ROAD TO 2379**

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# BENJAMIN VASKOV

USS *ARCHIMEDES*, OHNIKA III ORBIT

Stardate 55615.37 — 2378

## HOLLAND COMMISSION REPORT

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL 7.32.  
VOYAGER\_INQUIRY-POSTHUGHINTERVIEW\_N033

LT. JR. GRD. BENJAMIN “BENNY” VASKOV

ASSIGNED TO SECURITY PERSONNEL AS PART  
OF “OPERATION HOUSE CALL” USS *KETER* CREW

I don't know what else I expected to see out here. There was a general, uh— “apprehension of going somewhere like this,” but I mean— you read a dossier saying “you're off to be part of the relief crew for a group of former Borg out near the Neutral Zone,” and you're gonna start imagining some weird shit. What were we gonna find, anyway? Borg zombies? Limbs moving around like they're old puppetry rigs? You see the one guy's face they're talking about plastered all over the FNN, sure, and you think “yeah, looks like he's in a rough spot – but I'm sure it's nothing they can't handle, right?” They're from the Borg: everyone knows how tough they are! You don't think they couldn't figure something out in the meantime?

**[Vaskov blinks and shakes his head rapidly]**

After we'd broken off with the *Concagh*, the *Keter* arrived in O3 orbit right when it'd be the xBs' early morningtime. Aside from the fact ol' *Keter* barely made the sprint out here, we couldn't get any transmissions or scanner signals through to the surface thanks to the EM interference, so Captain T'Roun ordered

a security team landing escort be assembled. I was getting into a specialty haz-mat EV suit when my five-person squadron was pinged, signaling us that CMO Brianna Vasquez, eight nurses, and three science puddies were heading our way. About 10 minutes before we were all set to depart, Captain T'Roun, Seven of Nine, and the Doctor came in and topped off the landing party.

Seven of Nine and this Doctor hologram... ever since those two boarded, they were hard to separate. That one xB kid they'd brought along with them was content to wander the ship that whole week of traveling, but not those two. Even now, as they walked into the cargo bay with a whole bunch of gear slung over their shoulders, it was clear they didn't wanna split up. The Doctor was hovering over Seven's shoulder and firing off a million hypotheses as she donned her EV suit, and Seven was just... bristling, I guess you could call it. Which hey, fine: this is kind of an awkward situation for everyone, and she doesn't have to talk to anyone if she doesn't want to. Whatever. But if I'm gonna be assigned to a *security* position for this crew, I'd at least wanna know who I'm backing up, right? Or— I dunno, what these Borg are gonna be like? *Might* be like? Ugh; I guess my point is that I was surprised she didn't really, uh... jump the gun or give us any heads up's or anything. Maybe I was expecting some sorta explanation from her of what to expect, since she was *also* Borg. Maybe any tips she might have? Any *warnings*? If things actually got *violent*, of course. From either the Romulans, or... y'know. Whatever. But no; she was dead silent the whole time.

**[He looks down, as if perturbed by something he said.]**

I was surprised Captain T'Roun came down with the landing party. I'd had a few assignments under her command before, working at that starbase; she's normally pretty pragmatic, and knows when a good XO can get something done in her stead. Besides: if the *Keter's* scuttlebutt was anything to go off of, apparently the Romulans and the *Concagh* were getting up to a pretty high stakes game of *Chicken*, out past the system's Oort cloud, so I figured T'Roun would want to stay on the bridge in case we needed to mix up any plans. But... no. She came down with us, left Commander Toolizgh with the conn, and suited up just like everyone else.

I think getting visuals of the shitty little satellite that sent the xBs' hail out in the first place shook the Captain more than she thought it would. Going off the images we got sent down-deck, the poor thing seemed like it was, at *one* time, a fine-enough piece of cobbled-together Borg tech launched into space. *Somehow*, they got it into space. I remember Chief Engineer Jay very much wanting to know how they were able to do that. But *now*? Pffft – looked as if something had eaten it from the inside out. I was mentally getting into “mission mode,” but I remember thinking something along the lines of, “if *this* was the transmitter of their message to the Federation, then how were the *people* faring down *there*?” Because it apparently transmitted the *disease* too, right? I don't know how that works for Borg. Well, anyway, you try and reason: it's out in space, right? It's just a satellite! Maybe the vacuum helped it degrade faster, and besides; not like it's top priority to try and tend to something out in space while you're wrangling a pandemic.

As everyone finished suiting up and filed into the runabout, Captain T'Roun started going over the final debrief with us. After the bridge's power redistribution resulted in us finally getting some scans, we saw that *massive* cube crater for the first time, and from there we plotted our entrance game plan based on what we might encounter down there. Since we were flying into this situation a *little* blind, our *original* plan was to pilot two medical EVAC runabout sdown to the surface one kilometer from the cube's outskirts: Captain T'Roun's team leading with the *Aralez*, and then call in the *Hresh* with backup. We wanted to give the xBs the opportunity to see us coming – or, uh... just in case there was any *trouble*, it wouldn't be too far for us to *retreat*.

T'Roun was covering the last few closing notes when the bridge calls us to say that, *somehow*, that little shit-rocked satellite was sending out a hailing frequency. Apparently, it was a *pitifully*-weak signal– but it was nonetheless making some noise, and if we could *connect* to that signal, it meant we could at least give them a warning to say that we were coming down. Comms said the channel's connection wasn't gonna last long, so T'Roun told them to patch it through to the runabout's display instead of her having to run back up to the bridge.

**[Benny stops, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath.]**

I think what got me the most was just how... can I swear in this? **[I nod]** Okay cool, gotcha– I think what got me the most was just how fucking *tired*

Hugh and Troval looked. Hugh clearly hadn't shaved in a while, his and Troval's hair was slick and oily, *both* their organic eyes were just *dark*... oh, man; once they realized the connection was established? The way those two looked at the screen was like... watching someone turn on a faucet who hadn't drunk water in days. There was a relief and elation there, yeah, but also a *shock*. Like, "Oh my God, you found us. You're here. This is *real*." I've seen that look before, back when I was first enlisted and sent to guard SMASH units near the Bajoran sector. It's... well. That's a level of desperation you don't see every day. **[he pauses]** That's *also* when I learned xBs' eyes reflect light like a cat's do. Yeah yeah, their camera; it— almost made their eyes seem like they were glowing. I, uh... I dunno. It was neat. ...sorry; it's a little hard to think about all this again.

◆ **It's alright.**

**[Vaskov grins before his expression grows solemn again]** Anyway, Hugh's jaw: it was shaking, and Troval looked just as stunned. T'Roun took the conversational lead so they wouldn't be standing there gaping at each other. "This is Starfleet's USS *Keter* responding to your emergency hail sent and received on stardate 55546.82," she said real matter-of-factly. "We are here to provide your requested emergency medical assistance and a vaccine, once we've acclimated it to this planet's macromolecules: as well as first-response relief supplies."

They were both dumbstruck. I mean— if I were them and I'd just heard all that after dealing with a fucking plague for almost a month, I might be a little stunned, too. With Hugh in particular... now, I'm no ship's counsellor, but it was like something...**[he balls his fists and tenses]** *snapped* in him. I just remember this— **[Vaskov makes a hand motion down from his eye to the bottom of his cheek]** *huge* tearstreak running down his face, without *any* sort of other change in his expression. It's like if Hugh was a sopping wet towel, and what T'Roun had just said wrung a million gallons of stress out of him.

Before the Captain could follow up with something else, Hugh held his hand out. "P-please, Captain T'Roun, we... thank you—" he goes. He's choked— I could tell he was keeping back *some* sort of breakdown. "We will... we will send you coordinates to the current block of our most critical patients, before this signal loses its strength. I, we... thank you. Th-thank— thank you, *thank you*—"

Troval also babbles out a "thank you" as they turn towards each other and share this... hell, I don't know— "primal relief?" Right before the signal cuts out,

they sorta start pawing for the other and giving these fully-racked sobs. Troval also kinda spasms as they do this though, and uh... suddenly you remember they're working through their *own* ailments. They're *also* sick.

Nobody said a fucking thing other than Jovovich and Ma'arshak talking with *Keter's* ops for takeoff and departure. I *do* remember meeting eyes with Seven, at one point, and I'll be damned if I could tell you what kind of emotions were going on in that head of hers.

I know he apparently wanted to come, but I was real glad she and the hologram left that bright-eyed kid of theirs behind on the *Keter*.

We all just kinda fiddled with our respective gear, during the descent. What the hell else was there to say, y'know? Plus, all of us were watching that cube's shadow get bigger and bigger the closer we got to touchdown. It looked like a pyramid that crashed into the earth, surrounded by a great pit with a winding path around it... and then there were the little farmland plots, coming off and away from the impact crater's rim. It actually reminded me of, uh... so my sister and I went hiking a lot when we were younger, right? She had this obsidian pyramid she'd always set with whatever flowers she'd picked on a trail. Seeing that crashlanded cube there, so stark against the early morning sun coming from the coastline, it... thought of that. Inspired me to give her a call again, later that week.

After Hugh and Troval's transmission cut out, T'Roun told the *Aralez* pilots to follow the xBs' coordinates and touch down only 50 meters away instead of a full 1,000 like before. We still wanted to give our first runabout landing plenty of space to boost signals and establish point-of-contact, but we didn't want to, uh... delay anything anymore. The closer we got to the surface, the more we could see about a dozen figures walking in a line out to where we were approaching. I could tell Seven of Nine was watching them very, very intently, which... sure, I can imagine why. I think she noticed me looking at her, and when she turned back I tried to play it off; asked her something like "Hey, you gonna be alright going out there while that pathogen's still airborne?" She kinda glared at me, but just said real plainly that the Doctor based the vaccine off her own nanoprobe samples combined with *Voyager's* initial viral blueprint. "I would not be 'going out there' had I not taken appropriate precautions." Which, uh... yeah! Alright! Fair! The Doctor kinda gave me a cocked eyebrow and awkward nod, and we left it at that. There were gonna be bigger fish to fry here soon.



When we had about 70 more meters left to the surface, we saw one of them fall over, and that entire line heading out to our landing area crumpled. The ones ahead of them stopped, some turned back, some knelt and hollered for others closer to the structures they'd built... it was, uh. That guy, Crisis; he's a big one too, not someone you'd think would just...

**[He motions his hand in a downward flop and shakes his head.]**

Captain T'Roun looked at us five and told us to holster our phaser rifles onto our back attachments.

I figured that was fair.

**[clears throat]** As soon as we touched down, everyone filed out, and my team of five started setting up the pattern buffer enhancers around the runabout's perimeter. Seven of Nine and the Doctor were at the end of the line— just in case something came up with Seven and they might have to hightail it back to the runabout. As I planted my second buffer enhancer standee in the dirt, I heard the xBs coming, so I turned to watch the two parties meeting...

**[He takes a deep sigh.]**

You've... met former Borg before, right? xBs, they're calling 'em now? Yeah, right; thought so, considering your line of work... anyway, I've— had friends that've had cybernetics work done before: unrelated to xB stuff. One had their arm replaced after getting it blown off by a Jem'Hadar claymore, the other has something on her temple that went behind her ear to help motor controls... this, uh— seeing the xBs reminded me a lot of that. Of *them*. I remember slapping stupid magnets on Lev'koski's arm at 0300 hours with my platoon while they were sleeping, I help Amanda buzz extra hair on the back of her neck where she can't reach...

**[He pauses.]**

These people... this is how they lived, too. And then here comes this plague, y'know? A stupid fucking piece of collateral from a pissed-off Admiral from the future: not thinking about consequences, and threatening to destroy everything we'd just flown over. Threatening a society that didn't even know what'd been happening out in the galaxy for the last 10 years, we'd find out. These were people just trying to live their lives. And so were my friends too.

xBs just happened to get their metal parts from somewhere else. Some of them still had exo-plating, some didn't; some of them had hair, some didn't... I mean we flew over these—prefab buildings—scrapped together with Borg cube support beams! A solar panel field! *Crops*, for fuck's sake! Trying to live their lives as best they could with the tools they were able to use. I realized these people might be different, sure. Some people back in Sector 001 might not understand them. Be *terrified* of them, as stupid as that sounds now.

But right now, they needed help. They needed compassion and support against that stupid collateral. Just like my friends need help sometimes, too.

**[He takes in a hard sniff and runs his hand over his nose.]**

They met in the middle. T'Roun waved Seven of Nine and the Doctor to the front of the line. Troval hadn't come with the xBs' group, but Hugh helmed it with another couple of guys flanking him. They *all* looked a little worse for wear; some had masks on, some had these patchy-ass looking scrubs, gloves, robes... As the *Aralez's* engines died down and I turned on my environmental mic, I could hear Hugh and a few other xBs were yelling between each other and T'Roun's advancing party. He's shouting like "you have to help him, please, he's collapsed!". T'Roun's was trying to get Hugh to calm down, and Vasquez and the Doctor immediately dash ahead to start tricorder scans on Croxis.

When Hugh turned back from watching these Starfleet officers run towards his friend, that's when I think he really *noticed* Seven under her EV suit helmet, if you know what I mean. He just kinda... **[he leans his head forward and imitates reaching out a hand towards me with a mimicked, haunted expression]** *this*, at her helmet, and goes "you... I *know* you, you've *known* us... wh-why are you *here*, you'll be-!"

Seven interrupts him and just goes: "Starfleet has a vaccine, and my resilience is proof it works. My systems report themselves as adapting, and are able to immunize myself from the pathogen."

Even from where I was, I could see Hugh was overwhelmed. I think he was still coming to terms with the fact that this was all *real*. The two helping hold him up gripped his shoulder and balled their fists in relief.

"Mr. Hugh," T'Roun said as evenly as possible, "we are still replicating the antigen en masse, but we'll require multiple sample types from this planet and its population in order for it to synthesise properly with an atmospheric

disbursal.” Then her voice gets real gentle; probably the most kind I’ve ever heard a Vulcan manage. “First and foremost,” she said... well, no— almost asks him: “what supplies do you need.”

They’re all at a loss for words before Seven piped up. “They are here to help. We *all* are.”

You’d think they’d seen an angel with all the flames of heaven and hell behind it, the way those three xBs looked at them.

“D-dermal regenerators,” Hugh finally managed. “W-we’ll— offer as many — *whatever* samples you need, for vaccine and antidote acclimation. But t-the dermal tissue, then muscular... i-t’s— what the plague eats at most, before progressing to neurological functions; b-bring as many... as you can, and—!”

That’s when he loses it. They all do. I heard a rise of commotion and I see more and more folks out where the settlement is start to gather and peek towards us. Even CMO Vasquez looked up a little wide-eyed as she’s running tricorder scans over Croxis, and some xBs run their asses off back to the main plaza as more and more lights flick on. Hugh, meanwhile; he’s crying, relieved, he’s shaking the EMH and *T’Roun’s* hands...

My audio futzed out for a bit from the pattern buffer enhancers coming online, and I saw *T’Roun* and a few nurses up finally head towards Croxis. But Hugh and the two xBs with him, though — they lingered a little while to talk with Seven. When my environmental mic popped back on, I caught Hugh saying he was “very glad to meet her.” From the look of it, I don’t think she expected to be *told* something like that, but... hey. What do I know.

**[Vaskov pauses, a reflective smile skirting over his face.]**

**◇ And what happened after that?**

**[He looks at me with a full smile, shakes his head, and shrugs his shoulders.]**

Well, whaddya think? We got to work.



# PAVING GOOD INTENTIONS



**RECONSTITUTION  
AND THE ROAD TO 2379**



## TASK FORCE *KETER*'S FLIGHT

Task Force *Keter* — as much as it *could* be called a task force — made good speed for Ohinaka III. With good *reason*, too: Starfleet Command was well aware of what the Romulan reaction to this mission would be, and that, given the paranoid state of Romulan decision-making at that time, any move in the Neutral Zone's vague direction would be interpreted as a threat. It was, thusly, no real surprise to Jellico *or* the commander of Neutral Zone Tactical Forces Admiral Itoh, that the Romulans reacted very badly.

Within two days of TFK's departure, Starfleet Intelligence confirmed warp reactor blooms and mass signature movements along the entire Neutral Zone. The Rapid Reaction Forces and other tactical elements were quick to react, bringing themselves right up to the edge of the Neutral Zone to shadow the Romulan Star Navy as close as they could. "It's a proper standing and shouting war," Jellico complained to Somak. "They're furious but can't tell us why, and we can't get them to understand why we really don't *care* what they do — so long as they leave us alone."



Despite the best efforts of the RRF and Admiral Itoh, it was inevitable that *Keter* and *Concagh* would pick up a tail; as they closed in on the Ohinaka system, the *Akira*-class *Concagh* would confirm the two signatures on their aft quarter were, in fact, Romulan *D'Deridex* Star Cruisers – holding a steady but malevolent position just outside of weapons range. Captain Iain Bertram McKingsley – known as “IBM” throughout the fleet – was not about to let them follow him nor the *Keter* into the system, no matter what the Romulan’s intentions were. Intelligence debriefs from the Romulus Office – and dispatches from the diplomatic corps – heavily implied that the Romulans viewed the xBs as a “parasitic threat to their empire,” and as such, would consider Ohinaka III a “further infection from the *Llaetus’le*<sup>1</sup> to be stamped out.” “If the Romulans get to them first, they’ll make the Norkan Massacres look like a game of Kadis-Khot,” McKingsley would tell his staff in a briefing. “We’re not about to let that happen, are we?”

As far as Starfleet knew, the Romulans thankfully did not actually know *where*, exactly, Ohinaka III was. Romulan sensor equipment, as good as theirs was at detecting *military* equipment, was sub-par when it came to long-range detection of lifesigns and other organic presences. McKingsley was willing to gamble on this lack of knowledge: at least, that the Romulans would probably follow *Concagh* over the slow, aging *Keter* — especially if the *Concagh* suddenly jumped up three warp factors to try and “escape” her tail. McKingsley had been a Saber Squadron commander during the Dominion War – leading a trio of the fast escort vessels during the Badlands campaign and Operation Intercede. He was very used to being outnumbered and outgunned: in fact, he enjoyed it.

As the two ships approached the Oort Cloud, McKingsley put the plan into action – turning sharply to starboard before taking the *Concagh* to Warp 9.5 in an instant. The Romulans turned to give chase immediately, ignoring the *Keter* in order to keep up with the Starfleet cruiser that just made a high warp break towards the Romulan border. Signals decrypts from the Romulan Star Navy vessels suggest that they believed McKingsley was about to make an attack run on a series of spy satellites in the Wliu System. This was a

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1 Colloquial Romulan name in reference to the Borg – the term sometimes used as derogative reference towards the Borg *and* xBs. In Standard Empirical Romulan, “*Llaetus’le*” literally translates to “disease.”

bold assertion, considering that Starfleet was unaware the Romulans had surveillance equipment in the region.

Captain McKingsley would let the Romulan warbirds follow him for eight hours – allowing them to close to within weapons range before springing the second part of the plan. The *Concagh* would cut power suddenly, letting the Romulans overshoot. *Concagh* then shut *all* her power down, taking advantage of the advanced ECM Kit aboard to mask their electronic signature. With the vessel on Silent Running, they watched as the Warbirds scoured the area for them, waiting for one to break off for Ohinaka III. Neither did. It is unclear as to whether they had orders to find and destroy the *Concagh*, or simply feared the consequences if the Starfleet ship made it to Wliu. The latter, unfortunately, would fit the culture of paranoia that characterized the latter Romulan state.

The *Concagh* would make several attempts to slip away from the warbirds, but their tight search pattern and intermittent recloaking would keep her pinned in the space between Wliu and Ohniaka well past McKingsley and T'Roun's estimated rendezvous. In the meantime, the *Keter* pressed on. Stripped of an armed escort, Captain T'Roun would push her ship to the limit. The *Hiawatha*-class ship's retrofitting had kept her going throughout the Dominion War, but she'd never been expected to maintain a cruising speed of higher than Warp Four. Now, T'Roun pushed her as high as Warp Factor *Seven* – trying to put as much open space as she could behind them before Ohinaka system's electromagnetic interference could protect them. When the *Keter's* recently-assigned Chief Engineer Marcus would try and warn that the ship "wasn't made for this" as they evacuated staff due to spiking radiation, Captain T'Roun factually replied that "the *Keter* was made for usage during the Dominion War. The Dominion War has been over for three years."

The Romulans only noticed the *Keter's* speed jump twenty hours after McKingsley had made his border break. Scrambling to intercept, the Star Navy had barely jumped to warp before the *Keter* disappeared off their scopes. Watching with satisfaction from the *Concagh's* bridge, McKingsley remarked: "I'm not sure they're very good at this, are they." *Concagh* would break contact with the warbirds 40 minutes later, holding a low warp speed as they arced around to join *Keter* in the Ohinaka system.

The *Keter* – overworked with wailing engines and deck plates rattling like broken windchimes – arrived in the system on the 29th of July. A quick scan of the planet confirmed the worst fears of many of her biologists: the entire ecosystem of the planet had been contaminated by Borg technology. Nanoprobes had entered the water cycle and plant life, mutated animals, and even changed the composition of the atmosphere. These initial scans hypothesized that landfall without any protective equipment might result in accidental assimilation, or at the bare minimum, severe illness to most humanoids. As such, T'Roun ordered the initial landing groups to gear up in full hazmat gear – with phaser Type 2s on standby. On the insistence of The Doctor and Commander La Forge<sup>2</sup>, Seven of Nine was allowed to join the initial teams. The closest thing to an expert available, Seven – with her status as a “specialist” still in jeopardy thanks to the ongoing Voyager Inquiry – would be vital in the next 48 hours.

With transporters still inhibited by the system's electromagnetic currents, two medical runabouts would deliver the away teams to the surface: the *Aralez* and *Hresh*. Contact – made with Hugh just before the runabouts' departures through a deteriorating orbital satellite – confirmed both the location of the primary xB settlement and their immediate needs. Lieutenant Jr. Grade Benjamin “Benny” Vaskov had seen close combat in the Dominion War: first as part of the 10th Fleet's long support tail, and then at the coal face during the Cornus Sieges and the Invasion of Chin'toka. Like most of the *Keter's* crew, he'd been grabbed from a secondary assignment on Earth or Mars to fill up the berths before the mission began.

“After Hugh and Troval's transmission, T'Roun told the *Aralez* [runabout] pilots to follow their coordinates and touch down only 50 meters away instead of a full 1,000 like before. We still wanted to give our first runabout landing plenty of space to boost signals and establish point-of-contact, but we didn't want to, uh... delay anything anymore. The closer we got to the surface, the more we could see about a dozen figures walking in a line out to where we were approaching. [...]

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2 Commander La Forge — in company of Commander Data with their temporary transference from the *Enterprise-E* — would not arrive to Ohniaka III until August 10<sup>th</sup>, though remained in contact with the *Keter* and *Concagh* before having to cut communications to avoid possible eavesdropping from the Star Navy.



When we had about 70 more meters left to the surface, we saw one of them fall over, and that entire line heading out to our landing area crumpled. The ones ahead of them stopped, some turned back, some knelt and hollered for others closer to the structures they'd built... it was, uh. That guy, Crosis; he's a big one too, not someone you'd think would just...

Captain T'Roun looked at us five and told us to holster our phaser rifles onto our back attachments.

I figured that was fair. "

## RECONSTITUTION

Crosis — one of the key leaders of this settlement — would be one of the first patients treated by T'Roun's team after they left the runabouts. Any thoughts of clearing the compound for hostiles or establishing a perimeter were thrown out the window: immediate triage was the only thing on anyone's mind. Within about 18 hours, over 250 of the *Keter's* personnel were deployed to the planet, performing everything from pre-op work, non-critical surgeries, and establishing emergency vaccine inoculation sites. After realizing they could get planetside without having to don EV suits, orderlies and engineers worked 'round the clock to set up support facilities and take replicator scans of the xB shantytown's overtaxed infrastructure. In orbit, the remaining 340 crew and 85 supplemental medical staff from Starfleet Medical were swamped with patients filling ICU biobeds, temporary intubations, and most unfortunately, casualties.

Dr. Brianna Vasquez, Chief Medical Officer of the *Keter*, oversaw the surgeries from the overflow wards of the main sickbay. "We had expected to perform around 45 surgeries in the first 20 hours. We ended up doing nearly 130: sometimes on the same patients as repeat cases that returned to the wards. It was a mess. We had all the material the Federation could find on xB medicine — we even had the Doc who'd fixed up Seven of Nine on hand — but we were still scrambling to figure out what, exactly, what was going on with

these people and why. The vaccine would *work*, and then it *wouldn't*, or it would interfere with organ function or cause remaining implants to break down or short out. Every new patient, every new *species* had to be treated individually – not to mention we all had to stop and stare at each other when an xB first asked us ‘how many doses of a children’s vaccine’ we had on-hand. It definitely hadn’t been on the ‘to-do’ list.”

The urgent needs of the xBs, combined with their own anxieties and fears, pushed tensions to their limits planet-side. Starfleet orderlies were confronted as they tried to catalogue and count the population, and engineers attempting to shore up buildings or repair power conduits on their makeshift medical tools were interfered with by xB civilians. Two security officers trying to mark out a perimeter for a planet-side triage centre were attacked and abducted for panicked questioning. It was understandable; the xBs were terrified that Starfleet had come to wipe them out. Even with their limited knowledge of the outside world, they understood well enough what the rest of galaxy thought about the Borg: much less *them*.

Yes, the leaders of this former Borg clade were under Starfleet care – publicly taking the vaccine Starfleet *themselves* made, and undergoing reconstructive physical therapy in Starfleet-replicated dermal biosuits. But once it was learned where this devastating plague had *originated* from, many amongst the xB population were bitter about the flippancy of Janeway’s actions, even if they *had* destroyed the Borg’s freedom of manoeuvre. Even Hugh – instantly charmed by this Seven of Nine and Icheb that had come all the way from the Delta Quadrant – was remarkably apprehensive about the scale of the *Keter’s* operations, despite his new friends’ assurances – and even *more* alarmed at the prospect of a starship like the *Concagh* arriving after he woke up from anaesthetic.

The *Concagh* would arrive in Ohniakan orbit 45 hours after T’Roun made landfall. McKingsley would beam down to the *Keter’s* aid post. After only 20 minutes of inspection, he returned to the *Concagh* and made a call to Starbase 157, requesting the immediate deployment of a Starfleet Mobile Auxiliary Support Hospital (SMASH) unit to Ohinaka III. Initially, Jellico was hesitant – until McKingsley sent through images. 8063<sup>rd</sup> SMASH would be ordered out of SB 153 that afternoon to provide supporting doctors and medical corps personnel.

The USS *Archimedes* would carry the mobile hospital along the border, trailing the temporarily-transferred Commanders Data and Geordi La Forge's shuttle. The *Archimedes'* captain, Sonya Gomez, had been part of the crew complement that made first contact with the Borg near J-25 aboard the USS *Enterprise-D* 14 years earlier. Now, on her maiden voyage as captain of a starship, she would see them again; not as an enemy, but as powerless patients filling the wards of the *Keter*.

Even with the press imagery arriving out of Ohinaka III, the political situation remained fraught. The scale of the sentientarian disaster was immense and undeniable, certainly; but considering the fresh wounds of the Betazoid Occupation, the Bombardment of Aito, and the attempted genocide of the Cardassian people, there were some in the reactionary elements of the council who were hesitant to offer anything more than cursory support. Starfleet struggled to find a truly unified line: many of those who supported the "Ohinakan Cause" were also backers of soon-to-be Admiral Janeway, and the fact that Janeway had inadvertently caused such a disaster was not lost on their critics. Admiral Paris would visibly squirm as Ambassadors Pagro and Yunsa picked apart his defense of Janeway during a Starfleet Oversight hearing in mid-August.

Back in Paris, Min Zife — who'd begun this whole saga with nothing more than cursory irritation — grew increasingly interested in the events on Ohniaka III. His archetypal micromanaging and hyperfixation, a longstanding headache for the admiralty during the Dominion War, was now turned upon the xBs. There was an element of his fascination that was intended as a counter to Pagro's continued attacks on the "Borg Refugee Bonanza," but it *did* seem as if the xBs' treatment was becoming a larger symbol for the "belligerent sentientarianism" that Zife saw as the way forward in the post-war world. "Those Borg survivors are the sort of people we're here to help," he would tell Admiral Akaar in a staff meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August. "They've been through hell and back, they're ready to stand on their own feet, and it's our job to make sure they can: no matter what." Zife's eagerness to engage with the xBs went so far as to draw up several proposals for a presidential visit to Ohinaka III. While these plans would progress as far as transfer orders for the USS *Hood*, a disappointed Zife would eventually be talked down by his staff.

As much as Zife's increasingly pro-xB positions upset the Federalists, it was small fry compared to the outrage that came from domestic areas. The rapid move of the *Keter's* personnel and then the 8063rd SMASH upset much of FEDAC's Ross Plan scheduling in the region. The ripple effect knocked the reconstruction efforts on Benzar and Bolarus back by over 8 months, straight into Bolarus's rainy season, and well beyond the targets promised in 2375. The Bolian ambassador, infuriated by the interference of "their own president" in national reconstruction, would withdraw their support for the government – reducing Zife's majority even further.

The Romulans were even *less* happy, however. The mission to Ohinaka III and the continued presence of the *Concagh* — backed up by the *Obena* and a trio of *Steamrunner*-class escorts on anti-piracy ops in early September 2378 — infuriated Romulus. It seemingly confirmed to them that Starfleet was renegeing on wartime promises not to interfere within the Star Empire's sphere of influence, and they were correct in some senses: though that depended on how one understood — or prioritized factors within — this Romulan "sphere of influence." Ohinaka III's position within a group of dense, sensor-masking systems was a clear threat to Romulan interests in the Typhon sector: so long as one assumed that Starfleet was going to build a starbase in the system and turn the xB population into some form of shock troopers. Which is, of course, what the Romulans would have done, and exactly what *they* accused Min Zife of secretly orchestrating.

Zife — never one to tolerate the sycophancy of Romulan Diplomacy — had little time for the diplomatic protests, nor the twisting of Federation magnanimity. Having summoned the Romulan Ambassador to his cigar-smelling office, Zife would warn him that "any attempt to further interfere with sentient activity in recognized neutral territory would not be tolerated by the Federation." Despite this, the *Concagh's* task force would face off with Romulan warbirds at least four more times during August as they attempted to reconnoitre the system.

Nevertheless, recovery efforts persisted. The 8063<sup>rd</sup>, brought in as a overflow hospital for emergency surgery, was quickly shifted from triage to support care. These medical personnel found themselves acting more as support staff for the xBs; considering these former Borg were left alone to

become experts in their own physiology and medical needs, the SMASH staff soon learned that their jobs were to document, aid, and learn from the xBs as they refined their own techniques with the fresh supply of equipment. All in all, from of a pre-pandemic population of 1,202, 165 xBs died from the Cortical Plague in the span of mere weeks – with nearly 85% enduring some form of long-term side effect or disabling.

The *Keter* — still serving as a critical ward for the worst patients — would retire its disaster protocols on August 25<sup>th</sup>, ending nearly 4 weeks of sleepless nights and double shifts for her personnel. Granted leave for the first time in a month, many of her personnel would join xBs on tours and excursions over the planet’s countryside – as well as finally hike down towards the sandy, rose-colored beaches 7 kilometers out from the 8063<sup>rd</sup>s base of operations. These expeditions – collated and documented in the “McKillingsley-Crosis Report” – represented the first full survey of the planet’s environment by Starfleet personnel, and began the process of archiving the Ohniakan xBs’ decade-long cataloguing of their planet’s flora and fauna into Federation data and seed banks.

The residents of Ohniaka III had known their vessel’s crashlanding had irreparably changed their ecosystem — a phenomenon they called “Cubesfall Inoculation” — but were nevertheless shocked at just how much it had truly spread throughout the planet’s various climates. According to scans performed by the *Archimedes*’ powerful mapping sensors, the great hulk that was once “Cube 5219” had shed an estimated 15 million tons of debris in its slow and fiery descent 10 years ago, explaining how the now-disconnected Borg nanotechnology had already expanded out so much from Settlement 01<sup>3</sup>. Starfleet personnel had to use caution when drinking unfiltered water or eating fused<sup>4</sup> foods, were prescribed slow-release nanoprobe nullifier

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3 “Settlement 01” was the name of the township that hosted 90% of Ohniaka III’s population where the *Aralez* made landfall, later renamed to “Cooperation Capitol City.” Two tiny villages were also to the coastal north and south of Settlement 01 (named “Settlements 02 and 03”) : established in 2372 and ‘75 as part of the respective years’ expeditions.

4 Developed during the Ohniakan xBs’ Age of Isolation, the “Fused vs. Blank” scale was used to measure how much Ohniakan produce and/or animal-based foods had been “fused” with nanoprobes, or was left “blank” and had yet to be touched by remnant Borg technology. This inoculation has often been compared to the proliferation of yeast in Earthen food; if eaten in large quantities by a non-xB or continuously consumed overtime, it could cause a slow technological inoculation similar to that of Humans’ “Auto-brewery Syndrome.”

medications for all planetary practitioners, and often ran electric currents through clothes not freshly replicated in order to rid them of inoculation particle buildup – one officer going so far as to compare it to “electric aphids.”

Other activities also solidified the return to some normalcy. Civil buildings for administrative affairs were constructed, recreation areas were marked off, and xBs that had regained their strength offered to show SMASH staffers how they would normally tend to their currently-neglected farmlands, community gardens, and aquaponic cultivations. Some of the *Concagh’s* crew from Anglophone countries and colonies would set up a cricket pitch, before losing by 25 runs to an xB team a week later. In a wry note to Admiral Jellico, McKingsley noted that “the success of social recovery can be judged by the fact I have just finished remonstrating five officers for ‘overeager fraternisation’ before putting them on medical leave. I think that’s a sign that we’ve done a good job, Ed.”

Starfleet had good reason to pat themselves on the back. The sentientarian operation might have exacerbated Zife’s declining political power just before the 2378 regional election cycle, but it was a perfect vindication of the Stellar Service’s ongoing mission. It also confirmed that, even with the continuation of heightened military readiness, Starfleet was pressing on with the transition to peacetime activity.

## IN PLACE OF STRIFE

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2378, McKingsley would take receipt of two messages that would change the direction of Ohinaka III forever.

The first was a diplomatic note from the Federation Council to “the legal authority of Ohinaka III:” offering to hand over 748 cryogenically frozen xBs for “care and support.” The “iced borg” were a political hot potato for Starfleet Command, and a nightmare for both medical and engineering that were unwilling to deal with them. All the way from Wolf 359, nearly 70 borg drones were discovered in the cube over earth and scattered across the battlefield

and were cryogenically frozen in the aftermath, Starfleet scientists struggling to find a way to return many of these drones to individuality without causing major physical or mental damage. Others — reclaimed from abandoned Borg vessels, failed assimilations, and the “Polymax Exchange” with the Romulan Empire in 2375 — had brought the number of cryogenically frozen Borg within Starfleet’s purview to nearly 750. Stored at Cold Station 10, the group — sardonically known as “nanoprobe popsicles” by unsavory types in Starfleet Operations — had been left to gather dust in lieu of adequate medical experience.

Only with the return of *Voyager* and the dual work of both The Doctor and Seven of Nine did Starfleet Medical finally find the confidence to return to these cold storage Borg. The better medical knowledge, however, only confirmed certain fears in the interlude: the cryogenic freezing process had not been without complications. Time was rapidly running out to thaw and then “reclaim” the drones before their cybernetics deteriorated before repair. Many in Starfleet — including Admiral Ross, Paris, and Kunuk — were keen on moving them to Ohinaka III, which now represented the largest and most experienced “Borg reclamation facility” in the entire quadrant.

Jellico was bitterly opposed to the idea, remaining apprehensive about the possibility of a “cyborg enclave” on his left flank along the Romulan frontier. Alongside others in Starfleet Tactical, he would argue in favor of resettling the xBs within the UFP entirely on logistical grounds. It would have been a rash move, and almost certainly would have wrecked UFP-xB relations completely at this sensitive stage. Considering the decisions taken during the Dominion War, however, it would not have been unprecedented. Thankfully, cooler heads prevailed, and Admiral Shanthi ordeed the settlement issue to be shelved until after the 2378 electoral cycle ended.

The proposition of moving cold storage drones to Ohinkaka III had first been considered by Commander Geordi La Forge in August 2378. Due to his familiarity with cybernetics and his initial repairs made on Hugh’s biochips in 2368, La Forge had been involved in early false starts to reclaim the 700 frozen Borg, and was thus best informed to broach the subject with the xBs. La Forge did his best to mitigate any pressure from above — well aware that asking a colony of barely a thousand to nearly double their population without much in the way of preparation time was *far* more than a tall order.

As far as pressure was concerned over original “ownership,” Starfleet didn’t want much to do with them; even Jellico’s resettlement plan ended in the cold storage drones being transferred.

After deliniation with their comrades, Hugh and Crois seemed eager to do their part – as did the medical staff aboard *Keter* and the 8063<sup>rd</sup> SMASH. The 8063<sup>rd</sup>’s CO would request permission to extend their posting on Ohinaka III for another 18 months after hearing of the request, knowing that, without her aid post’s support, Hugh simply lacked the facilities to accept the offer. A JAG officer dispatch would leave Ohinaka III with a written acceptance of the offer from Hugh — though a senior staffer made it clear that the authorization would have to come from the still-split Federation Council, as opposed to the generally-united admiralty.

What those officers *didn’t* count on was the antipathy of the Centralists towards keeping these xBs within the Federation’s purview. Proposed by Anneik Okeg, the resolution would pass in a surprising nod-through, with the Centralists stifling any opposition from their own side. It would later be apparent that the vote was a watershed moment for Councillor Pagro’s seizure of power within the opposition, but Zife – never one to pay much attention to his opponents when they weren’t causing him problems – was more than happy to take the win, photographed with his signature toothy smile in the Trojan’s direction as the vote was called and passed.

The second message was from the Federal Department of Aid Control (FEDAC). FEDAC, which controlled and managed the movement, resettlement, and support of refugees and asylum seekers within the UFP, had received a petition from 14 individual xBs requesting resettlement on Ohinaka III under the “cultural resettlement and re-incorporation” clause of the McClaren Act. The petitioners were a diverse bunch: 3 were rehabilitated survivors of Wolf 359, 5 Romulan xBs recovered by Starfleet near the Typhon Expanse in 2372, an El-Aurian, 1 Cardassian, 2 Vuclans, and 3 Project Corvidae<sup>5</sup> scientists who the Romulan Senate had exchanged during treaty negotiations in 2374. All had attempted to return to life as normal citizens, but had found themselves

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5 Project Corvidae (2350-2363) was a level five classified Starfleet Intelligence operation, aimed at providing over-the-horizon information, analysis, and crucially warning on the movements and intentions of “Unknown Hostile C” – later identified as the Borg.



alienated by Federation society's unadulterated fear of ex-Borg individuals. Ohinaka III offered an opportunity to live outside of that culture of suspicion.

Initially, T'Roun and McKingsley were hesitant. For starters, Ohinaka III had barely stabilized itself; infrastructure was finally starting to bounce back after the pandemic's devastation, power converter cables were still strung from pylons above streets paved with prefab durasteel mats, and the 8063<sup>rd</sup>'s mess kitchen was only now replacing its tents with properly sealed buildings. Social stability was also fragile; even if outright violence was out of the question, T'Roun carefully considered whether or not the influx of Federation citizens and others might aggravate lingering bitterness over the Cortical Plague.

Alternatively, it was an easy decision for Hugh and Crosis to make. Their social duty for care extended to *all* potential xBs and, combined with the 8063<sup>rd</sup> SMASH's activity, they were now the best (and possibly *only*) people in the galaxy equipped to reclaim former Borg drones safely. Together, the Progenitors<sup>6</sup> on the planet found consensus; the ever-efficient descendents of the Borg immediately set themselves to work dedicating "living block" quarters space to expand living accommodations and offer these people a new lease on life – alongside homes for the soon-to-be-awakened 700 cold storage drones. The Ohniakan xBs would eventually persuade the two Starfleet captains to authorize the transfer: at least on a probationary basis.

The decision to allow "limited entry of those whose medical status and expertise are of net benefit to the situation on Ohniaka III" changed the course of the ex-Borg society forever. The tacit and limited, but still-open endorsement of xB migration to Ohniaka III would guarantee Jellico's resettlement suggestion would remain stillborn: even if McKingsley and T'Roun were unaware of that proposal entirely. The 14 petitioners — carried aboard the S.S. *Janus VI* from Regulus — would meet the transport USS *Sinai* at SB 157. They would arrive on Ohinaka III on October 14th, and they would be the first of many.

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6 The term "Progenitor" would first be used in reference to the original Ohniakan xB clade by one of the 14 petitioners: a Romulan xB that marveled over the farmlands they saw on their descent to Ohniaka III's surface, and wanted to meet these "Progenitor caretakers." The term was adopted as a shorthand when referring to the differing generations, and indicate some form of respect towards the founding members of this xB society.

Managing the new xBs — alongside the now immense project of thawing over 700 drones and starting their reclamations from the beginning — was a massive ordeal, and one that could not be handled by Starfleet alone. “We could do it,” T’Roun would point out to McKlingsley, “but then what will they do when we leave?” She had a point: as good as the *Keter* and the 8063<sup>rd</sup> were getting at with regards to xB medical care, their tour of duty had an end point. Even with the extended mission on Ohinaka III, everyone knew that it was only a matter of time before they would all be moved on to a new mission. Already, the medical staff were doing their best to involve and teach the more technical aspects of their operations to the xBs, who deftly combined their greater knowledge of patient care with the medical expertise of the SMASH unit.

The “Reclamation Project” emerged less fully-formed from this process, and more as a solution to a bureaucratic anomaly. As the migration of xBs picked up across late 2378, the amount of supplies being brought in from Starfleet expanded. With large numbers of xBs now serving as active supernumeraries to the engineers and medical staff — as well as beginning independent projects such as the reconstruction of Cubesfall’s town centre — the question of who *exactly* could sign off on these supply deliveries became more fraught. There simply weren’t enough senior officers around to sign for everything. The support services were growing irritated with stocks of biomimetic gel and industrial replicators being signed off on by ensigns carrying commissions younger than the products they were receiving.

Hugh was already beginning to see the need to establish home-grown medical care facilities. To his admittance, the need for a bureaucratic body around it had been ignored for a while. Starfleet Operations would force the issue when T’Roun requested a collection of mothballed computer banks for their usage; when Operations demanded to know which “neutral civil action unit” would be receiving them, Hugh would offer the “reclamation project” as an answer.

What that “project” meant would take months to be formally codified. But even in late 2378, it was clear that, even if the force would act as a security agency in some form, its primary purpose would *always* primarily be recovery and reclamation care for any and all former Borg. Those who

volunteered for the work – under the leadership of “Director” Hugh – were doing so out of civic duty of care rather than protection. Progenitors Troval and Archon, while yet to become the prominent cyberneticists they would be known as, emerge for the first time in Starfleet records after the “xB Meatball Surgery” of August 2378: applying their curiosity and knowledge of the process, quickly outpacing the experience of the 8063<sup>rd</sup>’s personnel. As much as McKingsley tried to convince the xBs to conduct phaser practices, they scorned his scheduled drills for further psychological studies and medical seminars.

The Reclamation Project also turned out to serve a crucial *social* function for the denizens of Ohniaka III as well – whether they arrived by Starfleet transport, or by cryotube offloading. The former group were the most stand-off-ish, and with good reason – they were used to a universe that viewed them with fear, hatred, and in even grimmer cases: greed.<sup>7</sup> They came first in pairs, then in groups, and then by the dozens: quietly burrowing within the existing population without much wanted fanfare or celebration. Progenitors confided in 8063<sup>rd</sup> personnel that the new arrivals seemed largely pessimistic about the long-term viability of the Ohinaka colony, and were surprised at both the Progenitor community’s eagerness and lackadaisical bliss to welcome them in.

Thankfully sooner rather than later, Hugh and the Progenitors came to pinpoint the specific disconnect they seemed to have with these new arrivals, despite their commonality as “those forever bound through the Borg.” The Progenitors’ decade-long seclusion had lent them a privileged, almost naïve celebration of themselves in contrast to the marginalization xBs faced elsewhere – especially when compared to the hardships their newly-arrived kin bore during those same years of pastoral bliss for the Progenitors. “A few months ago, I would be rotating farming duties today,” Hugh would wistfully tell Captain T’Roun. “My most pressing responsibility was to water the newly-seeded Rustleaf patch. My greatest anxieties were whether or not I remembered to turn off a stovetop. I did not have to fear for my life against hateful neighbors who thought I would assimilate them in the night.”

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7 During the late 2370s, contraband Borg technology held extremely high trade value in black markets – even if it was extremely dangerous to transport and keep controlled. One seizure of an underground operation in 2377 found invoices showing the price of a single, assimilation-capable nanoprobe frozen in stasis was valued at 6 bars of latinum.

Eventually, the commonalities of experience and “xB directness” began to break the ice. Progenitor councilors helped provide differing perspectives to the sometimes self-loathing transplants, and newly-arrived immigrants began to earnestly confide in these people who lovingly polished their implants and so openly Tethered<sup>8</sup> with each other. They were all re-forming their ideas of personhood and identity — whether individual or societal — and the ability to do that around others in the same process was vital.

“We’re creating a new kind of society on the fly here,” Troval would tell McKingsley at a meeting in late October. “That’s certainly true,” McKingsley replied. “But you also need to create a new kind of state, too — and everything that comes with that.”

## THE PRINCIPLE OF THE ONE

Admiral William Ross would visit Ohinaka III in early February 2379, as a detour from his well-wishing tour of the Romulan Border. It was not intended to be a long visit, nor a particularly formal one; many of the 8063<sup>rd</sup>s doctors had no idea that Ross was even on site before he walked into the OR, nor when he was suddenly there and asked them questions in post-op. He certainly had no expertise in cybernetics or xenobiology to qualify him for the visit: that purview still came under Admiral Kunuk. Instead, Ross’s interest came from war-time experience; Admiral Ross was the one who authorised the “Codetalker” program, where xBs within Starfleet and the FGF had served as signallers, sensitive data couriers, and “living decryptors” in the final stages of the Dominion War.

Arriving on the 11th, Ross was shocked by the state of the xBs: even well after the end of their moment of crisis. Recovery from the Cortical Plague was steadily continuing, but the psychological and physical after-effects

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<sup>8</sup> Coined during the Age of Isolation, Tethering is the name given to the practice of xBs physically connecting to each other with the tubules formerly used for assimilation. Tethering is also used to uplink with various technologies, issue medical aid with reparative nanoprobes, and can be employed in different species’ practices and customs (i.e., Vulcan xBs utilize these tubules when initiating mindmelds for implant diagnostics and cerebral communications).

from its devastation were still apparent. He would go to see the makeshift memorial built to honor the pandemic's dead, talked to several individuals about what they needed, and tried to find out *what*, exactly, the xBs' next steps were – as both individuals, and their “new kind of society” that was needing to be addressed.

Ross would also specifically meet with Hugh to discuss the next steps: still weakened, but recovering rapidly, and already assisting the 8063<sup>rd</sup>'s medic with more complicated cases. Supposedly, this meeting (which lasted only 35 minutes) was the first time that ex-Borg *statehood* was proposed. If Ross is to be believed, it was *Hugh* who suggested the matter – as part of contingencies for any Romulan intervention. More would be discussed at the end of Ross' visit; but for now, Ross could offer an informal (and completely unauthorized) apology for the actions of soon-to-be Admiral Janeway.

Hugh, mollified but still unconvinced, would merely comment that “he understood where she had come from.”

Ross's third and final day on Ohinaka III was spent in the existing communal spaces: inhabited by xBs who had been discharged from the *Keter* and the SMASH unit. The mood was optimistic, and several of the press photos show Ross and his staff amongst smiling xBs and off-duty Starfleet personnel as they dined together in a mess tent. “[Ross] was in his element,” Dr. Zimanski remembered. “It was just like the war; touring the front and seeing troops, except this time no one was dying. Everyone got to live — some even got to live *again* — and that seemed to bring a little life back to the old man.” Towards the end of the meal, Ross was taken by Zimanski to meet some of the “Nameless”<sup>9</sup> – former Borg whose assimilations (or severances) had been so severe, that knowledge of their previous life had been completely eradicated. With their developing therapy methodologies, there were those that hoped these xBs' identities could be recovered – but for now, they were being treated as new people: “starting from their own beginning,” as Hugh and the Progenitors would put it.

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9 It is important to note that every member of the original Progenitor clade was “Nameless,” due to the severity of Hugh's severance from the Collective in 2368. No xB from Cube 5219 retained or has ever recalled memories of any possible, previous life: save for the experiences Hugh had aboard the *Enterprise-D*.

“Halfway down the line, Ross stopped – hand frozen in front of an xB taken out of stasis three weeks ago called Fourth of Eight: who took the unmoving hand and shook it energetically. The xB’s wide smile, punctuated by implant scars and reconstructive surgery, was a stark contrast to the white-faced, gaunt look of horror the admiral had. After a second, Ross quietly asked him for his name. ‘Fourth of Eight, Admiral,’ was the reply. Ross stared back, shaking his head in short, sharp bursts. ‘No, that’s not right. That’s not right. Where’s your beard gone, Jiji?’ Fourth frowned at him, asked if he was alright, and then Ross just...turned and walked away. He might as well have *ran*, for the speed he went at. When I found him behind the supply shelter, the poor admiral was halfway through a panic attack.”

After some coaxing — and a slight dose of Lagavulin — Zimanski would discover that Fourth of Eight was actually Jivan Amirian: half-Human and half-Betazoid academy friend, colleague, and former romantic partner to Ross. Amirian was once the captain of the USS *Constance* at the Battle of Wolf 359, and had been marked as missing: presumed dead for over a decade. “Ross was as white as a sheet for the rest of the day. We ended up scratching the final meetings, simply because he acted like he wanted to be sick. One of his aides said that he hadn’t looked this bad since after the Second Battle of Chin’Toka.”

“Ross thankfully stayed an extra day so we could get what we needed to sorted, and the gossip that morning was that Forth had asked his consultant to take him to Ross’ cabin last night so they could ‘talk some things out.’ What those ‘things’ were, who the hell knows, but in the mess I heard Fourth ask some xBs he was recovering with to try calling him ‘Jivan.’ He’d started to *remember* things, which was *very* rare for all the Nameless we’d treated so far. It gave *us* a scare, and made the *Progenitors* cross-reference their own psyche approaches towards Nameless to make sure they weren’t flubbing anyone’s treatments. But, after some checking, we all figured this was just a special case – and apparently a lot of what Jivan had been searching for during his therapy sessions was found in those memories. The admiral, meanwhile – he walked past me and into his first meeting just before noon looking a hell of a lot better. His eyes were still awful puffy, but considering his mood the day before? I was impressed he actually gave me a smile when he said “good morning.”

Ross's visit was serendipitous in other ways. He was present for a grand meeting of the support council: consisting of Hugh, Crosis, Troval, T'Roun, McKinglsey, and a Progenitor Romulan xB named T'leetan that had designed a majority of Settlement 01's first power generators. They had met again to deal with the contentious delivery of new power plants by Boeing-Shikahr. Despite being a Federation government contract, Shikahr refused to deliver the new reactors without a signature from a "representative of the planetary government," and found the authority of the council to be lacking. When T'leetan had refused, Hugh eventually signed it off as "Director of the Reclamation project" (a title he remained apprehensive of), but the issues were only getting bigger.

"You're going to have to make this leap at some point," Ross would tell them after the argument reached its regular impasse. "It *is* your government, though, at the end of that."

"We don't want it to be *your* government," Crosis would reply. "We don't want to have to do it *that way*. *Your way*."

Government formation on Ohniaka III had been an open debate since the *Keter* first arrived. The mass of engineering projects, supply transfers, civilian and military visits, and deployments that followed only piled the pressure on, even as the xBs pointedly avoided giving a direct answer. Why exactly a society of 1,037 people able to function on a cybernetically-connected collectivist, almost anarchist basis would even *need* a civil government evaded them, and that entirely-rational conversation evasion stymied and annoyed Starfleet to no end. The USS *Cerritos* – which had helped construct minor orbital facilities and a repair yard above Settlement 01 – had written "xB Government TBD" on all its paperwork, much to the irritation of Starfleet Command. Early xB visitors to the UFP – including the first official representatives of Ohniakan xBs who returned to the Federation with the USS *Archimedes* – were issued 85 documents in lieu of any official passports. "If we are to continue defending these people from the Romulans – *and others*," Ross would tell Shanthi, "they need to get through their heads that they need to express their sovereignty with *more* than kind words."

The sovereignty question, on paper, was very simple. In the Federation's 218 years, Starfleet, the federal government, and their constituent

organizations had been involved in over 100 different state formations, re-organizations, and formalizations: from Terra Nova in the early 2160s, all the way to the Bak'u Declaration of 2375. The Federation Department of Aid Control (FEDAC) had an entire division devoted to state building, as did the diplomatic corps – and Starfleet Command itself. “We can build a new state in 18 months if we need to. 12, if you let us use pre-fab constitutions,” joked Commissioner Livos in 2360. Even with FEDAC stretched thin by the Ross Plan and the diplomatic corps tied up in the negotiations over Cardassian sovereignty, turning the xBs of Ohniaka III into a civil society – with state functions, citizenship, and legal protections – would be incredibly easy.

The Admiralty and President's office both quietly believed that the best course of action – both for the future development of “xB society (as much as it could be called that in 2378)” and their security in the near future – would have Ohinaka III become a Federation protectorate world: bringing it under the Owolade Act and all the Starfleet protections it provided. Estimates drawn up by the Interstellar Affairs Office suggested associate membership by the 2380s, and with full membership by 2400 by the earliest. It was a sensible idea: protection for a vulnerable society, a counter to Romulan expansion in the region, *and* another sign that the UFP was putting the tumult of the 2360s and 70s behind them.

Like all sensible ideas, however, it could not survive contact with reality. Sentiment within the Federation – as utopian as it was – remained ambivalent at best on ex-Borg citizenship, and hostile at worse. The experience of the scant few xBs within the UFP and Starfleet in the years after Wolf 359 had been bad: marginalized by society, if not by the state, unable to maintain pre-existing relationships, and “left out” of paradise thanks to crimes they had no part in whatsoever. The complications of the Hudson Act – which withdrew citizenship from “any person who aids and abets the military actions of a hostile power” – meant that many xBs that were once born within the UFP discovered their rights had been revoked, and had to fight to re-naturalize themselves into a society that had tried to erase them from it.

The Dominion War had seen some progress, but even then, Starfleet's fear had clouded their own magnanimity. In shades that matched 23<sup>rd</sup> century hostility to Illyrians and other augmented species, Starfleet would withhold promotion from and limit the command ranks of any xB personnel within



the service for “security reasons.” Many of the xB “Codetalkers” who played vital security roles during the war’s ground campaigns would not receive formal recognition until the 2380s: with some not until after their deaths. The Federation Council — still knee-deep in post-war recovery and the declining popularity of the Ross Plan — was unwilling to begin a war on yet *another* social front. This is not to say that they were entirely complacent in leaving the xBs out to dry; the continued 8063<sup>rd</sup> authorizations and McKingsley’s task force spoke to a genuine commitment to ensuring the survival of xB society. “If they want a state, we’ll give them one,” Secretary of the Exterior Orren Sh’Ten would tell Ross. “But they *do* have to want one.”

“Wanting a state” would turn out to be the more pressing issue. The xBs were fiercely autonomous: fearful of the strength of a centralized state that could mimic the Borg collective’s oppressive control. They had resisted attempts to form anything more cohesive than a small decision-making body (sometimes additionally verified by Tethering), and even *that* resorted to more of a consensus-based citizen vote than any recognizable form of indirect democracy. Cooperative deliberation had emerged naturally long before the arrival of Starfleet, and the idea that could change in the future was anathema. What concerned many of the xBs was the general insistence from the Federation that their society should — or perhaps would *need* to — resemble the Federation’s political system.

Advice came from refreshingly-surprising grounds. At the behest of T’Roun, FEDAC would send a committee of political advisors to discuss the possibility of state-building. Though the Progenitors were puzzled by T’Roun and McKingsley’s insistence at keeping the “guest list” confidential until they arrived, the advisors were not people that Hugh, Crois, nor anyone part of the dozen-strong greeting party expected. Instead of the typical Humans or Vulcans, the committee was led by a Horta (Runq), a Medusan (Iboa), a Betelgusian (Wii’yyuv’zwi), and a trio of Bynar (001, 011, and 111). Each represented the culmination of different political systems and traditions: based less on the institutional hierarchies of Terran Democracy, and more on a collaborative, mass consensus approach to societal organization. Working with these groups — who all rejected the general norms of galactic governance in favour of what others might deem to be “anarcho-collectivist” based systems — encouraged the xBs to follow their own path.

The importance of the “Principle of the One” — the ability of individual autonomy to remain paramount within a mutual aid system — which had dissuaded them from Federation association, was *encouraged* by the FEDAC team: against the wishes of their political masters. “They might be getting the runaround they want,” Zife would comment, “but we’re not getting crap out of this, as per usual.” It was not an unfair assessment. Starfleet and the Federation were increasingly investing a great deal of time and resources into the humanitarian mission without it being particularly clear who it was for. Admiral Paris could provide the realpolitik justification by simply pointing to the continued and less-coherent Romulan outrage at having their Typhon flank turned by a post-cybernetic society, but that was difficult to explain to FNN and the voters without sounding somewhat like a Cardassian Gul.

Even as the 8063<sup>rd</sup> began to wind up its activities and hand over medical facilities to the Reclamation Project, *who*, exactly, the Reclamation Project reported to remained nebulous. Was it the provisional leadership under Hugh? Not if *he* was to be believed. The idea that they reported to “all xBs” was, while rhetorically appropriate, *not* the answer bureaucrats wanted to hear. “This operation’s buck’s got to stop *somewhere*, Hugh,” Lewis Melbourne, Undersecretary to the FEDAC Commissioner would tell the xB leader. “If it’s not gonna be *you*, it’s got to be a *government*.”

The xBs remained hesitant, however. Even with the best of FEDAC offering their advice and models, the idea that anyone — even a group of people — could have authority over their community was still a dangerous concept. xBs had once been bound by the Borg and its further-commandering queen units, and they would have no part in creating another host of demiurges within their own body. The issue would be forced, however: not by Federation meddling, and not even by the increasing burden of the growing population.

Much like the UFP itself, the Liberated Borg Cooperation would finally come into being thanks to dangers that lurked beneath the Raptor’s Wing: the Romulan Star Empire.

COMING SOON

PART III  
THE ROMULAN  
SPARTACUS

THE TYPHON CONUNDRUM  
AND THE SPRING OF 2379

