



Losing the Peace (Star Trek: The Next Generation)

By William Leisner

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Continuing the events detailed in *Star Trek: Destiny*: With the displacement and devastation wrought by the Borg, can the Federation survive?

The Borg invasion has left the Federation reeling. Countless people have been killed or displaced by the wonton destruction, and now seek solace on planets that struggle just to feed their own. The ideals wrought in the paradise that was the United Federation of Planets now seem to be a distant dream. Starfleet is shattered, giving old enemies a chance to gain the upper hand. The question now is, what can one ship, and one captain do to prevent humanity from losing the peace?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

William Leisner is the author of the acclaimed novels *Star Trek: The Next Generation: Losing the Peace*, and *A Less Perfect Union* (from the *Myriad Universes* collection *Infinity's Prism*). He is a three-time winner of the late, lamented *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* competition, as contributed tales to the official celebration of *Star Trek's* 40th anniversary in 2006, and *TNG's* 20th Anniversary in 2007. A native of Rochester, New York, he currently lives in Minneapolis.

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The boy lay on the grassy hillside, the back of his head cradled in the roots of the old poplar tree, staring up into the infinite nighttime sky. Below him, the entire valley seemed asleep, with only a few scattered lights coming from the windows of its farmhouses and villages. The near perfect darkness made even the dimmest stars of the Milky Way shine like lighthouse beacons, guiding ship captains on their long journeys across the sea of space.

"Jean-Luc!"

The boy did not hear the voice coming from the direction of the house at first -- or rather, he chose not to hear it. He didn't want to have to give up this place, this memory frozen in time. He kept his eyes and his imagination fixed on the stars above.

"Jean-Luc!" a second, younger voice called from much closer by, accompanied by the rustling of grass and snap of twigs. The boy's thoughts now fell away from the sky and down to earth. Specifically, he wished for the ground underneath to open up and swallow him, hiding him from the pair looking for him.

But to no avail. "Here you are!" the boy crowed triumphantly, leaping from out of nowhere and landing his heavy work boots on either side of Jean-Luc's waist. "Dreaming again, are you, *mon petit frère*?" Robert grinned down at him, long dark hair flopping over his eyes. He had always been the bigger of the two brothers, and in the summer of his twelfth year, he had gained a full ten centimeters. "Don't you know what monsters lurk in the dark?"

Robert then let out a roar and fell atop his younger brother. The boy put his arms up to ward off the attack, catching the other in the chest and easily deflecting him. He then rolled in the same direction, seating himself on the bigger boy's stomach and pinning his shoulders to the ground with both hands -- though only momentarily, before their positions reversed again. Arms and legs flailed as they wrestled wildly, his brother laughing as he grabbed his wrists and pinned them to the ground. The boy was surprised to find himself laughing as well, finding the roughhouse play strangely liberating, and he laughed even louder.

"Enough fighting," came the first voice again from just overhead. "There will be no more fighting."

Robert jumped off his brother and went to stand beside his father. "What are you doing out here in the dark,

mon garçon?" Maurice Picard asked in a deep, authoritative voice. Despite his bald pate and deeply lined face, prematurely aged by a lifetime tending to the vineyard, his sharp eyes and hawklike nose marked him as a man one did not lightly cross. "Dreaming again?"

"No, Papa," the boy fibbed. "I was just...I couldn't fall asleep, and I..." He hesitated, knowing there was no point in trying to lie; his father knew full well that his younger son did not share his feelings of obligation to tradition, and had no desire to remain forever bound to the place in which he had happened, by chance, to be born. And he knew there was no avoiding his father's disappointment in that regard.

But strangely, his father's scowl fell away, and a broad smile flashed across his weathered face. He lowered himself onto one knee and put a large, calloused hand on the young boy's shoulder. "You need to be true to yourself, Jean-Luc," the older man told him. "What I've given you -- our name, our land, our traditions -- was only a foundation, not a limitation. And no matter where else you go and what else you do, it will always be yours."

The boy smiled, and then threw his arms around his father's neck, hugging him with an entire lifetime of unexpressed emotion. Papa returned the embrace, and after an indeterminable time, they let go and fell back, along with Robert, onto their backs in the grass. The stars looked close enough now that Jean-Luc thought he could reach out and touch them.

"All we're seeing now is old light," Maurice said. "The stars we see are how they appeared years and years ago."

"The past is the past," Robert added. "To know what is now, you have to go out and explore on your own, eh?"

That sounded like a grand idea, Jean-Luc thought as he closed his eyes and continued to dream. *A grand idea, indeed...*

"Jean-Luc?"

Picard opened his eyes again, and was surprised to find that the starlit vista above Château Picard had been replaced by a sky of brilliant blue. He was further surprised to realize the figure before him calling his name was not his father or brother, but his wife. Beverly Crusher smiled down at him, standing so that her shadow fell over him, shading his eyes from the brightness of midday. With the sun at her back, she appeared as a classical angel, surrounded by an ephemeral light, her long red tresses like flames as loose strands flew in the breeze. She had no wings, of course, and her rounded, pregnant stomach was also at odds with the traditional depiction of asexual divine messengers, but as far as Jean-Luc Picard was concerned, she was most definitely a heavenly being. "What are you doing out here?" she asked him, amusement in her tone.

"Not napping, certainly," Picard said, grinning up at her as he pushed up into a sitting position. "Only old men doze off in the middle of the day."

"Old men, and exhausted ship's captains," Crusher retorted, smiling back sweetly at him. "You're supposed to be on rest leave, and you need all you can get," she told him.

Picard refrained from contradicting the doctor. They were at his ancestral home in Labarre while the *Enterprise* was in drydock at McKinley Station, undergoing repairs to the widespread damage it had suffered during the most recent conflict with the Borg. He'd slept little during the crisis, of course, and had operated almost exclusively on adrenaline and sheer willpower when awake.

Despite all that, he did not feel exhausted. What he experienced at the end of the war -- witnessing the dismantling of the Borg collective by the Caeliar, and sharing, in a limited way, the absorption of billions of former drones into the Caeliar gestalt -- relieved him of his fatigue, instead filling him with pure joy as he was finally emancipated from his lingering, fifteen-year link to the Borg.

Beverly lowered herself onto the grass beside her husband. Spring was officially still a few weeks away, but already the world around them was coming back to life in a riot of green. "Though, if you're going to nap," she said as she settled in and leaned backwards against his chest, "you might pick a more comfortable spot for it."

Picard chuckled as he slipped his arms around her and laid his cheek on the top of her head. "This actually has always been my favorite spot on the entire estate," he said. "I would sit or lie here for hours, watching the Paris-bound shuttles by day and the stars by night. Of course, part of that was the fact that, if I lay in just the right position, I couldn't be spotted from the house." He looked back over his shoulder at that house now -- or rather, the house his sister-in-law, Marie, had rebuilt on the original's foundation following the tragic fire that had claimed the lives of Robert and his son, René. It was a near-perfect re-creation; if not for the loss of the roof-high shade trees closest to the house, he would have no trouble imagining himself over a half century back in time. "I had a most curious dream," he mentioned as the nostalgia washed over him again.

"Oh?"

Picard nodded. "I was a boy again, lying here, staring up at the stars. My father and brother came looking for me, and when they found me..." Picard paused significantly before continuing, "Father gave me his blessing to leave home, to follow my dreams." He smiled at the marvel of it. "Robert and I were able to reconcile before he died. But Father..." His voice broke momentarily. Beverly shifted her position so that she could look at him directly once he was able to continue. "I was away, on the *Stargazer*, when he died, and I'd always assumed that, to the end, he stayed as stubborn as he ever was in life." So certain of this was he that, when Q had presented him with a vision of his father during his own near-death experience, Jean-Luc had no trouble accepting bitter, disappointed old man as an accurate representation.

That negative image fell away now. "I feel now, though, that I've finally been given his absolution," Picard told Beverly, smiling again. "That all those old wounds have at long last been healed."

"That's wonderful, Jean-Luc," Beverly said, smiling back. "I know your relationship was troubled for a long time, and I'm glad you've finally found peace with your father's memory." She took one of Picard's hands and placed it on her swollen abdomen. "And I know your experience is going to make you an even better father to our son."

He answered by leaning forward to kiss her mouth. Jean-Luc Picard could not remember another time in his life when he had felt such peace and contentment.

"You know," Beverly said once their lips had parted again, "when you told me just now that you had a curious dream, I thought for a moment you were going to tell me..."

"What?" Picard prompted.

Hesitantly, as if afraid of bringing on a curse, she continued, "...that you dreamed about the Borg again."

Picard blinked in surprise. "Why...?" he began, then stopped. "No, Beverly," he assured her. "The Borg are gone, forever, from here and everywhere."

Crusher nodded, though she clearly did not feel Picard's confidence. "Yes. But...we've thought they were gone before."

Picard sighed. He wished that he could share with her the absolute certainty that had been conveyed to him by the Caeliar -- or whatever they and their newly liberated brethren had now become. All he could do was to look deep into his loved one's eyes and tell her, with all the conviction he could muster, "Beverly, believe me when I tell you: There are no more Borg. They are never coming back. We are all free."

Beverly stared back, and then allowed herself a small smile of relief. "Of course I believe you, Jean-Luc. Always...."

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