

Captain's log, stardate 68201.71:

While exploring the Lokana system, the Bellerophon has detected the presence of a lone Borg Sphere. Our long-range scans show it to be largely inoperable, but there do appear to be life signs on board. What is a sphere doing here, so far from any known Borg incursions? Is it a scout for a remnant Borg population or a relic from an older encounter?

"What can we tell from here?" Captain (Carrie) K'danz asked. She was staring at the image of a Borg Sphere looming ominously on the *Bellerophon's* main view screen.

"Not much," replied T'Var, the ship's Vulcan science officer. "There is a substantial amount of interference coming from the sphere itself."

"Attempting to boost sensor resolution," added Lieutenant Xin Zhadesh. The Efrosian operations officer's hands moved quickly across his central display. "Much of the sphere has been flooded with Gamma radiation. Compensating... now."

"Now reading twenty life-signs on board," T'Var reported as her sensors began to show more accurate details. "There are ten humans, four Andorians, three Bolians, two Bajorans, and a Ferengi."

"That's a motley crew," commented Commander Tom Paris, the *Belle's* first officer. "And all Alpha Quadrant species. Are they Borg?"

"Impossible to determine at present," T'Var answered.

"I've never heard of an assimilated Ferengi," remarked Starfleet Marine Major Michael Drake, the starship's Chief of Security.

"Neither have I," K'danz agreed. "We'll have to assume the possibility that at least some of those on board are in need of rescue."

"Bridge to transporter room," Paris said, activating the ship's intercom system.

"Transporter room," came the voice of the *Belle's* Tellarite transporter specialist. "Go ahead."

"Chief, can you lock onto the occupants of the Borg Sphere we're closing on and beam them aboard in a containment field?" Paris asked.

"The containment field is no problem, but I can't get a pattern lock through all this radiation," the transporter operator replied. "We'd either have to get our ship closer or send someone over in a shuttle to place transporter boosters."

"I'm not interested in boarding if we don't have to," K'danz said. "Helm, move us closer at one-quarter impulse. Chief, as soon as you get a lock, beam them over."

All eyes were anxiously on the view screen when a green beam suddenly thrust out from the sphere and struck the *Belle*. On the bridge, standing crewmen were knocked from their feet. The ship's alarm system automatically shifted to red status. Steadying herself in her captain's chair, K'danz called out for a status report, shouting over the klaxon.

"The sphere is employing a power siphon," Zhadesh reported. "Main power is now at ninety five percent and dropping."

"Helm, full reverse," K'danz ordered.

"Full reverse," acknowledged helmsman Sang Li.

"No effect," Zhadesh reported. "The beam has us stuck fast."

"Bridge to engineering," Paris called out. "We need everything you've got to thrusters for full reverse."

"Main power now eighty percent," Zhadesh reported.

"Engineering here," came the strong voice of Dar, the ship's half-Klingon chief of engineering. "All reserve power routed to thrusters."

“Main power at seventy percent,” Zhadesh called out. “Structural integrity is beginning to be affected.”

“We’re still not moving,” Ensign Li yelled, looking over his shoulder at the captain.

“All stop,” K’danz ordered. “No sense tearing ourselves apart.”

“Answering all stop,” Li repeated as he keyed in the command.

“Main power is at sixty percent,” Zhadesh reported. “I estimate the sphere is now at twenty five percent of its normal power capacity.”

“Major Drake, ready phasers and fire,” K’danz ordered. “Target that beam emitter, dammit.”

“Phasers locked and firing,” Drake called out. The orange beams were visible on the main view screen, striking the Borg vessel near where the power siphon beam was originating. “Direct hit...,” Drake reported. “No effect.”

“Keep firing!” K’danz shouted, the alarm klaxon still sounding.

Staring at the main viewer, the bridge crew watched and waited for some result. After several volleys of phaser fire, a small explosion on the surface of the sphere sent a shower of sparks twinkling into space.

“Main power now holding at fifty percent,” Zhadesh reported. “However, we are still held in some sort of tractor beam.”

“Turn off that damned alarm and stand down to yellow alert,” K’danz ordered. “Senior staff, I want a full status report in the briefing room in five minutes.”

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Star Trek: Bellerophon

“Salvage Rights” By Chris Post

“How bad is it?” K’danz asked.

“We’ve got minor hull breaches on decks two and four,” Dar said. “It would have been worse if we’d kept trying to break loose, but it will still take a trip to *Home Plate* to effect complete repairs. For now, containment fields are in place and holding.”

“What’s the status of the sphere?” K’danz asked next, turning her attention to T’Var and Zhadesh.

“The sphere is at approximately thirty percent power,” Zhadesh reported. “Environmental controls are evidently cleaning the air and radiation levels are dropping.”

“Hmpf,” grunted Major Drake. “Nice that we happened to come along and help them out.”

“Yes, but who are we helping?” K’danz asked.

“We still read twenty life-signs,” T’Var answered. “Much fewer than has normally been seen to crew a Borg Sphere in past encounters. And all appear to have some level of Borg technology integrated into their bodies, but not as much as typically seen in standard Borg drones.”

“Any communication from the sphere?” K’danz asked.

“None,” Paris confirmed. “Not even so much as a ‘Resistance is futile.’”

“Tom, I know I said I wanted to avoid boarding the Borg vessel if possible earlier, but now I want you to take a team over to the sphere,” K’danz said. “Figure out how to turn off that beam that’s holding us here with them and locate whoever is on board.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Paris replied as he nodded to other members of the senior staff.

* * *

As the six member away team materialized on the Borg Sphere, Lieutenant Xin Zhadesh and Lieutenant T'Var immediately began to scan with their tricorders.

"As expected, this area is free of radiation," T'Var confirmed. She then pointed into the distance and added, "There are five life signs that way."

Following the direction indicated by the *Bellerophon's* science office took the crew down a narrow passage. The dim green light of the Borg technology gave the only illumination.

"Creepy," said Commander Tom Paris, more to himself than anyone.

"Creepy, sir?" Zhadesh asked. Despite his years in Starfleet there were still some human expressions that the Efrosian did not understand.

"Spooky. You know, some place not quite up to the level of scary, but still gives you a bad feeling," Paris tried to explain.

"Like a disciplinary review board?" Zhadesh asked.

"Not exactly," Paris said. "It's more a fear of the unknown. Like imagining ghosts in a graveyard."

Paris turned to look at T'Var, who had just made a noise that sounded very much like a snort.

"Something you'd like to say, Lieutenant?" he asked.

"No, sir," T'Var said evenly. "I have just never understood the seeming need for humans to surround themselves with superstitions, particularly superstitions that frighten them."

Before Paris could respond, a green energy bolt seared past them, followed quickly by a second.

"We are the Borg. Resistance is futile," a human sounding voice called out.

Ducking for cover, the Starfleet officers realized quickly they were thinking the same thing.

"That didn't sound like any Borg I've encountered," Paris said as the others nodded in agreement. "What do your readings show?"

T'Var consulted her tricorder, which she had adjusted for narrower-range readings, and replied, "These people definitely have Borg implants, but it does not appear they have been assimilated."

"I show no indications of 'hive mind' activity," Zhadesh added, having scanned for an interplexing beacon. "No sign of any connectivity with the Collective what-so-ever."

"Okay, so the good news is that aren't full Borg and they won't be calling for reinforcements," Paris said. "The bad news is they are armed and hostile. Recommendations?"

"We could move to flank them, sir," said Lance Corporal Mike Donovan, motioning to the two other Starfleet Marines who had beamed over with the away team. The suggestion was punctuated by blaster fire from the unseen assailants.

"There is a passage ten meters behind us," Zhadesh said, reading from his tricorder. "Using it, the Marines should be able to get behind the ... Borg."

"Do it," Paris said nodding to the Marines. "Phasers on maximum stun to start. Power up if needed and don't forget to cycle emitter frequencies, just in case. These may not be real Borg, but that doesn't mean they can't adapt."

Donovan returned the nod and led the Marines away without another word. Two more green energy bolts lit the hallway, but neither hit anywhere near the party.

"Resistance is futile," called out a second voice, distinct from the other. "You will be assimilated."

"That pronunciation sounds like a Ferengi," T'Var observed.

"Who are these people?" Paris asked. "Borg Wannabes?"

"Wannabes?" Zhadesh asked quizzically as another energy bolt whizzed by.

"Want-to-be" Paris announced. "Pretenders trying to be something they're actually not."

"Why would anyone want to pretend to be a Borg?" Zhadesh asked, shaking his head in disbelief.

Before anyone could offer an answer, there was a sudden barrage of energy weapon fire coming from down the corridor, both Borg blaster and Federation phaser rifle. A few moments later, Paris's combadge chirped to life.

"Donovan to Paris," came the voice of the Marine squad leader.

"Paris here. Goahead."

"The passage is secure, sir. Five prisoners incapacitated. No casualties, but you're gonna want to see this."

* * *

So you're telling me they did this to themselves?" K'danz asked. "You're sure of it?"

"I could be wrong, but I really think these implants and attachments were added surgically without the aid of Borg nanites," said Dr. Bob Cuomo, the *Bellerophon's* chief medical officer. On the surgical table near the center of sickbay, one of humans captured aboard the Sphere still lay unconscious, Borg technology haphazardly connected to various appendages and orifices looking like the result of some mad scientist's experiment.

"I didn't know that was possible," Dar said. Moving around one of the five biobeds where the captured sphere crewmen lay, he leaned in to get a better look. "Can you remove this stuff?"

"Some of it," Cuomo said with a frown. "But some of these people lost limbs in order for for the augmentations to be added."

"They amputated their own limbs?" K'danz asked, the shock clear on her face.

"At least three of them," Cuomo confirmed, pointing to an Andorian woman. "That one's only got one original arm left. She'd need some sort of prosthetics to even walk again if we remove the Borg hardware."

"Captain," Paris interjected. "If these people did this voluntarily, I'm not sure we have the authority to undo it - even if they did attack us."

"You could be right, Tom," K'danz said, shaking her head. She tapped her combadge. "Bridge, this is the Captain."

"Go ahead, Captain," replied the voice of Lt Zhadesh.

"Any word from the remaining occupants of the sphere?"

"None, Captain. It appears they are choosing to ignore us at present."

"And what about the sphere itself?"

"Essentially unchanged," Zhadesh replied. "The tractor beam is still in place and its power levels are steady. The vessel's environmental controls have recycled about ninety five percent of the sphere's atmosphere."

"Keep me posted of any changes."

"Aye, Captain."

K'danz turned her attention back to the doctor.

"It's time we get some answers. Keep them restrained, but bring them around," she ordered. "Start with the Andorian."

Cuomo drew up a hypospray and administered it to the neck of his patient. A few moments later, the woman's eyes blinked open and she tried to sit, struggling against the restraining field.

"Where am I?" she demanded, looking around the room and noticing her compatriots around her. "Release me!"

"You are on board the *USS Bellerophon*. I am Captain K'danz, the commanding officer, representing the United Federation of Planets," K'danz said calmly. "Now, who are you?"

"I am Aviri, Two of Five," the woman replied coldly. "Why did you attack us?"

"You attacked us first," Paris countered. "And we're still stuck in your tractor beam!"

K'danz silenced her first officer with a glance before continuing.

"If you're Two of Five, who is One?" she asked.

Aviri did not reply, but her eyes flicked for an instant toward the Ferengi. Catching the slip, K'danz motioned for Cuomo to wake the short alien lying two beds over from the Andorian.

Unlike the previous patient, the elderly Ferengi came around slowly, his limbs making short, restless movements before his eyes slowly opened and scanned the room.

"I am Grek, One of Five," he said at last. "Release me and you will be assimilated."

"How about 'no' on both counts," K'danz said. "What are you doing out here? How did you come to be aboard a Borg vessel? And why did you attack my ship?"

Grek tested the restraints once and then lay back.

"I'll tell you what you want to know," he said. "But you've got to let me up."

* * *

Several minutes later, K'danz, Paris, Dar, and Drake were gathered with Grek, One of Five, and Aviri, Two of Five – both under heavy guard by several of Drake's Marines, in the Belle's briefing lounge.

"Alright, Mister Grek, we're listening," Captain K'danz said from the head of the table. To her left was her husband, Dar, the *Belle's* chief engineer and third in command. At her right sat Tom Paris, her executive officer. Major Michael Drake, chief of security, took the seat directly opposite the captain at the far end of the table while his two security officers stood near the door, keeping a wary eye on the 'guests.'

"First I would like to protest the accusation that we attacked you," Grek said firmly. "The damage done to your vessel was the result of your crew activating an automated proximity defense system. At the time of the incident my crew was unable to access any of the related control functions due to excessive radiation levels aboard our ship."

"Uh huh," K'danz said, her expression blank and unchanging. "Taking that under advisement, why don't you start by telling us how you came to be in control - or at least partial control - of a Borg sphere."

"Were you captured?" Paris asked.

"In a manner of speaking, but nothing so dramatic as being assimilated by the Borg," Grek said. "And as to how we came to be aboard the Sphere... We found it."

"Found it?" Drake scoffed. "Where? Just floating about lost in deep space?"

"Precisely," Grek continued. "It had almost no power, virtually no life support, and was flooded with radiation. The best part was that all the Borg inside were dead."

"If it was in such bad shape, why did you go aboard?" Paris asked.

"Two reasons," Grek replied. "First, for profit, obviously! And secondly, we had no choice. The sphere's defenses drained our ship's power. Our ship was destroyed attempting to escape. Beaming over was our only chance for survival."

"You mentioned profit," Drake remarked. "How do you hope to profit from a damaged Borg vessel that captures or destroys any other ship that approaches it?" Drake asked.

"Salvage," K'danz answered before Grek could speak, shaking her head. "But there is no way the Federation is going to let you keep that sphere."

"Even the Federation recognizes salvage claims on deserted vessels," Grek said. "If your Federation is interested in purchasing it, I am ready to reject your opening offer."

"A Borg sphere is no ordinary vessel," Paris said. "You can't honestly believe that we're going to let you just fly it out of here."

"That is our plan, actually," Grek said. "If you're not interested in buying the sphere intact, perhaps you'd like to bid on some of the components?"

"You don't seem to understand, Mister Grek," K'danz said firmly. "The ship isn't yours to sell, in whole or in part."

Grek looked across the table at Aviri before looking back at K'danz.

“You are the one who doesn’t understand, Captain,” he said. “We’ve made sacrifices and must be compensated.”

“What sacrifices?” K’danz asked.

“These,” Grek said, raising a mechanical arm and pointing at the Borg ocular assembly attached to his face. “You can’t pilot a Borg ship! You can’t even fully operate a single system unless you’re a Borg! We’ve been here working for six months and we’ve just now begun to make progress. We will NOT be denied our rightful profits!”

* * *

“Status report,” K’danz requested, entering the bridge from her ready room in response to a new alert klaxon.

Standing from the captain’s chair, Commander Tom Paris said, “The sphere’s shields just came online and raised. I our own shields raised and went to yellow alert as a precaution. What did the Admiral say?”

“What I expected,” K’danz said with a slight sigh. “Val rejects the salvage claim and has ordered us to secure the sphere and offer its occupants safe transport back to the starbase.”

“Well, that job just got a bit harder,” Paris said, eying the sphere on the view screen. “How are you going to handle Grek?”

“I’ll just have to use the charm I’m so famous for,” K’danz said with a toothy smile. “But Grek should be familiar with what I’m going to say.”

“How so?” Paris asked.

“I looked up his FCA record. Grek was not the most respected capitalist on Ferenginar. This isn’t the first time he’s tried to profit from a questionable salvage claim,” K’danz replied.

“Captain, the sphere is activating its transporters,” Lt Zhadesh interrupted, his bushy white eyebrows furrowed. “The signal is cutting right through our shields.”

“Red alert!” called Paris.

“Security, this is the Captain,” K’danz said. “Prepare to be boarded. All hands to battlestations.”

“Security en route to the bridge, preparing to repel boarders,” came the reply.

“Captain, I do not believe this is an attack,” Zhadesh said. “The sphere is apparently trying to lock on to the members of their crew we captured earlier.”

“Jam their transporter lock!” K’danz ordered.

“I am trying,” Zhadesh said, the strain of concentration thick in his voice. “Employing a tachyon burst protocol to disrupt their pattern lock.”

“Brig to bridge,” came another voice over the intercom. “The prisoners are phasing in and out of a level five containment field. Please advise.”

“Brig,” Zhadesh called out. “Set the field to a wide band frequency variance and activate the medical decontamination sequence.”

Viewing the information on his display, Zhadesh shook his head in frustration.

“Captain, it appears we are going to lose them,” he said, still working his hands over the controls of the ops station.

“Can we beam another team over to the Sphere?” K’danz asked.

“Not while they have their shields raised,” Major Drake replied from the security station.

“Can we piggy back on their own transporter beam?” Paris asked.

“Possibly, but we would have to do it now,” Zhadesh said.

“Bridge to transporter room,” K’danz called out. “Lock onto Commander Paris and Lieutenant Zhadesh and use the Borg transporter beam to send them to the sphere NOW.”

A moment later, the two bridge officers vanished in a green sparkle.

“Brig to the bridge,” came a hail over the intercom. “The prisoners are gone.”

* * *

“Not exactly an ideal situation,” Paris said in a hushed voice. “No time to prepare. Not even a phaser between us.”

“It could have been worse,” Zhadesh said. “The transporter chief did not have much time to set our arrival coordinates. We could have ended up inside a bulkhead.”

“Good point,” Paris said with a smile. “Any idea where we’re at?”

Zhadesh looked around the darkened compartment for any clue he could see, but finding none he simply shrugged.

“It is not the mess hall,” he said at last.

“Too bad, I hear Borg cuisine is en vogue this year,” Paris said, eyeing the room for himself. Spying a panel, he moved to it and began poking around. A few seconds later the panel was illuminated and giving a full display.

“Now I wish I had paid more attention when Seven would talk about Borg tech,” Paris said. “Any of this make sense to you?”

Moving beside Paris, Zhadesh peered down at the display, which was a strange combination of Borg iconography, Ferengi text, and standard, making it like the cryptographic puzzles he worked on in his spare time. Almost immediately some patterns began to jump out at him.

“We are in a navigation room,” Zhadesh said. “It is fascinating. It looks like there are at least four of these stations shipwide. Quadruple redundancy does not seem very efficient.”

“You’re thinking about it from the perspective of a starship,” Paris said. “Take the *Belle*, for example. She follows her bow. If we want to change direction, we have to come about. A sphere would have much different flight dynamics. Each one of the stations is probably working to plot different potential routes and destinations based on ever-changing data.”

Zhadesh nodded his head. “The Borg could then react as soon as the hive mind determined the need to move.”

Knowing now that he was looking at helm control, Paris tried to use his experience to orient himself.

“Hmmm,” he said. “What do you think that is?”

Following Paris’s finger to a corner of the display, Zhadesh took a moment to decipher the script. When he did, Paris could see the Efrosian’s eyebrows visibly raise.

“That is a transwarp route,” Zhadesh said. “It appears to be the last route plotted by the Borg crew at this station.”

“Where does it go?”

“Earth.”

“Away team to *Bellerophon*,” Paris said tapping his combadge, but there was no reply. After another unsuccessful attempt, Paris remarked, “Looks like it’s you and me, buddy.” He put a hand on Zhadesh’s shoulder.

* * *

“What’s going on over there?” K’danz asked, turning from the ops station to science and back again.

“Their shields are still up,” said the lieutenant that had taken over at ops. She double checked the console and confirmed. “Their weapons are off-line. No communication from either the crew or our away team.”

Lt T’Var, the Vulcan science officer, did not look up from her display as she added her own observations. “Captain, I am detecting an unusual reading in the space surrounding the sphere. I cannot determine the origin, but there is a marked spike in neutrinos directly around the vessel.”

"Hypothesis?" K'danz asked.

"Too little data to speculate, Captain," T'Var replied.

"Your best guess then," K'danz prompted.

T'Var momentarily considered formally restating her reluctance to guess, but decided now was not the time. She did, however, make a mental note to address the issue with her captain at a later date.

"No natural phenomena that I am aware of would account for this," she said. "I am unfamiliar with Borg technology, but I would presume the sphere itself would be the most viable cause."

"Keep gathering data and see what the database has on the Borg and neutrinos," K'danz said. "And keep trying to reach the away team. If standard coms won't work, get creative."

* * *

"Okay what was that?" Paris asked, his ears straining to hear the noise that had startled him moments before.

He and Zhadesh were moving through the labyrinth of corridors looking for any sign of the sphere's crew. The two listened, but everything was now quiet save for the gentle hum of ship's systems.

"It sounded like a whistle," Zhadesh mused.

"Yeah," Paris said. "Like a bosons' whistle. But why would anyone here be using a whistle?"

"The Borg Collective would not have need for communication systems as we think of them," Zhadesh speculated. "The current crew might..."

Before Zhadesh could finish, a second whistle sounded closer than the first.

"We'd better find some cover," Paris said, looking around for an alcove or room to duck into.

A third whistle sounded and this time Paris zeroed in on its location.

"It's coming from that panel," he said, motioning to Zhadesh. "I think someone is hailing us."

"The question is; Who?" Zhadesh said with a shrug.

"One way to find out," Paris said, activating the panel. "This is Commander Paris. We read you. Go ahead."

"Commander Paris?" came the familiar voice of Lt T'Var. "This is the *Bellerophon*. Are you safe?"

"We are for now," Paris replied, amazed that T'Var has somehow managed to link into the Borg subspace transceiver and establish communications with the away team. "But we haven't had much luck finding the crew over here."

"You may have another problem," T'Var said. "We are observing a growing neutrino field in the space around the sphere. At the current rate of expansion it will envelop the sphere in precisely twenty eight minutes and nineteen seconds."

"What happens then?" Paris asked.

"It is our hope that you will make that determination, sir," T'Var said.

"I may have an idea of the cause," Zhadesh said, pointing back toward the way he and Paris had come. Doubling back to the navigation room, the two Starfleet officers resumed their examination of the control panel.

"There it is," Zhadesh said.

"There what is?" Paris asked, scowling at the display.

"It is a power reading," Zhadesh explained. "Someone is preparing this vessel for transwarp. If the sphere was fully functional we would already be underway."

"That's not good," Paris said. "Any way to tell where they're planning to take us?"

"Not from this station," Zhadesh answered. "Each station works independently, so I can see they are operational but not much else."

"Can we stop the process?"

“Grek was partially correct with his assumptions about needing Borg implants to properly use these systems, but I believe it is possible to work around the interface,” Zhadesh said.

“How much time will you need?” Paris asked, eyeing the power meter.

“On a good day, I would estimate between three and four hours,” Zhadesh said.

“Well, this is not a good day.”

“No. No, it is not.”

* * *

“Can you get a fix on our people using the subspace transceiver as a guide?” K’danz asked.

“No ma’am,” came the reply from the transporter chief over the intercom. “Between the Borg shields and residual radiation interference, there’s just no way.”

K’danz turned to T’Var at the science station. The science officer looked grim even for a Vulcan.

“How much time is left,” K’danz asked.

“Five minutes, twelve seconds,” T’Var replied, not even looking up from her console.

K’danz changed her focus to ops where the lieutenant that had stepped in for Zhadesh stood at the ready.

“Could we anchor them here with a tractor beam, like they did to us?”

“Even if we could get the beam to lock onto the Sphere, we’d likely be dragged into transwarp with them,” the lieutenant replied. “And if Transwarp is anything like the slipstream drive I heard the *Voyager* experimented with, that would not be good for us.”

K’danz thought for a moment, contemplating the issue from a different angle. “The neutrino field activates the transwarp corridor. What can we do to disrupt or destabilize the neutrino field?” K’danz asked.

“It might be possible to use the deflector to emit a Pranger wave with sufficient amplitude to disrupt the field,” T’Var interjected.

“I can override some relays and give the deflector a bit more output,” the ops officer added.

“Do it now,” K’danz ordered, sending the bridge crew into sudden action.

* * *

“What’s that?” Paris asked, pointing to a new blinking light on the display.

“Interesting,” Zhadesh remarked, almost to himself as he studied the reading indications. “The *Bellerophon* is emitting a Pranger wave. I believe they are attempting to disrupt the neutrino field that will open access to the transwarp corridor.”

“Will it work?” Paris asked, a tone of hope in his voice.

“It might have ten minutes ago,” Zhadesh replied.

“Too little too late,” Paris said. “I guess that leaves us with Plan A.”

Zhadesh did not respond, focusing his attention on trying to disrupt the Borg transwarp navigation process. The countdown had ticked down to one minute.

Paris returned to the hallway and activated the panel serving as his makeshift communications station.

“*Belle*, this is Paris,” he said. “It doesn’t look good for us. I think we’re going on a little trip! We’ll try to get a distress signal out when we come out of transwarp.”

“Tom, we will find you!” reassured Captain K’danz. “Just stay...!”

Paris began to feel an undulation that he recognized as the jump to transwarp and the transceiver went silent. Returning to the navigation room, Paris was surprised to find it empty. Moving slowly through the corridors, he found Zhadesh working in another nearby chamber.

“Couldn’t stop the jump to transwarp, huh?” he asked rhetorically.

“No, but in the last moments I was able to do something else,” Zhadesh answered with a smile, all the while still working at the controls in front of him.

“And that was?” Paris asked.

“I was able to move our navigation station’s destination to the front of the queue,” Zhadesh replied.

“So that means... What? We’re heading to Earth?”

“Yes.”

“Does the crew in control of the Sphere crew know?”

“Probably,” Zhadesh said. “But I do not believe they have the capability to change course midflight.”

“So what are you doing now?”

“Trying to lower the shields,” Zhadesh replied. “Care to help?”

“More than happy to, but we’d better be quick about it,” Paris answered with a smile. “If they realize they’re not heading where they intended to go, the Sphere crew will be looking for us now.”

* * *

A relatively short time later, a Borg transwarp corridor – perhaps the same one that helped transport the starship Voyager back to Earth, opened within the Sol system. Starfleet Command immediately reacted to the perceived threat, dispatching every starship and defense vessel within the system to intercept the intruder.

As the first starship on the scene approached, the operations officer was surprised by an indication that appeared on his console.

“Captain!” the man said. “We’re receiving a hail on a Starfleet subspace frequency!”

“That’s damn peculiar,” the captain remarked. “Has that ship raised shields or armed weapons?”

“Negative,” the nearby tactical officer replied.

“Respond to that hail,” the captain ordered. When the ops officer replied that the frequency was open, the captain continued, “Attention Borg vessel. This is Earth Planetary Defense. Do NOT raise shields or arm weapons or you will be destroyed! Prepare to be boarded.”

“Earth Defense, this is Commander Tom Paris of the starship Bellerophon, assigned to the Fifth Fleet,” Paris replied, ducking back as a green energy bolt whizzed past his head. The Sphere crew had finally located his and Zhadesh’s hiding spot. “Lieutenant Xin Zhadesh and I are aboard the Sphere with twenty hostiles using Borg tech. We could sure use a hand.”

The captain exchanged an amazed look with his first officer before looking at the lieutenant at ops.

“Reading twenty two life signs aboard the Sphere, Captain. One human and one Efrosian appear to be cornered by weapons fire.”

“Can you lock onto them with our transporter?”

“Already locked, Captain.”

“Don’t worry, Commander,” the captain said, resuming his conversation with Paris. “We’ve got you.”

“What does he mean, he’s got us?” Paris asked rhetorically, knowing that if the Sphere crew were aware that he and Zhadesh were unawmred they would storm their location within seconds.

Moments later, the two Starfleet officers began to dematerialize.

* * *

Several days later, Paris and Zhadesh were in an office located aboard the Earth Spacedock, where the Borg Sphere had been impounded and its crew placed into custody by Planetary Defense. Both officers were facing a large wall-mounted view screen where an image of their relieved commanding officer was displayed.

“I’m told Grek got a personal grievance hearing with the Federation President,” K’danz said, shaking her head. She seemed very large on the full-wall view screen. “I also heard when he learned he was facing a long incarceration for attacks on Federation crew and vessels, he was more receptive to parting ways with the sphere. It’s now being dismantled.”

“What about us?” Paris asked, motioning to Zhadesh.

“It looks like you’ll be getting a little shore leave while we arrange a ride back to the Typhon Sector and *Home Plate* for you both,” K’danz said. “Try to keep each other out of trouble. See you in a few weeks. *Bellerophon*, out.”

“Yes, Captain,” Paris and Zhadesh said in near unison as the screen went black. The human first officer then looked at his companion and asked, “So, anything you’d like to do while we’re here?”

“Well, I do know this dabo place not far from the Academy grounds in San Francisco...” Zhadesh replied.

The End