

Dark Territory Last Stand

By DarkKush

USS Tombaugh
2362

Ensign Joshua Stone stood anxiously on the transporter pad, cold despite the crush of warm bodies sharing the circular pad with him. He was still in shock that Captain Blackwood had picked him, a mere bridge hand fresh out of the Academy, to join the Away Team, to make first contact with an alien species. He didn't know whether to be proud or intimidated beyond measure. Captain Blackwood was always needling the "greenies" as he liked to call them, some of it good natured, and some a bit mean-spirited in Josh's estimation. He guessed he would figure out which upon his return. In any event he would share it with his bunkmate Tevik and put in his log. Josh had been recording almost everything he could about his time on the *Tombaugh* because he was afraid his memory would be too faulty, and he wanted to have as comprehensive a record of his first assignment as possible. He knew his family, planet bound farmers from Belle Terre, would want the full scoop.

"Energize," Commander Deitra Glover's clear, hard voice cut through Josh's ruminations. He shrank a little each time the woman spoke or whenever he saw her approaching him on the bridge. The tall, athletically built ebon First Officer was very intimidating. Whereas Captain Blackwood was a bit irascible, a joker and raconteur, Commander Glover was a martinet, an unsmiling, driving force of nature that kept everyone in line. But the woman was careful not to cross the line where Captain Blackwood was concerned. However, she had not been pleased by the captain's suggestion that Josh join the Away Team. Neither had Lt. Commander Raldan, the ship's Security Chief; the burly Caitian stood behind him, breathing loudly. Josh imagined that the felinoid was glaring daggers at him, but he was too afraid to confirm his suspicions. Stone gulped when he heard the familiar whine of the transporter, and felt a tingle in his feet. He looked at the other two members of the Away Team: Dr. Wadj, and Lt. Cadin. Despite his trepidation, Josh was glad to get to spend extra time with Lt. Cadin. The beautiful blonde Bajoran had captured his fancy the nanosecond he had seen her. Feeling his gaze, Cadin turned to him and smiled, making Stone feel a hell of a lot better

instantly. As the whine built and the tingling grew, Josh took one last glance at the transporter station.

His roommate Tevik stood behind the controls. As his eyesight started to waver and break apart, Stone was sure that Tevik gave him a most uncharacteristic thumbs up.

Alien Vessel

"Feels like a sauna in here," Commander Glover replied, taking stock of their surroundings. The large, cavernous starship was dank, and dimly lit, with a sickly green glow accenting but never overtaking the darkness. She unclipped the hand lamp from her belt, activated it, and instructed the others to do the same.

"Got a problem with saunas?" Quipped Dr. Wadj, a scaly green Aquan. Glover pursed her lips, not quite smiling.

Lt. Cadin held her tricorder close to her face, its lighted screen providing additional illumination. "Humidity is 92%, 39.1% Celsius," she replied. "I'm also detecting trace amounts of tetryon particles in the atmospheric mix."

"Feels good to me," Lt. Commander Raldan muttered, his ears twitching up, "Smells a bit earthy too."

"Is it harmful to us?" Glover asked. The Bajoran shook her head in the negative seconds later. Deitra felt a little relieved, but not too much. The place gave her the creeps, but she would never tell her teammates that, it would weaken their confidence in her, and she would never let that happen again. Serving on the *Tombaugh* was her last chance at making captain, after the black mark she had received due to her actions in the Ghorusda Disaster, and she intended to get it right this time. However, she hadn't been so determined to make a peaceful first contact that she had come unarmed. She fondled the cool, burnished metal handle of the phaser attached to her hip and felt a bit more relief. "Let's go."

Alien Vessel

Lt. Cadin Brona swept her tricorder along the seemingly infinitesimal collection of alcoves, stacked on top of each other as far as her eyes could see and the scanner's reach would permit. Almost each alcove was occupied. "Dear Prophets," she breathed. "There must be hundreds of thousands of beings on this ship, many from species we haven't even heard of."

"I got that much just by looking at a couple," Lt. Commander Raldan said. "What are we dealing with here Commander?" Commander Glover threw the question back to Cadin, and the Bajoran nervously swallowed.

"I'm not sure," she admitted.

"Where is the command deck? Who is in charge here?" Commander Glover asked.

"I don't know that either," Cadin replied. "It appears that these aliens have an extremely decentralized way of doing things." She pointed upward to several small pyramids spread across the closest ceiling. "Those pyramids are some type of distribution nodes that spread information throughout the ship, but so far I haven't found a central originating data source."

"In this monstrosity it might take you centuries to do so," Dr. Wadj remarked. They continued making their way through the ship. Cadin paused every few minutes to take more thorough readings of the aliens in their alcoves. Despite their at times vast physical differences, they were all garbed in black plated armor, with some type of eyepiece, and tubes sticking out of their paled flesh. Blank, soulless eyes stared back at her. It was a ghastly sight, and Brona couldn't help but recall the horror stories of Cardassian experiments on her people she had remembered hearing as a child refugee.

"You okay?" The voice startled her. Cadin reached for her phaser. "Whoa Lieutenant, it's me Josh." The woman calmed down slowly, and turned to the earnest young man.

"Ensign don't you have something to do besides sneaking up on me?" Her tone made the ensign backtrack. He held up his hands, the intense beam of his hand lamp briefly blinding her.

"I'm...uh...sorry sir," he apologized, and Brona couldn't help but think how cute the red head was, though he was bit too young for her.

"No need to apologize," she said, after her sight had returned. "I...was just lost in thought for a moment when you approached me." "Oh...I get it," Ensign Stone said, but Cadin knew that the callow human couldn't possibly understand what she had been through and what her people were still enduring under the Cardassians' lash, but she didn't have a desire to make him feel bad about it. Brona worked up a smile.

"What do you think so far?"

"Sort of reminds of me an Old Earth vid....*Tales from the Crypt*," Stone admitted. Brona didn't get the reference, but she understood the sentiment.

Alien Vessel

The heat and the earthy aroma that had first greeted Lt. Commander Raldan gave way to a smell of decay that chilled him, despite the humidity. The further they ventured into the labyrinthine ship, the Caitian's nostrils twitched with the foulness of rot, of dying flesh and blood from a myriad of species, of the burning smell of metal melding with skin. The dankness overlaid a cold, mechanical sterility. Raldan found his hand on his phaser the

deeper they traveled. When the first of the aliens walked by them, he whipped it out and aimed it at the creature. The black armored, four-armed alien shambled on, ignoring him.

"Holster that weapon!" Deitra ordered, but Raldan could tell by the timbre of the woman's voice that she wanted to do the same thing. However, he complied. Soon the group found themselves surrounded by the slowly moving automatons, clanking along, with varied appendages that had replaced one of their arms making whirring and clicking sounds. The Away Team formed a tight circle and the aliens divided, moving around them, flanking them.

"I don't like this," Raldan muttered.

"Just keeping moving," Glover said.

USS Tombaugh

"Sir, we're getting a communication from the alien vessel," The officer standing in for Brona, said from the Ops terminal. Captain Vernon Blackwood sat up in his seat. He had been getting bored waiting on Commander Glover's update. He knew that Deitra was a very thorough officer and wouldn't check-in until she had as complete a story as she could get. He stopped marveling the humungous cube hanging in front of them hours ago.

"Put Commander Glover on," Blackwood said.

"It's not the Commander Sir," the stand-in, a young Xyrillian female named Bricta, said, "It's from the alien vessel. Audio only." Blackwood frowned, concerned, but not overly so. Perhaps Glover had found a way to contact the ship's skipper and convinced them to initiate contact. Deitra could be very persuasive. So far, the ship had ignored their hails.

"All right, let's hear it," Blackwood said.

"*We are the Borg*," the metallic voice was like a chorus blended into one voice, a powerful and chilling sound. "*Resistance is futile.*"

Hello to you too, Blackwood thought, fear starting to poke through his good nature. "I'm Captain Vernon Blackwood, of the *Starship Tombaugh*. On behalf of the United Federation of Planets we would like to greet...."

"*Greetings are irrelevant. Your biological and technological distinctiveness will become our own.*" The deck trembled.

"What the Hell was that?" Blackwood asked.

"Sir!" Raldan's stand-in, Lt. Fachan, a middle-aged Eska male shouted, "The alien vessel has latched a tractor beam onto us."

"Damn," Blackwood shifted in his seat as the ship rattled again. He faintly heard the stress on the engines as the *Tombaugh* resisted being reeled in. He opened a line to Engineering. "Chief LaSalle, keep our engines going at full reverse. We'll break the tractor beam one way or another, and when we

do, be on standby to warp the Hell away from here pronto!"

"Aye sir," the woman tersely replied. Blackwood cut off the link and then turned back to Raldan's stand-in. "Lock on to the Away Team and beam them back!"

"Can't sir," Lt. Fachan replied. "The-the...Borg...have activated some type of transport inhibitor field inside the cube. I can't get through."

Blackwood cursed before saying, "All right, how about we take out that tractor beam. It's time to take off the gloves."

"Aye sir," the Eska said, his forehead ridge crinkling as he searched for the source of the beam. "Got it," he said a half-minute later.

"Fire," Blackwood ordered. The captain watched the screen as a single, fire-orange phaser beam blew a chunk off the cube, and Vernon felt guiltily satisfied by the destruction. He hated violence, but he wasn't going to let anything happen to the people in his charge without a fight. "Hail the Borg again. Maybe they'll change their tune now that they know this little ship's got some teeth."

"Resistance if futile," was the soulless reply.

"Still not able to lock onto the Away Team," Blackwood asked, his hopes dimming. Fachan shook his head before lowering it.

"No sir."

"I want our people back," the captain declared. "Perhaps I can pound some compliance out of these Borg. Raise shields and power weapons!"

Alien Vessel

"We are the Borg." The chorus filled the entirety of the vessel's environs. Dr. Wadj looked at the cybernetic aliens streaming past, but he didn't see any of their lips moving. *"Resistance is futile."*

"Who is that talking, and who are they talking to?" Lt. Commander Raldan asked. The Chief Medic thought that was a very good question.

"I don't know, but I think it's a safe bet that it's the *Tombaugh*," Commander Glover replied, her face a grim mask. "Everyone take out your phasers, set them on stun." Wadj had initially opposed the commander's insistence that he carry a weapon, but he was glad for it now. He held the small, oval shaped weapon in one of his webbed hands. The other still held his medical tricorder, which continued drawing a wealth of information about the aliens.

"Lower your weapons," a dry voice commanded. A new trio of aliens was approaching them. "Lower your weapons," the lead alien, a large reptilian male from an unknown species, commanded. He held up a weighty appendage, with a sparking tip at the end. Wadj joined the others in looking at Commander Glover for instructions.

"Do as he says, but don't holster them," Commander Glover ordered. The trio stopped and stood their ground. The alien sea surrounding them had also stopped surging and was holding place.

"We need to get out of here," he whispered.

"Way ahead of you Doctor," Glover said. She tapped her compin. "Glover to *Tombaugh*. Glover to *Tombaugh*..."

Before the woman asked, Lt. Cadin held up her tricorder. "Sir, some type of interference field has been established preventing us from beaming out, or from anyone else beaming in."

"Great," Commander Glover muttered. She turned to the trio's leader. "Why have you activated a field that prevents us from leaving your vessel? We mean you no harm. We are simple explorers and we were merely seeking more information to understand you better."

"Your biological and technological distinctiveness will become our own," the lead alien said, though Wadj didn't see any spark in the creature's eyes that the words were something it had conceived. The rote manner in which he spoke told the Aquan that the alien was merely mouthing words that came from someone else, the true puppet master running the show.

"We're not hostiles," Glover said. "We come in peace."

"Peace is irrelevant," the lead alien said. "Surrender your weapons and prepare for assimilation."

"Assimilation?" Ensign Stone asked, his voice squeaking with fear. Wadj felt for the young man. This was no place to die. Or be assimilated, whatever that meant.

"No," Commander Glover stood tall, proud, and defiant. The woman hadn't made a lot of friends during her brief time as First Officer, but no one could doubt her toughness. She aimed her phaser at the lead alien. "Lower the field and let us return to our ship," she ordered. The trio moved forward, but the other aliens surrounding them didn't move. The lead alien raised his sparking appendage, preparing to bring it down on the First Officer. Glover shot the man point blank in the chest. The creature stumbled backward and fell to the deck. The now duo continued advancing. Glover took aim at them as well, but each shot was absorbed by small personal shields that materialized over each aliens' body to catch each beam. The lead alien was already groggily returning to his feet. "How the Hell did he get up so fast?" She asked, and Wadj heard fear coating her voice for the first time. "Forgo stun settings, shoot to kill. We're going to have to fire our way out of this."

Raldan quickly took aim and fired at the closet member of the trio. The beam sliced through his armored chest and the alien twitched and fell backward. Lt. Cadin took out the third alien. Commander Glover aimed again at the trio lead, now a solo act. But when she fired at him, a personal shield had developed, protecting the lead.

"Let's back out of here, slowly," Glover ordered. And the group began to backtrack. The cybernetic trio lead continued lumbering forward, in no obvious hurry. The Away Team quickly hit a wall of armor and leathery skin. The river of aliens around them had solidified, not allowing them to push through. They were completely surrounded.

Raldan cursed and fired into the side of the closest alien. The beam absorbed by another shield. "Our weapons are useless," he growled.

"Maybe not," Glover said. She raised her phaser and smashed it into the head of the trio's leader. It smashed into the alien's eyepiece and the man staggered back, before being pushed to the side by his two compatriots. His body was pushed along until it disappeared into the sea of aliens. "Use whatever you have at your disposal for weapons, we're going to have to fight our way through."

"How?" Ensign Stone asked, nearly hysterical. "Sir, how can we do that? And where would we go if we did do that? We can't even beam off this ship?"

Lt. Cadin placed a hand on the quaking young man's shoulder. "It's okay Josh. Trust the Commander."

"I'm sorry Brona, but she got us into this," he charged.

"That's enough Mr. Stone," Glover snapped. "Now is not the time to break unit cohesion."

"She's right," Raldan said. "We've got to stick together."

"I-I can't do this, I feel like I'm suffocating already," the panicky ensign wailed. He turned away from the group and attempt to push his way through the mass. A small, female cyborg met him. Despite her mottled skin, and hairless scalp, Wadj recognized she was human. The one eye she had that remained uncovered was of the purest blue, it reminded him of his Birthing Waters on Argo.

She raised an arm to the young man, as if to caress him. Stone stopped, shrinking back. "Don't touch me!" She pulled up short, her hand hovering just inches from his face. Two tubules shot from the back of her outstretched hand, sinking into the ensign's neck. He sighed, his knees buckling.

"Josh!" Lt. Cadin screamed. She aimed her phaser at the young alien, but one of the aliens, with a hook-like appendage brought it down on her hand, severing it. Her horrible cries were cut off when the attacking alien grabbed her and injected her as well. Wadj stood transfixed as he watched Brona's skin pale as her veins turned bluish-gray. Her eyes took on a vacant cast just like the other aliens. Where they killing her, or doing something much worse? He shuddered at the thought.

"What the Hells?" Raldan growled. He leaped up, over the fray, and crashed back down into them, out of Wadj's eyesight. But the Aquan heard the man's roar, the terrible slashing of his razor-sharp claws, and he even glimpsed the occasional head being tossed into the air before the Caitian

squealed, and then he heard nothing more.

Strong hands grabbed him from behind. Wadj attempt to fight them off. "It's me Doctor," Glover hissed. "Stand behind me," she ordered. He did as she commanded, and the two remaining members of the Away Team stood back to back, the black sea surging forward, pale hands grasping at them. "If we're going to have a last stand, we might as well go out fighting." But Wadj had already dropped his phaser and begun to pray.

USS Tombaugh

"This is was a mistake," Captain Blackwood said. He cradled Bricta's charred corpse in his arms. The bridge rocked again, from another volley from the cube. Blackwood's eyes filled with tears from the smoke, mixed with sadness and frustration that he had led his crew into destruction.

His first strike against the Borg cube had been moderately successful, but the aliens had a tremendous adaptability and the *Tombaugh* had met with declining success each time after. The same couldn't be said for the Borg. The *Tombaugh* had attempted to flee, but the cube quickly caught up with them. The Borg had overwhelmed the ship's shields, taking out the propulsion systems first. Then they had employed another damnable tractor beam, and now they were using some type of cutting beam to carve up the *Wambundu*-class vessel as if it were a roast. And there was nothing Captain Blackwood could do about it. Except...

"Computer," he said, his hoarse voice sounded foreign even to him. "Initiate autodestruct." The captain locked in the command and set a timer. He stumbled back to his seat. Before he sat down, he looked at Lt. Fachan. The able Eska was still at the Tactical console. He had met with some limited success by modulating phaser frequency, and employing some other nifty tactics, but the Borg always seemed one step ahead, as if they were well versed in Starfleet tactics as well as being vastly tactically superior. One more thing that would've kept him awake at night if he had survived this, Blackwood thought. He sat down, and began preparing a message buoy. Starfleet had to be informed about the Borg. They had already made their way into the Beta Quadrant without being detected, and he couldn't let them get any closer to Earth. But hopefully the destruction of the ship might also take out the Borg cube.

The computer droned on, as various sections of the ship reported more parts being ripped from the *Tombaugh's* frame. Blackwood steadied himself, and thought of his family. Then he thought of the Away Team. He knew they hadn't survived. The Borg had probably killed them first. "I'm sorry," he murmured. Vernon felt horrible for his friend Samson Glover. He had taken on Deitra as a favor to his old friend, and the woman had proven to be

extremely capable, if somewhat of a taskmaster. She would've made a fine captain one day. But Blackwood felt most terrible about Ensign Stone. He had hoped to give the man a nice opportunity to be part of a key finding and a nice career boost with this first contact. The overeager young man had reminded Vernon of himself when he had been a greenie far too many years ago. But now Stone would never get a chance to grow, or blossom into an officer, or a man. Vernon shook his head, overcome with grief. The universe could be very cruel sometimes.

He heard a familiar whine and felt a shadow standing over him. Fachan gasped, and Vernon tensed. He looked up, and saw Commander Glover standing over him. But he didn't smile or rejoice. Instead, he screamed.

The End