

United We Stand

By John Borda

The giant ship lay still in space. It had emerged from a transwarp corridor, damaged, when its transwarp field generators had finally given out, only the fourth of its kind to come this far. The first had found and reported vast resources awaiting them, but neither of the next two had returned. The crew were roused, and assigned repair details. They were within striking distance of their objective, and they wanted to be fully functional, as their task would not be easy. They needed additional supplies and crew, so once basic repairs had been completed, they scanned the area they had arrived in for nearby ships. Finding a Vulcan long-range research vessel, they set an intercept course.

"We are the Borg. You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile." And, in this case, they were right.

"How did you manage to hit me when I was cloaked?" asked Q'bang.

"You telegraphed the move- you started to jink up and right before you cloaked, and I just followed your move" replied Lt Borda.

The two were just leaving the shuttlebay after an afternoon of tactical flying exercises. Q'bang's flying was legendary on the Starbase, it wasn't often that she got caught out.

"Bad habit of yours, I'm afraid- I've seen you do it a couple of times before." continued Borda.

"Don't tell anyone on Firestorm squadron- I'd never live it down if they found out I'd let a Feddy beat me, even once!"

"Not to worry, just work on it before next time. Then maybe you'll stand a chance."

"Like hell! I nearly got you several times!"

"Nearly doesn't cut it- and you had a cloak and the latest Klingon fighter, I had my salvaged junkpile!" The "Laika" was, indeed, salvaged, but was heavily modified to be as deadly as a fighter, without looking that way.

"If that "junkpile" is standard build, my mother's a Tribble!"

"I wondered where you get your cuddly side from!"

The banter and exchange of insults continued down the corridor as they returned to their respective quarters.

The Starbase was quiet. It was the last days of the Dominion War, and most of the warships that regularly frequented it were at the front line closing on Cardassia. Only traders came and went, and "Firestorm" squadron of B'rel Klingon fighters patrolled, having been left behind to defend the station if needed.

Ambassador K'hellenbeck finished his report on the tactical exercises he had managed to observe that day. While it was mainly routine, he had been surprised at the level of manoeuvrability that had been built into a standard Federation shuttle, and the skill of its pilot. While it could be that combat simulation had brought out his best, he doubted that the official Level 7 pilot's rating was accurate. Still, there were many anomalies on this starbase, some merely because of the heavy Klingon participation in both its build and manning, and others to do with its secondary purpose as a Federation intelligence-gathering outpost. Part of his job was to gather intelligence of his own. It was sometimes hard to consider himself among allies, when he was supposed to watch and report on them, but then Nerrad, also on the station to collect his reports, would also be making his personal assessment of the Ambassador. The Tal'shiar were like that. Not content with getting rid of him on this Klingon infested rat-trap, where he was likely to find a knife between his ribs at any

moment, they had to spy on him to make sure there was not some pretext on which they could drag him back in chains for a slow, painful and dishonourable execution. Still Tal'shiar or no, Nerrad was at least *Rihanssu*, and would watch his back as well as watching him. *Mnhei'sahe*¹ dictated no less.

The Klingon Ambassador was asleep, his Chief of Staff in his arms. This was one of those rare occasions when her children could all be accommodated elsewhere, leaving them alone together. Good food, good bloodwine, and the inevitable aftermath had hastened their slumber.

The night shift was well under way when the priority message came in. Cadet Memo was on duty with Laura-Jean in Ops, while so many people away, including most of the Klingon contingent aboard the *HegH qad*, he was learning Ops control, especially as, being an android, night was no barrier to him. He patched it through direct to the Commodore's quarters.

Commodore Jat was reading when the call came in, and just about to turn in. She sighed, knowing the message would probably keep her up some time longer, and went to her desk to answer the call.

"Jat here"

A familiar face appeared on the screen.

"Anarita, there are Borg approaching your station." T'pina came bluntly to the point.

"T'pina- what?" Jat had yet to take the information in, combined with the surprise of seeing her old friend again.

"A Vulcan research ship was attacked fifty light-years away from you. The Borg have usually made the Terran system their target, and you're not far from their path. I've copied the information to Starfleet, but had to tell you as quickly as possible- you don't have much time to intercept them."

"I don't have anything to intercept them with- the *HegH Qad*, *Rage* and *West Point* are all at the front."

"Do what you can to delay them, it may be hours before Starfleet can get enough ships together. That is, if any can be spared from the war. Live long and prosper, old friend."

Commodore Jat slumped back, her face ashen. If the Borg attacked the station they had but a few hours to live, or be assimilated. Hardly living long or prospering. But attack it they must, if only to give Starfleet enough time to assemble a fleet. Their only chance was to use the station as bait, hold out as long as possible, then destroy the station at the last possible moment. The fateful decision made, she contacted Ops.

"Laura-Jean, sound Red Alert! Get the senior officers, and Ambassadors, up and to my ready room ASAP, and commence civilian evacuation immediately. And get Memo to set up multi-spectral long-range scanning sweeps as far out as possible."

"But we can't interpret those type of scans- what's happening?" replied a confused Laura-Jean.

"The Borg are in the area, and we're going to make them come to us. Now carry on!"

Wondering frantically if her commanding officer had just gone mad, Laura-Jean nodded to Memo, and sounded the Red Alert.

¹ Romulan honour system

"Red alert always sounds when you're in the shower!" muttered Lt. Borda as he struggled back into his uniform. Having got into his trousers and boots, he left his quarters still struggling into his top and headed for the turbolift.

K'bang was dreaming of her mate, away at the front. The red alert siren cut through her fantasy, bringing her bolt upright on her shelf. She threw aside the fur blanket and strode across the room to her comms panel.

"What is it!" came the grunted response.

"Make Firestorm ready for battle, all pilots to the briefing room, NOW!"

"Yes, Ma'am" more respectful, having recognised her voice. "What's happening?"

"You'll know when I know." K'bang shut off the comm. She grabbed a flightsuit, glad that she'd remembered to use audio only, jumped into it and was out the door seconds later.

The briefing room was crowded. Commodore Jat was already there. Madia Amme, the Bajoran ambassador, was one of the first there, swiftly followed by K'hellenbeck and Nerrad. All three looked picture perfect, not a hair out of place, in contrast to Lt. Borda and K'bang who arrived shortly afterwards. Ke'reth and B'sel, who had obviously got dressed in an even greater rush, were the last ones there.

"The Borg are here" the room fell silent.

Commodore Jat continued. "We have four hours at most before they either pass us by or attack. I intend that we draw them here. To that end, I have the station's sensors actively sweeping in a multispectral frequency pattern, to make them believe we have sensor technology we don't possess.

"Suicide, Commodore?" said K'hellenbeck. "Not a favoured Starfleet tactic."

"It may be our only option. Starfleet needs time to get enough ships together to defend Earth. The only thing that can stop the Borg is massive firepower or something new. They've met us in battle before, so can adapt to most of our weapons. This station is the only thing that can deliver enough firepower to have a chance against them. Even if we can't stop them, we can at least delay them a few hours. Every minute may be vital."

"I'm happy to commit the *Diplomacy* to the battle, but alone one Klingon destroyer isn't going to last long." responded Ke'reth. "I can call on the Empire to send something, but most of our ships are at the front."

"As are ours" said K'hellenbeck. "But I will ask, nonetheless."

"Firestorm is already standing ready for launch. We fight too, but, as Ke'reth said, what difference can we make?" added K'bang.

"K'bang- can your fighters tow a quantum torpedo at Warp speeds?" Lt Borda asked.

"Difficult, but possible- why?"

"Then we can co-ordinate an attack together, and launch them all simultaneously. Twenty-seven quantum torpedoes at once might be too much for the Borg to handle."

"We have twenty-six, with the fighter that was delivered a few hours ago, but we don't have the arming computers to launch them. How did you plan to do that?"

"Then we have twenty-eight, I can carry two on the *Laika*, and I can arm them all remotely. We'll just have to co-ordinate your release and my arming precisely."

"But if the Borg detect the torpedoes, they'll just avoid or adapt to them!" said B'sel.

"If I understand your attack plan, you'll go in in formation, launch, drop out of warp and wait for the explosion?" said K'hellenbeck "That would arouse suspicion. I suggest you increase speed and attack before the torpedoes arrive, then scatter at the last possible moment."

"Bravery from a Romulan! And what good will this do us?" retorted K'bang.

"We give them the attack they expect, make them optimise their defences for shuttlecraft weapons, and perhaps stop them seeing the torpedoes until too late. And there will be thirty of those, my personal shuttle can cope with two torpedoes. Nerrad will be with me."

Nerrad was not used to being volunteered, but knew better than to directly contradict the Ambassador in front of aliens.

"If you really want to screen the torpedoes from the Borg sensors, I suggest venting plasma during the attack, and igniting it as we leave. The flash will momentarily blind them." added Major Madia. "Well, it worked against Cardassians."

"Very well, Lt. Borda, you and K'bang brief Firestorm and the Romulans on the attack plan. The *Diplomacy* will lead you." said Jat. "Major Madia, you and Lt. Evad had better oversee the civilian evacuation while the rest of my crew get this station ready for battle. Good luck to us all- I suspect we'll need it!" They all started to leave. "Lt. Borda, a moment."

When the two of them were alone she said: "In the secure section of the weapons hold, there are six tricordomide torpedoes. I'm releasing two of them to you, carry them on *Laika*, and no other ship. Use them well, between them you should get a 500 teracrochane yield. If that doesn't slow the Borg down, nothing will."

"Thank you Ma'am. That might just make the difference."

"You've seen what the Borg can do. Make sure it doesn't happen here." She was referring to his previous assignment of salvaging the Wolf 359 wreckage.

Their eyes met for a moment. No response beyond that was needed. Borda turned and left for the pilots briefing room.

As they made their way to the pilot's briefing room, Nerrad slowed his pace so that Q'bang left him and K'hellenbeck behind.

"Why have you committed us to this fool's errand? If the Borg destroy the humans, it's not our fight!"

"If the Borg destroy the humans, it will be our turn soon afterwards. Our best chance to prevent that is while they have but one ship. If they assimilate the humans, and a few other races, we could face hundreds of those ships. I take it you've read what happened at Wolf 359?"

"Yes. And you also expect me to waste my life fighting those monsters?"

"You know the state of our anti-Borg preparations. Think of the opportunity to gather information about what the Federation knows. We may yet face those weapons ourselves, should the Federation survive. Your superiors would be pleased."

Nerrad said nothing. He knew when he had been out-manoeuvred.

The briefing had been short. While the Klingon pilots hated the idea of an automated attack, the threat of the Borg and the precise timing needed to carry it out left them no choice. As they launched their fighters, Lt Borda headed down to the weapons hold to deploy the torpedoes. As he went, he bumped into a Klingon figure coming the other way.

"BordaH!"

"QidanG" the two had met before, and Borda had helped him recover his unit's honour.

The two embraced briefly, as comrades in arms do.

"Come with me, we can talk as we go. What brought you here?"

"I was delivering a B'rel to Firestorm. Seems they only trust me as a delivery boy even now. I'm supposed to take an old K'vort back for scrapping."

"Can it tow a torpedo at warp?"

"Perhaps, if it still works. Why?"

“We are engaging the Borg, and we need every ship we can get. Will you join us?”

“And pass up a chance of finally dying honourably? Need you ask!”

“Go join Firestorm, get K’bang to upload the mission plan to your ship. Then form up outside to pick up a torpedo.”

“Qu’apla, my friend! Once again you do me honour!”

They went their separate ways. One more ship seemed little enough to throw against the Borg. He just hoped this little fleet could at least make a difference.

Quek watched as the fleet assembled outside. His sensors had already alerted him that something was amiss on the Starbase. His little shuttle was hidden in the Firelight Nebula. A battle was obviously looming. He did not know who the enemy was, but there would be a battlefield to scavenge for salvage. He made up his mind to follow the fleet at a distance, and await the outcome. He rubbed his hands at the thought of some previously unknown piece of technology in his cargo bay being mass-replicated for the highest bidder. War was always profitable, especially if you didn’t take sides.

Loading the assembled fighters was simpler than expected, just a matter of pushing quantum torpedoes out of the weapons hold airlock until each fighter had picked one up. The Romulan shuttle, *Baz’khetkaze* took on two, storing them in the gaps between its wings. The *Laika*’s permanent berth was the weapons hold, so it was easy to fit the two tricordomide torpedoes to its underslung pylons without anyone outside guessing that anything different was going on.

As the *Laika* emerged from the hold, the *Diplomacy* turned, with Firestorm squadron forming up around her, with the odd trio, the K’vort, the Federation and Romulan shuttles just behind. They slowly accelerated to maximum impulse before going to warp, in order to keep hold of the torpedoes, somewhat tenuously held in tow by tractor beams.

The Borg ship had been spotted on long-range sensors, and the fleet of small ships headed in to intercept the massive cube. Ke’reth gave the order to cloak ships, and suddenly the *Laika* was alone. Not to be outdone, Lt. Borda activated a holographic grid on the outside of the shuttle, and its appearance changed into a huge Ferengi Marauder. The Klingons looked at this illusion surrounding them and laughed. The Borg were in for a shock when they found out that this was no bunch of cowardly Ferengi.

It was time. “Commence attack pattern” called Ke’reth. This was the signal to drop the torpedoes, and accelerate to warp 5. Lt. Borda sent out the arming codes, and, making sure his own torpedoes were a fraction of a second late, left the deadly cargo in his wake.

The first part of the attack went smoothly, for a group mind the Borg were slow to react to the illusory Marauder until it was too late, and the fleet decloaked and opened fire. For a brief moment, explosions appeared on the cube’s surface, then shields kicked in and easily deflected the light disruptor fire. As planned, the fleet criss-crossed paths, laying a plasma cloud, then dispersed at warp, igniting it as they went.

The Borg were momentarily confused. The Ferengi ship was known to them, Locutus had met them in battle before his assimilation. Then a multitude of other weapons hit them, they adapted to the most numerous kind as they found multiple

targets appearing and firing. As soon as they had struck, they had gone, leaving only time to engage the biggest vessel. There was a plasma flash in their wake, bright, but nothing their shields could not easily handle. For efficiency, they reduced shield power and continued on their way.

The first quantum torpedoes tore straight through the Borg shields and exploded against the hull of the huge cube, tearing craters hundreds of yards wide. As they lost some of their shield emitters, the Borg compensated with what was left, and only their massive power output stopped the rest of the torpedoes from getting through. This burned out some more emitters, weakening the shields, forcing them to focus on just repelling quantum torpedoes. Until finally, two different torpedoes slipped past them.

Every sensor suddenly jumped off the scale as subspace itself trembled with the might of the explosion. A few seconds later, a blinding flash enveloped the fleet of shuttles. The Klingons roared! Surely this was victory!

K'hellenbeck and Nerrad exchanged glances. Both had been briefed on tricordomite weapons, no-one had seen their effect. Until now. Nerrad would have his intelligence scoop, and would definitely owe K'hellenbeck a favour, to be repaid at a suitable time.

Ke'reth sat stoically in his command chair. His crew were frantically repairing the damage to his ship, the only one the Borg had managed to hit back at. This was one of the times when he could do little or nothing, except attempt to exude confidence that he didn't feel, in the hope that the crew would also take heart from his example. But one by one, overloading systems were shut down, damaged systems came back online. His crew were spared Sto'vorqar. This time.

Quek cursed as he replaced the charred remains of his sensor grid. This would cost him dearly in latinum, and whatever weapon had been deployed would have vaporised a Marauder-class starship. He had only been close enough to see that such a ship had suddenly appeared, a host of torpedoes had been launched, the ship had accelerated and then there was a blast as something had collided with the torpedoes. His sensors hadn't been able to see what before the blast burned them out.

Lt. Borda also checked his sensors. As the interference from the blast died down, they scanned the debris. The sensors beeped as they made out a shape, then resolved the size of the remaining object. It was big- too big!

"Borda to all fighters- the cube may still be active!"

K'bang responded "Firestorm, regroup in scanning formation and scan the cube! Feed results to the *Diplomacy's* tactical computer!"

Firestorm fanned out into a very loose cross, and started scanning. Aboard the *Diplomacy*, B'sel started collating the results into a coherent whole.

"*Diplomacy* to Firestorm, the cube is damaged, no engines, no shields, little power. They're dead in space."

"How long until they regenerate?" asked Lt. Borda.

"They may soon have some shields and weapons, we estimate 30 minutes before they reach full strength." Replied B'sel.

"Then we need to stop them now, before they are strong enough to overwhelm us."

"And how do we do that?" asked K'hellenbeck "Especially as the *Diplomacy* isn't in any condition to fight."

“We’ll have weapons online in a few minutes, Romulan p’tagh!” came the testy reply, this time from Ke’reth.

“*Diplomacy*, can your sensors co-ordinate an attack yet?” interrupted Lt. Borda.

“Yes, but what do you have in mind?” asked B’sel.

“Steer us towards the remaining vital areas on the Borg ship, especially areas of the greatest activity. The rest of us, form up and we finish this- the hard way!”

The shuttles formed up, the *Diplomacy* behind them. There was no conversation, each one focused on their own thoughts. This time, it would not be a quick hit-and-run. This time it was attack and keep on attacking until one side or other held the field of battle. Even against a massively damaged Borg cube, this would not be an easy fight.

2 of 3 moved quickly between consoles. The other two of her subunit were no longer functioning, caught in the blast that had silenced so many voices aboard the cube. She alone co-ordinated the repair efforts- but hundreds of drones consolidated those areas that were functioning, then moved to repair adjoining sections. But co-ordination was difficult- the vinculum was destroyed, and even her mind was noticing the lost voices, and new voices of suppressed individuals starting to emerge, some as barely perceptible thoughts, some as blind panic as the individuals’ consciousness clashed with the Borg group mind. For now, she focused on getting more power sources online, the group mind feared- yes feared! – another attack.

Aboard the *Diplomacy*, Ke’reth heard the news he did not want to hear- his weapons systems were unsalvageable. The blast from the Borg weapon had been deliberately aimed to leave him helpless, only the planned swift departure had saved him and his crew from assimilation. It wounded his sense of honour to lead from the rear, but he had no choice, he would have to focus on supporting the fighters and shuttles in their attack.

“Ke’reth to all fighters. When you go in, hit them from all sides. We will monitor your sensor readings and look for weakness. When we see it, you all attack together. Own this day, for today is a good day to die!”

“So die hard!” came the response from Lt. Borda. The Klingons roared in agreement, and the fleet again went to Warp.

2 of 3 saw the small ships again stream from warp at her ship. By now she knew most of them were Klingon, so she focussed the defence against their weapons. The attack came, dispersed, easily deflected, except for the Romulan and human weapons, but that was just two of the many. Once she had weapons, she could finish them first, then the rest later.

“*Diplomacy* to fighters- only the Romulan and Federation weapons worked- the rest of you can be countered. What about the underside of the fragment?” B’sel was referring to the base of the remaining corner of the cube, effectively a triangular pyramid.

“The debris is concentrated there- it will be difficult to get through!” replied K’bang.

“My specialty!” called Lt. Borda. “Can the rest of you keep them distracted? If you all hit one point, the Romulan disruptors might do enough damage for the rest to get through!”

“Roger that” replied K’bang. But one fighter broke formation and followed the *Laika*.

“QidanG, what are you doing?” called Borda “This is not going to be easy!”

“I follow you, friend. Lead us to glory!”

The shuttle and ageing K'vort swooped under the pyramid, while the rest of the fighters closed on the *Baz'khetkaze* and focussed an attack on one of the sides.

In the remains of the cube, 2 of 3 saw two targets disappear underneath her, to where there were no external sensors. She knew that the shattered remains of the cube would now work against her, before they were a shield, now they would provide cover for an attack. She focussed on getting a weapon on-line, through the growing chaos in her own head, as undisciplined voices chattered, making it harder for the group voice to be heard.

The two tiny ships raced through the spinning chunks of charred metal that hid the soft underbelly of their enemy. There was no talking, as both were taxed to the limits of their flying skills to weave their way closer without hitting something on the way. They rounded a still-burning chunk the size of a starship, and saw a solid wall ahead. "Now!" Both ships opened fire into the unshielded mass, disruptors, phasers and mini-photon torpedoes burning their way into the middle of the pyramid. A tunnel of fire bored deep, but then it was time to pull out.

The Laika skimmed the surface of the Borg vessel, its phasers automatically firing to distract any counterstrike. The K'vort tried to follow its line, but it was older, less manoeverable- its wingtip struck the surface and it ploughed into the remains, only its structural integrity field holding it together as it sliced through deck after deck. Finally it stopped, close to the heart of the fragment.

"QidanG!" are you all right?" Borda called out.

For a moment there was no answer. Then a voice- "I am not finished yet, friend. Let me see if I can get out- keep attacking!"

QidanG started firing his thrusters, trying to work his fighter free of the tangled metal around him. Around him metal groaned and rattled as he tried to turn. Then there was a clank as something hit the side of his fighter. Then another. Footsteps! Someone was walking on his hull! He looked around to see a Borg drone walking slowly towards him from the rear of his fighter, working its way along the hull to the cockpit.

"QidanG to BordaH! I am being attacked, I can't free my ship. Tell the fleet to get clear!"

"I can get close enough to beam you out in a few seconds! Hold on!"

"Do not expose yourself, even for me friend! Tonight I will drink a toast to you in StoVoQar! Now go!"

Borda understood. So did the rest of the fleet, and for a moment K'hellenbeck and Nerrad wondered, then followed the fleet at warp.

2 of 3 sighed with relief. The attack on her underside had silenced so many voices, and come so close to where she was. There was barely enough shielding for the control centre she occupied. Once again, she focussed on getting repairs under way.

Quek could not believe his sensors. The remains of a Borg cube, abandoned, almost completely destroyed. If he could salvage enough working nanoprobe from a drone, he would be rich beyond his wildest dreams! He set his transporter to beam into a stasis field, and gleefully plotted a course close enough to skim the wreckage.

QidanG reached towards a glass panel, and hit it once. It shattered, exposing a handle. He grasped it and pulled, calling Kathless' name...

The handle, unlike any other on the ship, was not an electronic control. Its sole function was to physically disconnect the fail-safe circuit maintaining the antimatter containment field. The field collapsed, antimatter met matter- $E=mc^2$...

2 of 3 was thrown across the control centre as what was left of her world exploded around her. Saved only by the remains of the shielding, she saw herself spiralling in burning space, pieces of wreckage spinning round her. There was silence. The voices were gone, she was the last, and though as a Borg she could survive in space, eventually her power would be used up and the terrible cold would slowly freeze her to death. Then she felt a tingling sensation around her...

Quek was horrified as his prize exploded before his eyes. Debris shot past his shuttle as he desperately tried to turn away from the explosion then hit the warp drive control. As he finally managed to clear the area, a beep sounded. He ignored it for a moment, then looked round at his stasis field. His jaw dropped as he saw a drone held in his stasis field. Smoke was pouring from behind panels in his cabin, but he could only see the riches that his prize would bring him. He set a course for the Starbase, following the fleet of shuttles and fighters that had now left the area.

K'ereth led the fleet back into the starbase's dry dock area. In spite of losing his weapons in the middle of a battle, he was happy. After confronting the Borg, being alive was doing very well indeed, and he now had an excuse to completely upgrade the *Diplomacy's* weapons system, his Chief of Staff's budgeting notwithstanding.

"What have you done with my property! Shouted Quek from the starbase's holding cell.

"The drone you captured is being de-assimilated." said Lt. Borda calmly. "She will be given her individuality back, if at all possible."

"But I salvaged it! She- it belongs to me!"

"You know full well you can't own another sentient being. That would be slavery, and the Federation has very strict laws on slavery." Just the hint of a threat in his voice now.

"Fine, keep her then! I could have been rich beyond the dreams of even the Grand Nagus! Federation law is an ass!" But he was blustering to an empty brig- Lt. Borda had already left. Still, the container of nanoprobes he had extracted before the stasis field started to fail was safely hidden on a small moon in the Firelight nebula. Sheer terror at being assimilated had caused his current predicament, he had beamed down the container and surrendered the drone before she could break out of stasis. Still, he now had enough to buy himself his own Marauder- and with that even bigger prizes could be had.

K'hellenbeck was surrounded by Klingons and half-drunk. Nerrad couldn't wait to get his report back to Romulus, and had left at once. He dunked his tankard into a rapidly emptying vat of bloodwine and carried on singing with the rest of the Klingons. And for the first time on this station, he had no fear that any of the hands slapping his back held a knife.

Commodore Jat surveyed this scene with a feeling of the surreal. Hours before, she had been preparing to destroy the station. Now she saw Klingons and Romulans and humans and the whole range of species aboard the starbase celebrating together. Years of diplomacy could not have done this, she thought. Maybe we should invite the Borg round more often!