

The Xilothian Factor

by

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This is not a complete story; rather, it is a story fragment that adds a new storyline (a new race that can place a check on the Q) into the Trek universe. It alters the STNG episode "The Best Of Both Worlds, Part I", and begins shortly before Captain Picard is abducted by the Borg.

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Worf didn't need to check the status on his readouts to know what was happening. "Borg tractor beam is attempting to lock on."

The image of the Borg cube grew larger on the viewscreen. "Fire at will," said Picard. "Continue rotating shield frequency."

"Captain." Data turned to look at Picard. "Another ship is approaching at high warp."

Fearing the worst, Picard asked "another Borg cube?"

"No sir." Data studied his sensor readings, but interference from the Borg tractor beam made them less reliable than normal. "It's a smaller vessel...perhaps Defiant class in size." As the vessel neared, the readings were becoming more detailed. "But the ship's design is not in the Starfleet database."

The Enterprise lurched, and Worf announced "shields failing...tractor beam has locked on." At that same moment, a Borg materialized on the bridge.

Without hesitation, Worf drew his phaser and fired. The Borg fell.

"Captain, the new ship has extended shields around the Enterprise." Data used his readings to attempt an analysis, but the shields were unlike anything he had ever seen or studied. "They appear to be holding."

Picard glanced at Riker, who raised his eyebrows. "On screen."

The image of the Borg cube zoomed out slightly, and the third ship came into view. The main body was cylindrical, with a large circular module -- the propulsion unit? -- at one end. Picard did not see any identifying marks anywhere on it. "Mr. Worf, hail that ship."

"Aye sir. Hailing frequencies are open."

"This is Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the Federation starship Enterprise. Please identi--"

A voice interrupted, "Hello Captain Picard. Please hold on for a minute. You are free to monitor."

Worf glanced at his board. "The channel is still open."

A moment later, the Enterprise bridge heard the voice say "hail the Borg. Borg ship. You have this one chance to return home. I suggest you--"

"THREATS ARE IRRELEVANT. RESISTANCE IS FUTILE. YOU WILL BE ASSIMILATED." On the Enterprise bridge, the crew watched as multiple beams shot from the Borg cube at the small ship.

"The ships shields are holding," reported Data.

Over the Enterprise's intercom, the voice sighed. "They never change. Well, I tried." A narrow particle beam shot from the small ship and hit the cube.

For a few seconds, nothing happened. Then Data reported "sir, I am reading multiple malfunctions within the Borg vessel. They are occurring throughout the ship and seem to be outpacing the Borg's ability to repair."

All of the beams emanating from the cube stopped.

The cube exploded.

Moments later, a --human? -- face appeared on the viewscreen. Male, maybe forty years old? "Captain Picard. I'm Arthur. May I come aboard? It's been awhile since I had the company of fellow humans, and I'm guessing you have several questions."

Picard thought quickly. Whoever this Arthur was, he had technological capabilities beyond the Federation, beyond the Borg...and that made him a potential danger. On the other hand, he had not exhibited any hostile intentions toward the Enterprise, and he did seem to be human. It would likely be a good thing to have him for an ally. "Very well," he replied. "We will beam you aboard momentarily."

He signaled Worf to close the channel, then turned to Counselor Troi. "Counselor?"

"I'm sorry sir, but I can't read anything from him. He may be exactly what he says, or something else."

So caution is needed. He started to speak when Wesley's voice chimed in. "Sir? What are we going to do with the Borg?" Picard followed Wesley's gaze to where the Borg body lay. "Mr. Worf, have this Borg taken to sickbay for examination, then join us in conference room one. Commander Riker, Counselor Troi, greet our guest. Mr. Data, you're with me."

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Picard and Data were waiting in the conference room when Riker and Troi entered with Arthur. "Captain!" exclaimed Arthur as he held out his hand and smiled. "So good to meet you!"

"Welcome aboard," replied Picard. "And this is--"

But Arthur's eyes had already shifted to Data. "--Noonian Soong's work! Son of a gun, he did it!"

Data's head tilted slightly. "Yes sir. But how did you know?"

Arthur smiled even wider. "Because I knew Soong back when he looked just like you. And he was convinced he could create a sentient android." Arthur walked around Data and looked him over.

"Sir," Data began, "if you knew Doctor Soong when his physical appearance matched mine, you would have to be older than *your* physical appearance indicates."

"Indeed," Arthur said. He looked around the table at Troi, Riker, and Picard, and then spoke seemingly into the air. "Resa, how old am I?" A voice replied back, "You are currently 447 years, 8 months, and 12 days old."

"Well then" said Arthur. "If I'm that old, I think I'll sit down." He seated himself, and the others did likewise. "So captain, what--" The door slid open and Worf walked in. Arthur jumped back up. "A Klingon! In Starfleet! I have been away too long!"

Picard stood as well. "This is Lieutenant Commander Worf."

"qaqIHneS", said Arthur. "nuqneH", replied Worf as he took a seat.

Arthur and Picard reseated themselves, and Picard said "So. What brought you to our rescue?"

"Well, actually I wasn't here to rescue anyone," Arthur began. "I was on my way back to Earth when my ship detected the Borg." He suddenly looked dead serious. "The Borg should not have reached this part of the galaxy yet. Do you have any idea why they were here?"

"Oh yes," answered Picard. "They are here because of Q."

Arthur's eyes widened. "Q! Please tell me more."

Picard explained how Q had appeared and said "You judge yourself against the pitiful adversaries you've encountered so far" and then threw the Enterprise 7,000 light years into Borg space.

Arthur was visibly irritated. "Resa!" he exclaimed. "File a report on this and add a personal note that the Q are attempting to advance the technological development of the Federation in a manner that is causing unanticipated Borg expansion into the Alpha quadrant."

"Submitted," came the reply.

"Is that the Q's goal?" asked Riker. "To force us to advance or die?"

Arthur said, "I'm not privy to the thoughts of the Q, but yes, that's my point of view." He looked at Picard. "Humans are a minor species to the Q. I'm surprised they have any interest at all in interfering with human affairs."

"The Q have no honor," chimed in Worf.

Arthur shook his head. "Actually they do. It's just not anything that corresponds to Klingon honor." He turned back to Picard. "I've reported this. Now we just have to wait."

"Reported to who?" asked Riker.

Arthur leaned back in his chair. "The Xi -- no, let me start at the beginning.

There are three elder races in the galaxy: the Q, who you've met, the Xilothians, who I, well, work for, and the Va'Daq. The Va'Daq prefer their own company and do not get involved in the affairs of other races, except in rare instances. The Q -- well, some of those in the continuum -- delight in involvement, but they usually only interact with the more advanced races, like the Douwd and the Organians. And the Xilothians think races should be left to pursue their own destinies, as long as those destinies do not lead to large-scale havoc.

The Xilothians and the Q have butted heads in the past over Q's interference with other races. They may do so again in this instance."

Counselor Troi spoke up. "How did you get involved with the Xilothians?"

Arthur paused and got a distant look in his eyes. "I was a radio operator for an army unit during World War II. My unit was surrounded, everyone was being cut down, and there I was in the middle of it reporting back to HQ just like they trained me, as objectively and as dispassionately as possible. I probably had seconds to live. Then the next thing I knew I was on a spaceship, similar to the one I use now.

The captain was an Ocampan. You'll meet them someday. He said that I had exhibited the qualities his sponsors were looking for, and he wanted to offer me a job."

"And that job is?" Troi asked.

Arthur looked around the table. "I am a 'Point of View' for the Xilothians. They greatly value hearing the events of the galaxy as interpreted by other species. So, they recruit beings from many different races to explore the galaxy and report back on what they see."

"In ships that can destroy the Borg," observed Riker.

"They give us technology to remain hidden if we choose. If we don't, they make sure we can defend ourselves against pretty much every species out there." He glanced at Troi. "That's why you can't get a read on me. It's my protection against belligerent telepathic species."

Picard spoke up again. "From what you've said, though, it sounds like the Xilothians have something like the Federation principle of non-interference. And yet you interfered."

"Well," began Arthur, "I do have some leeway. And I saw a ship full of my fellow humans being attacked by a Borg vessel that had no business being in this part of the galaxy. However," he sighed. "You are essentially right. I may have to pay a price for my actions."

A new voice spoke from the doorway. "You certainly will if I have anything to say about it." Picard and Riker turned, then spoke in unison: "Q!"

"Hello, Mon Capitaine," replied Q. "I have come to right a wrong, to see justice served, and..." he turned to look directly at Arthur, "to make sure that events unfold as the Q have intended."

A second voice spoke from the other side of the room. "That has yet to be decided." Heads swung to the newcomer, who -- like Q -- appeared in human form, but unlike Q took a female guise.

"This is none of your business," snorted Q.

"Perhaps," the female replied. "Perhaps if you had discussed your plans beforehand, we would have agreed with your course of action. But now, that course has been interrupted by our Point of View and it is most definitely our business."

Q huffed. "Your so-called Point of View has also kept a dead Borg from destructing so that this crew can study it. It's down in their sickbay now." He scowled. "We should have never agreed to your proposal for a council of elder races." The female said nothing, and after a moment Q shrugged. "Very well." He held out his hand and a small glowing orb appeared just above it. It floated over to the female who closed her hand around it. She stood still for a second, and then said "This is a risky path you are taking."

"That's always been the problem with you Xilothians," said Q. "You're never willing to take risks."

"And you Q have always been too casual in your use of lives," she answered.

"So a few eggs get broken," replied Q. "It's worth it."

The Xilothian closed her eyes, appeared to be meditating. A moment later, she opened her eyes and simply said "we disagree."

Q grew visibly petulant. "But how will --" he began, and then smiled. "Janeway," he murmured, so softly the others only heard a mumble. "Ok," he said to the Xilothian, "what about this." A second glowing sphere floated over. She considered it, and simply said "this is acceptable. We will not interfere."

"Picard stood. "Interfere? Interfere in what? What have you two decided?"

Q turned to Picard. "I would love to stay and swap recipes, but I simply must be going." And he vanished.

The Xilothian turned to Arthur. "Your interference is understandable but must not happen again. You will proceed to the Gamma quadrant and remain there until further notice." She gestured, and he vanished.

She turned to Picard. "Captain, prepare." And then she was gone.

"Prepare?" Picard said to the spot where she had been standing. "Prepare for what?"

Just then his communicator beeped. "Captain, Crusher here. The Borg is...reactivating. It's waking up."

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