Star Trek - TNG - The Beginning

The Borg cube filled the entire main screen of the U.S.S. Bellepheron and spilled beyond it's frame. The advanced imaging sensor systems incorporated into the Bellepheron's spaceframe allowed the bridge crew to distinguish individual Borg moving in the portals of the Borg ship even though the ship hung in space with the rest of the armada Starfleet had assembled over two thousand kilometers away. The Borg vessel had come to a complete stop when Admiral Hanson hailed it and the conversation was directed to all of the ships in the fleet.

"This is Admiral J.P. Hanson, commanding the Starfleet Task Force in your path.

I am ordering you to - ," the admiral's transmission was overridden by the Borg response, carried out on an amplification wave so powerful that it eclipsed inter-Fleet communications, pushing them into ghostly background cries.

Captain James MacGregor remembered Hanson's surprised and somewhat indignant look as he faded from the screen to be replaced by a Borg. MacGregor's breath caught in his throat. Around the bridge, his people stopped what they were doing to stare at the screen. Captain MacGregor was, for once in his life too stunned to be irritated at the break in concentration. He stared at the mutilated body of Jean-Luc Picard. Covered almost entirely with black cybernetic implants, what was left of his skin was ghostly white. And then he spoke in the voice of the Borg with no inflection and no emotion. Distantly, he heard his first officer, Commander Maxwell admonishing the crew, directing their attention back to the job at hand. Dragging his thoughts away from wondering how any man could survive what the Borg had done to Picard - Locutus - Picard he focused his attention on the screen.

"I am Locutus of Borg. Resistance is futile. You will disarm all weapons and escort us to Sector 001 where you will assist us in the assimilation of your biological and technological distinctiveness into our collective. Resistance is futile. Comply now or be destroyed." "That'll be the day," muttered Lieutenant K'Chal, the Bolian Tactical officer.

Captain MacGregor turned to face the tactical and helm stations, situated next to each other on the bridge. "Mr. Seth," he addressed the helm officer, "Mr. K'Chal, divert all power to the tactical systems and prepare for combat." Swivelling his chair back to the screen he raised his voice over the response of Admiral Hanson. "Commander Maxwell, secure isolation bulkheads on all decks and engage security fields. Alert damage control teams and fire parties to prepare to receive damage." "Captain," K'Chal tilted his head towards MacGregor without turning from his instruments. "The Borg have engaged the Fleet; the Melbourne is under attack." Commander Maxwell studied his panel. As executive officer he was tasked to coordinate the Bellepheron's actions with the task force's and ensure that the Captain had all the information he needed. "Message from the Melbourne. Weapons free, engage at will." MacGregor stepped to the helm. Resting his hand on the back of Ensign Seth's seat he nodded acknowledgement of Commander Maxwell's announcement. "Hail the Horatio," he ordered, referring to the Bellepheron's wingman. "Initiate approach sequence at half sublight." The Bellepheron lunged into motion from a relative standstill, approaching the Borg vessel in a curving loop. Moments later, the Horatio pulled into a tight formation, close on her starboard side. The two vessels bobbed and weaved through the debris already accumulating around the Borg vessel as the Task Force engaged it with every weapon at it's disposal.

Captain MacGregor tightened his grip on the helm officers seat as the Bellepheron twisted through another series of evasive maneuvers. The Horatio stayed close to starboard. So far, the automated sequences had kept the two ships from being damaged but MacGregor knew that the closer they got to the Borg, the more of a threat they'd be considered. A creaking sound echoed through the hull around

the bridge. MacGregor frowned. The spaceframe shouldn't be compromised by these maneuvers to that extent.

Commander Maxwell suddenly appeared next to him. Raising his voice to be heard over the hull's groaning he leaned close and yelled, "The upper equipment module sustained some minor damage on that last series of evasive maneuvers! It's not designed for combat! It's hampering our maneuverability." MacGregor nodded. All Nebulae-class starship were fitted with upper equipment pods whose payload could be changed without the need for extensive layover's in spacedock. At the moment the Bellepheron was carrying an extra suite of long range sensors. Tilting his head to the ceiling he addressed the computer.

"Computer, on my authority, jettison the upper equipment pod and have it self-destruct when it's clear of the task force. Authorization MacGregor 7-5-3-Charlie!" The computer confirmed his order and moments later the thunder of explosive bolts firing transmitted themselves throughout the hull. Immediately the groaning ceased and the helmsman reported that the ship was handling better. "Where's the Borg ship," Maxwell called.

At the commencement of battle the Borg vessel had fired it's impulse engines for maneuvering room. The Bellepheron's evasive maneuvers had taken it on an almost opposite course from the Borg, widening the gap between the ships. Lieutenant K'Chal consulted his instruments. "The Borg vessel is on a course of 112 Mark 34 at three quarters sublight. Range is about thirty three million kilometers." Maxwell glanced at MacGregor for approval. MacGregor nodded his agreement.

Maxwell glanced at the helm. "Mr. Seth, plot an intercept course and engage at warp two. I want an approach that will bring us out of warp at fifty thousand kilometers from the Borg. We'll make our attack run from there. Inform Captain Gallin and the Horatio." Seth nodded and Captain MacGregor strode back to his seat. He glanced at Maxwell as he sat down. "What's the status of the Task Force," he murmured in a low voice.

When Commander Maxwell looked at him, Captain MacGregor read the despair in his expression. "The Melbourne has been destroyed. We've also lost the Saratoga, the Kyushu, and the Rec'Treal. The task force's attacks are becoming more and more disorganized and I can't detect any major damage to the Borg vessel." Lieutenant K'Chal turned to face his Captain. "The Horatio has signaled us.

They're in position. Captain Gallin sends you his compliments and wishes us good luck." James MacGregor studied the distant starfield on the main screen. At random intervals, a flare of light would blast across the image, a violent announcement of a warp core breach. The Borg ship had slowed somewhat, apparently taking it's time with the remnants of the task force. MacGregor tipped his head as he listened to the chatter over the open communication channels.

".....-ten seconds to a core breach! Abandon ship! All hands-..." ".....-orrdinate your attacks at these points. We'll support you as long as we can....-" ".....-S.S. Tolstoy. We're adrift in space and are abandoning ship. Help...-" ".....-op them, we can't stop-.....!"

Captain MacGregor straightened his spine, and clenched the arms of his chair. He became acutely aware of the lives under his command. Each and every heartbeat on the ship seemed to be pounding in his head. He was aware of every indrawn breath as it happened and every breath waiting to be exhaled. He felt the crushing weight of his responsibility to these people Abruptly he pressed the control pad to magnify the viewscreen image. With no specific coordinates entered, the computer selected a point just to the left of the ship's centerline and magnified it.

An Excelsior-class starship appeared, floating in space. The entire front half of it's primary hull was gone, torn away as if by the hand of a vengeful god. The vessel was drifting in space, small fires eating away at the oxygen as it escaped from the thousands of smaller hull breaches. MacGregor's trained gaze noted that all of the escape pods were still in their bays.

Abruptly he turned to his operations officer. "Mr. Kyle, quickly assess who is absolutely essential to fighting this ship for the next ten minutes and order all other personnel to the lifeboats. Mr K'Chal, we are offloading all nonessential personnel in lifeboats. Advise Captain Gallin that he has three minutes to do so as well. Mr. Maxwell adjust our attack strategy to reflect this delay and launch the log buoy and an automated disaster rescue beacon. Now, gentlemen!" Galvanized by the voice of their leader, the officers moved quickly and in less than thirty seconds the thumps of departing escape pods echoed through the deck. Captain MacGregor turned back to the screen and addressed his crew, both present and adrift. "It has been my singular pleasure to command each and every one of you. I wish you the best of luck and I thank you for the honor you have given my family with your loyalty." Commander Maxwell glanced up from his console. "All boats are away with the crew captain. Forty three officers and crew elected to remain behind to fight the ship.

The Bellepheron is ready in all aspects for combat, sir." K'Chal added, "The Horatio is prepared." The helmsman glanced at the captain.

Captain MacGregor settled back in his seat. "Mr. Seth, take us in." The Bellepheron broke out of warp speed eight minutes after jettisoning the equipment module. The Borg vessel lay off to the port side engaged with six starships at once. Captain MacGregor ordered a course change as he assessed the tactical situation.

"We'll engage the Borg at these coordinates," he called, entering a series of numbers into his armrest. In response, the Bellepheron swerved almost forty degrees to port. The Horatio swept under the Bellepheron, reappearing on her port side and slightly ahead.

Captain MacGregor glanced at his tactical displays. Mentally counting to himself he waited for a usable orientation on the Borg vessel to appear.

The tactical officer fired the primary phaser array several times at the Borg vessel, probing for a weakness. MacGregor realized that this standard attack option would only give the Borg a chance to adjust and he ordered K'Chal to cease and desist.

"Mr. Seth, lay off our attack run. We'll come around from 320 mark 241 while Mr. K'Chal retunes the phasers. Advise the Horatio." Commander Maxwell looked up from his board. "Sir, the Horatio is jettisoning escape pods and maintaining her course!" "What," cried the captain. "Onscreen!" The Ambassador class starship appeared in the center of the viewer. By the time the computer focused the image, the last of the lifeboats had finished jettisoning. The Horatio bore down on the Borg cube, who brought several tractor beams into play in an attempt to stop the ship. Abruptly, two then three more of the cutting beams lashed out from the cube, bisecting the primary hull down the centerline. Wisps of escaping air that were crystallizing could be seen on the monitor.

The secondary hull was taking major punishment as well, with two beams working on the port side of the vessel.

One of the cutting beams made a downward slice, whether deliberate or as a result of the vessels changing postion relative to the ship MacGregor would never know. One or more of the antimatter storage units ruptured and initiated a chain reaction less than thirty kilometers from the Borg cube. The

Horatio vaporized in a spectacular blast of light and energy. Although the actual mass of the cube was moving at about ten percent sublight and was thus far out of range by the time the explosion died out, the Borg absorbed a massive amount of subspace radiation and energy from the blast in the few nanoseconds that it was in proximity.

Literally twelve percent of the cube vaporized. All over the Borg vessel lights went out and the sensor readings abruptly changed. Despite the jamming and false readings being generated by countermeasures equipment on both sides of the battle it became evident that the Borg Had suffered a massive loss of power.

"Keep that area on the screen," Captain MacGregor shouted, pointing at the damaged cube. "Adjust course to match and prepare to fire!" The cube's image increased as the operations officer raised the magnification. The surface of the damaged area appeared blackened, the twisted ends of support girder's poking through the rubble.

"Mr. K'Chal, fire at will," ordered the captain. The tactical officer didn't acknowledge the order verbally. On the screen, torpedoes streaked towards the cube.

Four of the six launched impacted on the surface of the cube but the last two collided with an energy shield that appeared. Commander Maxwell said, slamming his fist into the armrest. "They're already back up an running! How is that possible?" The viewscreen showed the Bellepheron's phasers and torpedoes attacking the cube in concert. K'Chal was a skilled tactical officer and his attempts to weaken the shield with phasers at the points the torpedoes were passing through didn't go unnoticed.

Four more torpedoes damaged the Borg vessel. Abruptly Maxwell sat forward, studying the cube as it grew closer. A frown creased his brow. "If their systems are up and running then why haven't they fired?" As he realized the answer to his own question Captain MacGregor was already ordering the helmsman.

"Hard about Mr. Seth! Prepare to go to warp!" The captain knew he was already too late. A tractor beam from the Borg ship lashed out and affixed itself to the port side of the primary hull and to the forward port quarter of the secondary hull. Immediately the lights went out to be replaced by the dim red emergency lighting. Console graphics stood out brightly against the bulkheads. The information they showed was not encouraging.

The Bellepheron was being held by a tractor beam whose power was nearly equal to the combined energy output of Bellepheron's warp core.

With that much force being applied to the ship, the hull would soon buckle and collapse under the strain. If the Borg decided not to use more advanced means like the cutting beam, then the Bellepheron had no more than ten minutes before integrity was compromised.

"Engineering to bridge," the voice of Bellepheron's chief engineer called over the intercom.

"Bridge, MacGregor," replied the captain. "What've you got for me, Ellie?" "Captain," replied the chief, "We've already got some pretty serious shock damage down here. I don't have the people to deal with it now. What do you want to do?" MacGregor slumped back into his chair. It swiveled slightly, bringing the status displays at the engineering station into view. They told him how dire the situation really was. "Ellie, get everyone off now! We're right behind you." "Commander Maxwell, see to the abandon ship procedures. Coordinate your efforts with Lieutenant K'Chal. Computer, set a countdown at seven minutes with aural warnings every minute. Shut down all nonessential systems including life support on unoccupied decks and divert it to the Structural Integrity Field. Begin." "Acknowledged," replied the

computer. Captain MacGregor's officers scattered to their jobs. MacGregor stepped to the tactical position. Lieutenant K'Chal glanced at his captain.

"Mr. K'Chal, load a spread of photon torpedoes with baffle charges and target them to provide maximum coverage between us and the cube when we launch the pods." The deck shuddered. "Warning," intoned the computer, "Decompression danger on decks eight through eleven and twenty-seven through thirty. Spaceframe strength has been compromised." "What's going on," MacGregor shouted as he lost his footing and fell to his knees. "The Borg vessel has begun cutting into the hull with it's cutting beam," reported Commander Maxwell. "We've just lost communication with everything below deck 13," Mr. Seth reported.

MacGregor's commbadge beeped. He blinked at it for a moment and then his finger stabbed it. "MacGregor here." "This is Ellie, skipper. We're at the access portal to Jeffries tube Three-Alpha on Deck 27. There's some wreckage but we're cutting through it. What's the plan?" "Ellie, get your people to the nearest lifeboat bay. The computer's started a countdown. We're timing an attack on the Borg to cover our escape. Ellie," MacGregor's tone caused everyone to glance up. "You have to launch the pod in seven-no six minutes or else." "We'll be there. Randall out," replied the engineer.

Captain MacGregor turned to face his staff. "Commander Maxwell, secure the bridge and lay below. See to the safety of all hands. I'll join you momentarily." Commander Maxwell looked as if he wanted to protest, but at last he nodded and turned towards the lift. Captain MacGregor watched them go and then completed the preparations the Lieutenant K'Chal had begun. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed the internal sensor display shift, and his jaw dropped when he read the information displayed.

Commander Ellie Randall peered forward through the gloom of the corridor. Up ahead, the security officer leading the group had paused. Randall resisted the temptation to call out to him. Chief Petty Officer Collins was an experience security officer-something was wrong. Randall's finger's brushed the tiny Type I phaser in it's hip pouch. Chief Collins and his partner, an Andorian rating named Shev had the only two Type II phasers since they were the best shots in the group. Randall leaned back against the wall and let her gaze wander over her rag-tag command. Eleven engineers huddled in dark corridor, gathering closer than necessary to each other for mutual comfort. Although come to think of it, Ellie realized that the temperature was dropping. Not to mention the vibrations coming through the hull from the tractor beam were unsettling on a primal level.

A an elbow dug into her side; the surprise of it almost made her jump out of her skin. She muffled a sheik and directed a withering glare at her companion. He in turn pointed towards Chief Collins. Collins had his phaser drawn and he was giving the rest of the group an alert signal. Shev stepped up next to Randall and inclined his antennae towards Collins. Aware that the Andorian's hearing was much more sensitive than her own she waited. Shev inclined his head back towards Ellie and spoke one word. "Borg." Commander Maxwell slapped his hand against the actuator panel and the ingress ramp to the lifeboat station lowered to the floor. The adjacent stations access ramp followed suit as did it's neighbor. K'Chal and Maxwell assisted the survivors in boarding their lifeboats and secured the hatches.

Abruptly their commbadges beeped. "This is Commander Randall. We have reached the boat station and we're ready to launch. Be aware that the ship has been boarded by the Borg. We'll see you at the pickup." Maxwell tapped his commbadge. "Captain, we've been boarded. I'd recommend you get down as soon as possible." Captain MacGregor's voice echoed back over the line. "I'm aware of the situation Commander. I'm afraid I won't be joining you. I can't take the risk that the Borg might disable our distraction." The captain paused. "Good luck to you all. It's been my honor to serve with you. Now get to that boat station gentlemen. That's an order. MacGregor out." Maxwell and K'Chal exchanged looks and then moved back to the access ladder leading to the bridge. Captain MacGregor closed the door to

the weapons locker. Setting his phaser to level 8 he returned to the tactical position. The humm of a transporter beam permeated the bridge and Captain MacGregor swiveled his chair about in time to see three Borg soldiers materializing on the aft deck. Snatching his phaser from it's holster he fired before the Borg even finished materializing. The phaser beam struck the middle soldier in his torso, literally blowing him in half. The other two Borg studied the bridge with a lacononic gaze. MacGregor aimed at the second soldier and fired again. The beam impacted the cyborg on his right shoulder. The Borg slumped to the deck, missing it's upper torso.

By this time the third Borg was almost upon him. MacGregor opted for a head shot but a force field blocked the shot at the last minute. The Borg foot soldier closed the remaining meter between it and the captain and backhanded him. MacGregor saw the blow coming and rolled with it. Luckily, it was a glancing hit to the side of his face but it still pitched him over the tactical console. He landed hard on his back and the wind fled from his body leaving him gasping. The Borg busied itself at the tactical console.

"Computer," the captain croaked "Initiate a security lockout on the tactical console. Save the settings as a default model for reinstating..-" The Borg foot soldier appeared around the edge of the panel. MacGregor shoved his feet against the ruptured deck plate for leverage and scuttled away from the advancing foot soldier. A phaser beam struck the Borg on it's left shoulder and the creature vaporized before MacGregor's eyes.

Captain MacGregor scrambled to his feet and glanced towards the aft end of the bridge. Commander Maxwell nodded to him. "Captain, Lieutenant K'Chal and I felt that you might need an escort to the lifeboat." His expression brooked no argument. Raising his hands in surrender the captain moved to join his officers at the lift while Maxwell holstered his phaser.

"Computer, initiate weapon launch at the end of the seven minute countdown.

Activate auto-destruct sequence and set the countdown for four minute thirty seconds.

Authorization MacGregor 7-5-3-Charlie." "Gentleman," the captain said. "I suggest that we get to the lifeboat." He paused to look around the bridge for a moment. Shaking his head, he pulled the ship's dedication plaque from it's place on the wall and tucked it under his arm. Patting the bulkhead by the turbolift Captain MacGregor was the last one to leave the bridge. Moments later the three officers strapped themselves into the reinforced acceleration couches aboard the cubical lifeboat. A counter on the bulkhead was moving backwards from three minutes.

At t minus thirty seconds the sound of torpedoes being released echoed down the corridor and as the lifeboat jolted away from the Bellepheron, the lingering traces of the scatter warheads could be seen in the massive amounts of sensor interference they created.

MacGregor stared out of the viewport as the Borg cube drew away, trailing the Bellepheron. The Bellepheron's warp engines abruptly emitted a pulse of light nanoseconds before the ship was consumed in one of many antimatter fireballs still dotting the heavens.

"My god," whispered Commander Maxwell, "Where's the task force?" MacGregor leaned back against the bulkhead. "Out there," he whispered. His tone of voice ended any conversations that might have started.

The rescue vessels from Earth arrived several days later. Reports that the Enterprise had defeated the Borg in high earth orbit provided some measure of cheer to the survivors. Shortly before the rescue ships arrived in earth orbit, it was announced that the survivors and casualties had become recipients of an

campaign ribbon commemorating the victory of the Federation. MacGregor wondered what comfort a pretty piece of ribbon would provide to the orphans and widows and widowers of the battle.

The next two months were filled with debriefings and evaluations, as well as numerous conferences and meetings with staff officials and delegates. The surviving crews were broken up and reassigned throughout the Fleet. Counselors kept a close watch on all of the survivors.

The pains of Wolf 359 would not begin to surface for months, perhaps even years.

The Federation had lost something more valuable than 39 starships. It's sense of security has been compromised. How that will affect the survivors of Wolf 359 remains to be seen. How that affects the survivors of the U.S.S. Bellepheron will be covered in future stories.

The End

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