

“Resistance is futile.” Or is it? The characterization of the Borg in
Star Trek: The Next Generation

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Master's Thesis

English

Languages and Literature

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Autumn 2020

Abstract

This study analyzes how the Borg are characterized and depicted and how this characterization develops in the science fiction television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994). The focus of this study is not to cover the entirety of this series, but instead focus on a few episodes relevant to the study. Furthermore, the study focuses also on what kind of different themes are represented and reflected with the depiction and characterization of the Borg and how these occur. The Borg are an alien, cybernetic humanoid species, typically depicted as antagonists in the *Star Trek* world. The Borg are also typically depicted as machine-like automatons, linked into a hive mind that is shared within their entire Borg Collective. Therefore, they are typically represented as lacking a sense of individuality.

The methodology applied in the study for analyzing the characters and their actions is functional semiotic approach, which is a character-based approach to film and TV analysis. Comprehension of the characters and their interaction with each other are considered to be one of the most important elements in the narrative comprehension and interpretation. Functional semiotic approach can also be used to apply a delicate framework for analyzing the relationships between the characters. The study also adopts the notion of the theory of de-villainization, which includes the concepts of geopolitics and empathic reading. These are used to complement the theoretical framework for the analysis. The process of de-villainization blurs the line between the threshold of a protagonist and an antagonist. Empathic reading requires the understanding of the historical context surrounding a villainized group or population. In the concept of geopolitics, the role of an individual representative of an antagonized group is considered to be of significant importance in how outsiders perceive them.

This study suggests that the Borg are first depicted as a nearly indestructible, dangerous threat to humans and other cultures in the world of *Star Trek*, as they assimilate other species into their collective. However, the Borg are later humanized and depicted in a more ambiguous manner. Eventually, an individual Borg character, Hugh, is even portrayed as a protagonist in the episode “I Borg.” This is done with the characterization of Hugh after he is detached from the Borg Collective. Hugh begins to develop a sense of individuality and appreciation of it. Hugh is also depicted to be an outsider in his appearance in the episode “I Borg.” As an outsider, he questions the actions and

behavior of the human characters. This is used to reflect an optimistic view of humanity and traditional humanistic values that are typically seen in a positive light, such as forgiveness, individuality and empathy. *Star Trek* has often reflected different contemporary and relevant social issues and humanistic values, and this TV series aims to convey these issues and values to the viewer in the characterization of Hugh.

Keywords: *Star Trek*, individuality, de-villainization, utopia, Borg, hive mind, science fiction

Tiivistelmä

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma analysoi, kuinka Borg-nimisten hahmojen hahmon kuvaus toteutetaan ja esitetään ja kuinka tämä hahmon kuvaus kehittyy scifi-televisiosarjassa *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994). Tutkimuksen tarkoitus ei ole kattaa Borgien esiintymistä koko sarjassa, vaan sen sijaan keskittyä muutamaaan tutkimukselle relevanttiin jaksoon. Tutkimus keskittyy lisäksi siihen, minkälaisia teemoja Borgien esittämisellä ja hahmon kuvauksella ilmaistaan ja heijastetaan, sekä kuinka nämä tulevat esille. Borgit ovat maapallon ulkopuolinen, teknologialla vahvistettu, kyberneettinen ihmismäinen laji, jotka esitetään tyypillisesti antagonisteina *Star Trekin* maailmassa. Borgit esitetään tyypillisesti myös konemaisina, robotteja muistuttavina olentoina, jotka ovat yhteydessä toisiinsa jaetussa tajunnassa ja kollektiivissa. Siitä syystä Borgeilta tyypillisesti puuttuu yksilöllisyyden taju.

Tutkimuksessa käytetty metodologia hahmojen analyysiin ja heidän toimimiseensa on toiminnallinen semioottinen lähestymistapa, joka on hahmopohjainen lähestymistapa elokuva- ja TV analyysiin. Hahmojen ja heidän keskinäisen vuorovaikutuksensa ymmärtämistä pidetään yhtenä tärkeimmistä elementeistä narratiivisessa ymmärryksessä ja tulkinnassa. Toiminnallista semioottista lähestymistapaa voidaan käyttää myös tarkan kehyksen luomiseen hahmojen keskinäisten suhteiden analysoinnissa. Tutkimus käyttää myös antagonistien inhimillistämisen teoriaa, johon sisältyy geopolitiikan ja empaattisen lukemisen käsitteet. Näitä käytetään täydentävänä teoreettisena kehyksenä tutkimuksen analyysissä. Antagonistin inhimillistämistä voidaan käyttää protagonistin ja antagonistin rajan sumentamiseen. Empaattinen tulkinta vaatii historiallisen kontekstin ymmärtämistä koskien ryhmää tai populaatiota, jotka tyypillisesti nähdään antagonisteina. Geopolitiikan käsitteessä nähdään, että yksittäisellä edustajalla on merkittävä rooli siinä, kuinka ulkopuoliset mieltävät ryhmän, joka tyypillisesti nähdään antagonisteina.

Tutkimuksen analyysi osoittaa, että Borgit kuvataan ensin lähes tuhoutumattomana, vaarallisena uhkana ihmisille ja muille *Star Trekin* maailman kulttuureille, koska Borgit sulauttavat muita lajeja osaksi heidän kollektiiviaan. Borgit kuitenkin inhimillistetaan ja esitetään myöhemmin monitulkinnaisella tavalla. Yksittäistä Borg-hahmoa esitetään jopa protagonistina jaksossa ”I Borg.” Tämä toteutetaan Hugh-nimisen Borgin hahmon kuvauksella sen jälkeen, kun hän erkaantuu Borgien kollektiivista. Tälle hahmolle alkaa kehittyä yksilöllisyyden tunne ja arvostus sitä kohtaan.

Hugh kuvataan myös ulkopuolisena hahmona hänen esiintymisessään jaksossa "I Borg." Hugh kyseenalaistaa ulkopuolisena hahmona usein ihmishahmojen toimintaa ja käytöstä. Tätä käytetään sellaisten perinteisten humanististen arvojen heijastamiseen, mitkä nähdään tyypillisesti positiivisessa valossa, kuten anteeksiantaminen, yksilöllisyys ja empatia. *Star Trek* on usein heijastanut erilaisia aikakauden mukaisia ja relevantteja sosiaalisia ongelmia sekä humanistisia arvoja, ja tämä TV-sarja pyrkii ilmaisemaan näitä ongelmia ja arvoja katsojalle Hugh'n hahmon kuvauksella ja esittämisellä.

Avainsanat: *Star Trek*, yksilöllisyys, antagonistin inhimillistäminen, utopia, Borg, kollektiivinen tietoisuus, scifi

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1 Introduction

Star Trek is one of the most well-known and popular science fiction franchises in the world. It has been around for over 50 years. The first series in the franchise, *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966–1969) was created by Gene Roddenberry. The second live-action *Star Trek* series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* aired between 1987 and 1994. There were two new series developed in the 1990s, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–1999) and *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995–2001) and one series in the 2000s, *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001–2005). After a long hiatus, *Star Trek* returned to the television in the late 2010s with *Star Trek: Discovery* (2017–) and *Star Trek: Picard* (2020–). In addition to the TV series, there are currently a total of 13 films in the franchise, released between 1979 and 2016. Generally, the TV series and the films share the same continuity with each other, but each series has their own different setting and main characters.

Instead of taking place in a purely imaginary fantasy world like for example the *Star Wars* franchise, *Star Trek* is depicted to take place in the future of humanity, more specifically in the 22nd, 23rd and 24th centuries, depending on the series. Furthermore, *Star Trek* is not aiming to tell fantastical stories, but instead scientifically believable science fiction. The writers of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* note about the difference between science fiction and fantasy; both can deal with unusual events, but science fiction stories are based on extrapolations of generally accepted scientific facts or theories, whereas fantasy does not need to have a basis in reality (Block & Erdmann, 2012, p. 124). Jacob Barber (2017) notes in his article that *Star Trek* attempts to deal with its premise seriously and create characters who respond to the imagined worlds in believable ways (p. 41). *Star Trek* depicts the future of humanity in a mostly utopian setting. For example, Earth is depicted as free of inner conflicts, as there are no wars taking place on Earth and hunger and poverty do not exist there anymore.

An important aspect of *Star Trek* has always been that while it is a science-fiction show, the main focus of the franchise has never been on aliens, spaceships or action. Instead, *Star Trek* has typically focused on addressing and reflecting different relevant and contemporary social and political issues, such as individuality, inclusiveness, diversity, prejudice, racism or war and examining them in a believable science fiction setting. Weldes (2003) notes how the worlds of science fiction allow the viewers to explore elements of a contemporary society in more or less estranged settings (p. 11). In

Star Trek, these issues are often tackled with a humanistic, liberal focus and values. Other recurring themes in *Star Trek* are different ethical, moral, or philosophical dilemmas and questions that are often addressed and dealt through the characters and their actions. Furthermore, *Star Trek* has typically examined the different aspects of humanity either through human or alien characters, or sometimes through characters with artificial intelligence like androids or the Borg. In many ways, *Star Trek* has been a reflection of the western and American society and their different aspects since the beginning of the franchise in the 1960s.

However, some research has also pointed out the problems in how these issues are represented in *Star Trek*. For example, Neumann (2003) points out how the United Federation of Planets (shortly just the Federation), which acts in *Star Trek* like an interstellar United Nations consisting of several planets, including Earth, is typically depicted as a social order and role model that should be idolized by other cultures (p. 45). Neuman (2003) also suggests that the Federation's relationship and diplomacy with the non-Federation world is sometimes depicted to be imperialistic in the sense that the Federation's way of life is the only correct one (p. 46). Inayatullah (2003) also notes how *Star Trek: The Next Generation* often depicts the Federation as something that does not see itself as *developing*, but it has rather already *developed*. Furthermore, the Federation is depicted to often fill the lack of others, while not aiming to search, expose or fill its own lack. In addition to this, *Star Trek* often convinces that the Federation must teach others and not learn from them, even though it seemingly pretends otherwise (p. 54). Therefore, *Star Trek's* representation of social and political issues is not without its flaws and should be examined critically.

Star Trek is an interesting franchise to study, as it is one of the oldest and most popular science fiction franchises in television and film. The way *Star Trek* handles and discusses the different topical social issues is also usually very sophisticated, mature and interesting. *Star Trek* is also a relevant franchise in today's world, as for example *Star Trek: Discovery* is quite popular and ongoing, with its third season having premiered in October 2020. In addition to this, a new upcoming *Star Trek* film is in early pre-production and set to release in the near future. The ninth TV series, *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*, is also in early pre-production. Furthermore, *Star Trek* has had a major cultural impact since its inception, as it has spawned several similar science fiction franchises, such as *The Orville* (2017–) and *Babylon 5* (1994–1998). *Star Trek* has also been parodied and referenced several times, for example in the popular TV series *The Simpsons* (1989–) and *The Big Bang Theory* (2007–2019).

This study focuses on the Borg, a species of cybernetic humanoids and how they are characterized and depicted through different characters in the second live-action TV series in the franchise, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The series will be shortened to *TNG* for brevity and ease of reading. The Borg's characterization and depiction will be analyzed through following the actions of the Borg and key characters of *TNG*, as well as the interaction between these characters. The Borg are one of the most popular antagonists in *Star Trek*. While *Star Trek* is a popular subject of academic studies, there have been relatively few studies conducted on the Borg. What makes the Borg an interesting subject of study is the development in the characterization of the Borg from an antagonized collective to a more complex characterization where their villainess is blurred. This is clearly observable as *TNG* progresses. This study aims to answer the following questions: How are the Borg characterized and depicted in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and how does this characterization develop? How are the Borg de-villainized through the character of Hugh in the episode "I Borg"? What kind of themes are represented and reflected with the characterization of the Borg?

This study uses functional semiotic approach as the methodology for analyzing the actions of the characters. In addition to that, theories of de-villainization, geopolitics and empathic reading are used as additional theoretical framework in the analysis. These are described in section 3. Furthermore, some background information on the *Star Trek* franchise is given in section 2 that focuses on *TNG* as research material. The characters relevant to this study are also introduced there. The characterization of the Borg as a whole in the selected episodes and Hugh, a lone Borg drone, are analyzed in section 4.

2 Research material

This section sheds light on the *Star Trek* franchise, focusing on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. This section has also information about *TNG*'s characters, as they relevant to the study due to their role and importance in the referred episodes and it is important to know some context and background information on them.

2.1 *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

Star Trek: The Original Series was cancelled in 1969 due to low ratings. The first *Star Trek* film, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, was released in 1979 and the film received five sequels. They were successful in the box office and interest towards the franchise began to increase, which lead to the creation of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in 1987 (Block & Erdmann, 2012, p. 1). *TNG* was created by Gene Roddenberry, with Rick Berman and Michael Piller acting as showrunners for most of *TNG*'s run. The series aired 176 episodes, a total of seven seasons during its seven-year run on TV. The Borg make their first appearance during the second season, in the episode "Q Who." The Borg are used relatively sparsely in *TNG*, as they only appear in six episodes in the series. In addition to this, they are the main antagonists in the film *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996). There is some noticeable change in the Borg's depiction during *TNG*. They are first characterized simply as villains, but their characterization becomes more complex in their later appearances, especially in the episode "I Borg."

The story of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is set in the 24th century and it takes place between the years 2364 and 2370. Each season covers about one year in the chronology of the series. The main setting of *TNG* is onboard a starship called *U.S.S. Enterprise NCC 1701-D*, which is often abbreviated to the *USS Enterprise*, or (the) *Enterprise*. The main premise of the series is that the crew of the *Enterprise* is on an interstellar mission to find and explore new cultures and civilizations. The *Enterprise* is a large and powerful galaxy-class starship, with about one thousand crew members. It is owned by Starfleet, which is an Earth-based organization and part of the Federation, focusing on space exploration. Starfleet has its headquarters in San Francisco. Starfleet uses an officer ranking system similar to military and in order to become a Starfleet officer, it is required to complete

Starfleet Academy, which takes four years. *Enterprise*, like most of the ships in the Federation, is capable of combat, even though its primary function is to be an exploration ship. *Enterprise* is considered and depicted to be the most powerful ship in Federation and its flagship.

TNG is episodic by its structure, so most of the episodes are their own, self-contained stories. However, there are several two-part episodes in *TNG*. Contrary to serialized TV series, *TNG* does not have a singular ongoing storyline as its main focus. However, there is an overarching continuity within the series that is noticeable, for example in the characterization of the Borg. In addition to the main characters, there are several recurring side characters that appear throughout the series, and most of the main and recurring characters have noticeable character development. Like *Star Trek: The Original Series*, *TNG* depicts the future of humanity in a mostly optimistic, utopian setting. However, there are still conflicts, dangers and wars taking place in *TNG*, but they do not originate from the humans and humans are typically not depicted to be in conflict with each other. However, it is important to note that *Star Trek* and *TNG* do not depict humans as perfect beings.

2.2 Main characters of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

Beverly Crusher (played by Gates McFadden)

Beverly Crusher is the chief medical officer and doctor of the *Enterprise*. Crusher is close with Picard and they have mutual respect and admiration towards each other. They are also depicted to have occasional romantic feelings for each other. Crusher is very strong-willed and humanitarian by nature and is shown treating a young Borg drone saved by the *Enterprise's* crew in one of the analyzed episodes.

Borg (played by various actors)

The Borg are a species that is several thousand years old. They are drones, partly machines and partly organic. The term 'Borg' has the same singular and plural form. The Borg's scientific knowledge is superior to the Federation and Starfleet. The Borg are a collective entity, so the drones typically do not have individuality and they all share the same goal, which is to 'assimilate' other life-forms and civilizations to their Borg Collective. By assimilating others, the Borg turn their victims into other Borg drones by modifying them with cybernetic implants. The victims' knowledge and

experiences become part of the Collective. The ultimate goal of the Borg is to become 'perfect,' which is their reasoning for assimilating others and adapting their knowledge and technology. The Borg do not require traditional nutrition, so they digest energy through their energy conduit ports, which is then synthesized for the required organic nutrients.

Data (played by Brent Spiner)

Lieutenant Commander Data is a male android with an artificial intelligence operating system. He is the second officer of the *Enterprise*. Data is shown to be superior to humans in many ways, for example he is physically stronger, and he can also process information much faster.

Deanna Troi (played by Marina Sirtiz)

Deanna Troi is the *Enterprise's* counselor, which is an important position. Her job is to ensure the well-being of the ship's crew. She is also a trained bridge officer and has the rank of a lieutenant commander. Troi is half-human and half-Betazoid, which is an alien race capable of feeling the emotions of other life-forms.

Geordi La Forge (played by LeVar Burton)

Lieutenant Commander Geordi La Forge, often referred as Geordi by his friends, is the chief engineer of the *Enterprise*. Geordi has been blind since birth, but he has implants in his eyes that use an advanced visor. This allows him to see with an infra-red vision. In the episode "I Borg," Geordi befriends a Borg drone and names him Hugh.

Guinan (played by Whoopi Goldberg)

An alien female from a distant world, Guinan is the bartender of Ten Forward, the *Enterprise's* recreation facility. Guinan's exact age is never told, but Picard reveals that she is at least several centuries old. Guinan's race is almost extinct due to their encounter with the Borg prior to the events of the series. Guinan often offers counseling and advice for the main characters of *TNG*.

Hugh (played by Jonathan Del Arco)

A young Borg drone who is saved by the *Enterprise* in the episode "I Borg." Originally identified as Third of Five and later named Hugh by Geordi, Hugh develops a sense of individuality. Hugh is also the first Borg character depicted in a non-antagonistic manner.

Jean-Luc Picard (played by Patrick Stewart)

Picard is a life-long explorer and the captain of the *Enterprise*. He is a very experienced and honorable officer with a strong sense of duty. Picard is typically very diplomatic and sophisticated. Picard's relationship with the Borg is a troubled and traumatic one, as he is assimilated into the Borg Collective in the episode "The Best of Both Worlds."

Q (played by John de Lancie)

Q is a powerful, nearly omnipotent being from the realm known as the Q continuum. Q's species, simply called Q, are highly advanced beings whose powers and abilities appear godlike to humans. Even though Q is initially depicted to be an antagonist, throughout the series it becomes clear that he has a hidden agenda, where he seeks to help humanity. Furthermore, Q takes a special interest in Captain Picard. Q introduces the *Enterprise* and the Federation to the Borg in the episode "Q Who."

Wesley Crusher (played by Wil Wheaton)

Wesley is Beverly Crusher's son. He is a young ensign and the *Enterprise's* helmsman, who appears in "The Best of Both Worlds," but not in "Q Who" and "I Borg."

William Riker (played by Jonathan Frakes)

Commander Riker is the first officer of *Enterprise*, often referred to as Number One by Picard when on duty. Picard and Riker have a great deal of admiration, trust and mutual respect towards each other. In "The Best of Both Worlds," Riker is given a field promotion as the *Enterprise's* captain after the Borg assimilate Picard. When in command of the *Enterprise*, Riker is forced to almost kill Picard when Picard becomes a Borg drone.

Worf (played by Michael Dorn)

Lieutenant Worf is a Klingon, an honor-driven warrior race. Worf is the chief security officer of the *Enterprise*.

3 Theoretical and methodological framework

The theoretical and methodological framework applied in this study is presented in this section. In addition to that, some important terms and how they connect to this study are explained here. Furthermore, previous studies about *Star Trek* relevant to this study are presented in this section.

3.1 Functional semiotic approach: a tool for analyzing the characters

Functional semiotic approach can shortly be described as a character-based approach in film analysis. In her study, Tseng (2013) describes functional semiotic approach to be an analytical tool for constructing the action patterns of characters in film (p. 587). The understanding of the characters and their interaction with each other in film and TV is regarded to be one of the most significant elements in the narrative comprehension and interpretation, as the viewer's deduction of the narrative structures is significantly mediated by the characters. In functional semiotic approach, the faces, expressions, actions and all other behavior of the characters are used as the main resources for the analysis. By doing so, the viewer can revise the different traits and emotions of the characters and how they are depicted. The characters have also a significant part in mediating entire narrative structures. In addition to this, the actions and interactions of the characters have a prominent role in the visual cognition of the viewer (Tseng, 2013, p. 587). For example, this means that the interaction between *TNG's* characters and the Borg play an important role in how the viewer perceives and interprets the narrative structures in the Borg's depiction. Visual cognition can be defined as a thought process where the viewer acquires knowledge and understanding of the characters through their thoughts and experiences. In "I Borg," as the characters are depicted to care for and empathize with the character of Hugh, it is used to provoke similar feelings in the viewer.

Tseng (2013) also states that functional semiotic approach can be used to apply a more delicate framework for analyzing the relationships between the characters and how they are depicted. In addition to this, this can affect the viewer's relationship with the characters and how he or she interprets them (p. 589). Tseng (2013) further characterizes the framework as offering "a useful account of how viewers interact with film characters and how the interaction results in emotions

and sympathy” (p. 589). The mobilization of sympathy and gathering information about the characters are anchored in the perception of formal and textual elements. These elements construct the characters through the film in a coherent way (Tseng, 2013, p. 589). The viewer’s sense of empathy plays a crucial role in the analysis and interpretation of the characters and their actions. Tseng (2013) adopts the concepts of *recognition*, *alignment* and *allegiance*, from Smith (1995) and makes use of them in a multi-levelled, systematic framework of character analysis (p. 589). Furthermore, the information concerning the behavior and traits of the characters is mediated by their coherently constructed identities (Tseng, 2013, p. 589). In the analysis, this can be seen in the identities of *TNG*’s characters that are constructed over the course of the episodes. For example, Picard’s behavior and attitude towards the Borg are constructed with his experience as a Borg drone and this is used to justify Picard’s harsh behavior towards Hugh in the first half of “I Borg,” whereas Crusher is characterized as a humanitarian doctor willing to help those who are injured, even if they are possibly villainous. The context surrounding these characters plays also an important role in the construction of their identities and in the analysis of their behavior.

According to Tseng (2013), sympathy towards the characters can be seen on three different main levels: recognition, alignment and allegiance (p. 589). Recognition is an analytic tool that refers to the identification and acknowledgement of the identities of the characters. Tseng (2013) further states that this focuses on how the viewer perceives the filmic elements and how these elements are constructed in a coherent manner into a recognizable form surrounding the individual agents (p. 589).

Secondly, alignment extends beyond the formal cues that are presented to the viewer in the film. It is an analytic tool that refers to the level of information that is offered to the viewer on the actions, feelings and cognition of the character(s). Tseng (2013) further suggests that alignment can be used to give a somewhat limited view on certain characters and how they are depicted, which can be a conscious and subjective choice to mediate how the viewer perceives these characters (p. 589). The main principle behind alignment has been connected to the concept of geopolitics and villainization (Gunderman, 2017). In geopolitics and the antagonist/protagonist binary, the historical context and information that the viewer has or is provided play a crucial role in understanding the motivation behind the actions of the antagonists (Gunderman, 2017, p. 52). For example, if the viewer is only provided a limited amount of information about why the Borg or some other species that are

depicted as antagonists, act in a certain way, it is a conscious choice to mediate the viewer's perception of these characters as antagonists. However, if the viewer is given an understanding behind these actions, the antagonism of these characters can be blurred.

Finally, allegiance refers to the viewer's evaluation of the characters on a moral level. Allegiance has both cognitive and affective dimensions because the viewer could judge the characters based on emotional arousal and thus view the actions of the character through an emotionally loaded lens. Because of this, the viewer's allegiance to the characters is mediated by many different factors, for example the information collected through alignment, as well as the actions and behaviors of the characters (Tseng, 2013, p. 589).

Tseng moves on to introduce Eder's (2010) framework for character analysis, which can be used for further analysis in how characters are interpreted and understood. This framework involves four major levels of description that build and are in constant interaction on each other (Eder, 2010, p.21). These four levels are:

1. Artefact: the lowest level that deals with the composition of concrete materials and aesthetic structures. This level addresses how the characters are depicted textually and stylistically.
2. Fictional being: the second level addresses the formation of socially contextualized character traits and the mental models of the characters, for example what kind of features the characters are depicted to possess.
3. Symbol: based on the first two levels, this higher descriptive level describes what the characters represent and what indirect meanings they convey.
4. Symptom: the highest level involves more culturally framed intentions that the filmmakers want to convey through the characters and their actions, for example if the characters are depicted as role models for the viewer. (Eder, 2010, p. 21)

Tseng's study rests on the two lower descriptive levels of Eder's framework, focusing on the patterning of action and character elements. Furthermore, Tseng's (2013) method reflects on how the textual structures and stylistic formations of the characters are depicted (p. 590). Eder's theoretical apparatuses are applied in the thesis for analyzing the Borg's characterization. When analyzing the textual and stylistic depiction of the Borg, one focus is on the concrete depiction of

them, for example what their actions, behavior and interaction with the main characters are and how the Borg's appearance is depicted. Further analysis is applied when looking at how the Borg's society is constructed and what kind of contextual information is provided of them. In addition to these, the analysis will pay attention to what kind of themes, symbolism, meanings and intentions the episodes aim to convey with the Borg's characterization.

3.2 The concept of utopia and its representation in *Star Trek*

An important theme in *Star Trek* is the utopian depiction of the future. The basic definition of a utopia is that of a community or society that is depicted to have highly desirable qualities. An important part of a utopian depiction is also that the citizens of these societies or communities are depicted to have highly desirable and positive qualities. Shortly, utopia is seen as the opposite of dystopia, as a dystopia is a portrayal of a negative and undesirable depiction of an imagined society or community. Weldes (2003) notes how utopias represent what we hope the future will be, whereas dystopias something we fear the future might be. Dystopias extrapolate negatively from contemporary trends as and as result, often provide themes directly critical of contemporary world politics (p. 10).

In his article, Breteton (2005) writes that "Utopianism can be broadly defined as the desire for a better way of living expressed in the description of a different kind of society that makes possible an alternative way of life" (p. 21). According to Parrinder (2000), the depiction of utopia in science fiction can also be used to improve the societies we live in (p. 23). He further clarifies that "Not only is science fiction an idea of tremendous import, but it is to be an important factor in making a world a better place to live in, through educating the public to the possibilities of science on life which, even today, are not appreciated by the man on the street" (Parrinder, 2000, p. 23). Curtis (2005) points out in her study that

Utopia is thus not the attempt to bring about heaven on earth. For the true utopian sees her project as both a critical reflection on the flaws of her society and also a prescriptive outline for the possibility of a better future. (p. 148)

Braine (1994) argues in his study that the *Enterprise* on *TNG* is a utopian community in itself and he compares the *Enterprise* to a small town “where your neighbors are your co-workers, where everyone walks to work, and where most contact is face-to-face” (p. 9). He further points out that “old fashioned values of community prevail: weekly poker games, drinks at the bar, plays, recitals, poetry readings, the compassionate local doctor, family intimacies” (Braine, 1994, p. 9). According to Braine (1994), the *Enterprise* also depicts its technology in a positive light and that it has preserved and developed the best technological aspects of the past (p. 8).

Data and the Borg are depicted as the opposite representations of technology in the sense that Data is the positive, utopian technological representation and manifestation. Braine (1994) notes how Data for example does not require sleep, food and he never complains (p. 10). However, *TNG* depicts Data as someone with free will, so he is not considered a slave or a collection of neural nets and algorithms, even though he is an android. Even though Data lacks emotions, he is not depicted as an automaton, but instead as someone who is innocent and enthusiastic. Data is the literal incarnation of the technologically confident and humanistic future (Braine, 1994, p. 10). Braine (1994) further writes, Data is “intelligent and strong beyond human capacity, yet domesticated and entirely subservient to human needs” (p. 9).

Contrary to Data, the Borg are presented in a negative, dystopian light (Braine, 1994, pp. 9–11). The Borg are depicted as a technological nightmare, as they are relentless, destructive and indifferent to other organic species in *Star Trek* (Braine, 1994, p. 10). Jackson (2003) discusses them as the ultimate collectivist threat to the liberal-humanist aspirations of the Federation (p. 144). Braine (1994) further writes about the Borg’s depiction; “Half humanoid, half cyborg, the Borg portray technology beyond human control, the organic consumed by the machine” (p. 10). Braine further compares Data to Spock, a Vulcan character in *Star Trek: The Original Series*, as both are non-human characters in environments that consist mostly of humans. Both Data and Spock are depicted as outsiders who adjust to the human environment and they both are fascinated by humans and humanity. Even though both are depicted emotionless, they display humane features such as curiosity, loyalty and ethics (Braine, 1994, pp. 9–10).

Braine’s statements on the Borg are accurate. The Borg are mostly depicted to be a dystopian community from a humanistic point of view, as the Borg drones assimilate other cultures to become

a part of them. The Borg are also typically seen as faceless automatons without free will or individuality. However, the depiction of the Borg is arguably blurred through the characterizations of Hugh, as more insight is brought into his character. Hugh's actions, behavior and appearance are normalized to the viewer while blurring the antagonism of the Borg. Furthermore, the interaction of Hugh and the central characters of *TNG* brings out and highlights several utopian elements in the world of *Star Trek*. These central characters are also used to blur the antagonistic status of the Borg through their actions, as well as their interaction with Hugh.

3.3 The concept and features of artificial intelligence (AI)

As the Borg are depicted to be technological, cybernetic lifeforms that are partly cybernetic and partly humanoids, the notion of artificial intelligence is introduced and discussed here. In the episode "Q Who," Riker notes how they are the humanoids, who are implanted with cybernetic parts that link to an AI system. As *Star Trek* is a fictional world, the depiction of AI in *Star Trek* cannot directly be compared to real-world AI systems. However, there are several similarities with *Star Trek's* depiction of AI and some real-world definitions and concepts of AI. Some of these traits can be seen in the depiction of the Borg.

In her article, Misselhorn (2018) discusses the concept of real-world AI, stating that some of the AI systems aim to "model or simulate human cognitive abilities" (p. 161). In industrial production, machines are used to do tasks that are considered too difficult or dangerous for humans. Occasionally, machines are able to do these tasks better or faster (Misselhorn, 2018, p. 161). Misselhorn (2018) also brings up the term artificial morality, which refers to an emerging field in the AI development that explores whether AI systems can be applied with moral capacities and notes how artificial systems keep developing to become more intelligent when they are faced with situations requiring moral decisions. (Misselhorn, 2018, pp. 162–163). She further notes about the possible differences between human and AI behavior; it is common in philosophy that when humans do something, their reasoning consists of a combination of two attitudes: "a belief and a pro-attitude (e.g. a desire): I am going to the library, because I want to borrow a book (pro-attitude), and believe that the library has it (belief)" (Misselhorn, 2018, p. 163).

The Borg's hive mind-like behavior is typically depicted to resemble machines in many ways, such as their robotic expression and movement. Their information processing capabilities are also depicted to resemble computers. Furthermore, the Borg are shown to rapidly increase their intelligence and knowledge, as they adapt against the weaponry that is used against them for example. The character of Hugh is likewise depicted to become more intelligent on an individual level in the episode "I Borg" as he is placed in a situation that requires moral decisions. However, what separates Hugh from the typically portrayed AI characters is that the reasoning behind his actions can be considered to be pro-attitude-based, as he has a humane reason behind an important decision he is forced to make in the end of the episode where artificial morality is put to the test.

3.4 De-villainization and geopolitics in *Star Trek*

In her article, Gunderman discusses Cardassians, a villainous extraterrestrial species in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, as a case study and how their antagonism is blurred and how they are de-villainized. Gunderman (2017) notes that the actions of the Cardassians are considered xenophobic, senseless, murderous and ruthless to the protagonists of *Star Trek* (p. 52). Furthermore, the Cardassians occupy geographic areas that exist in the plot as the embodiments of violence and war. A particularly significant part in the violent and brutal characterization of the Cardassians was the Cardassian Union's military control over the planet Bajor, named the Occupation that lasted for half a century. The brutality of the Cardassians was depicted and characterized by forced labor, slavery and mass genocide that they committed against the Bajorans (Gunderman, 2017, p. 52).

An empathic reading of the species that is typically villainized, such as the Cardassians, can blur the line between a protagonist and an antagonist, and understanding the historical context of the Cardassians plays a critical role in the blurring of their antagonistic characterization and whether the viewer considers them as villains (Gunderman, 2017, p. 52). This empathic reading allows the viewer to deconstruct the villainous characters that are typically depicted and presented in a negative, harmful and violent light. Villainous groups typically occupy a space that is normally associated with negative attributes like violence and destruction. However, a critical understanding

of the historical context surrounding the Cardassians that is depicted reveals a more complicated representation than ‘good versus bad’ (Gunderman, 2017, p. 52).

As the protagonist typically represents the moral actor within a situation, the actions of the protagonist are attuned to the well-being and desires of the main characters and their environment (Gunderman, 2017, p. 52). Contrary to the protagonists, antagonists work directly in opposition to the protagonists (Gunderman, 2017, p. 52). What is more, the genre of the media being consumed can also heavily influence what it means to be a protagonist or an antagonist, and furthermore, science fiction can inherently blur the boundaries between a protagonist and their associated antagonist (Gunderman, 2017, p. 53). This is typically done by presenting non-human representations of individual beings from an antagonistic species. The character of Q and the Borg are used as examples of how *Star Trek* can show either positive or negative effects when an individual is separated from their respective hives or collectives:

Individuals in these collective webs can also separate from the ‘hive,’ causing serious positive or negative repercussions for the group as a whole. This reinforces the importance of understanding not only the group dynamics of a certain population, but also the individuals that make up these populations. Their significance as individuals can be immense—to understand how places are made, we must understand the everyday geographies of the individuals that inhabit those spaces. (Gunderman, 2017, p. 54)

Gunderman (2017) further notes about blurring the threshold between an antagonist and a protagonist, as well as de-villainization that “the actions and movements of the protagonists are normalized, while the actions and movements of the antagonists are seen as foreign, unnecessary, violent, threatening, or simply, ‘bad’” (p. 56). That is, the relationships between the protagonists and the antagonists are often complex in different science fiction works. In *Star Trek* for example, some extraterrestrial races, who have been previously established as antagonists, can be de-villainized by acknowledging and being aware of the of the social and cultural spaces and conditions in which their species or society exists (Gunderman, 2017, p. 56). In short, this means that by learning more about the culture of a previously villainized race, the viewer is offered an understanding of the antagonists and reasoning behind them, as well as insight into the antagonists, which can further blur the line of their villainess. This can also be connected to Tseng’s (2013) concept of allegiance, where the viewer evaluates the characters on a moral level through an

emotional lens (p. 589). Naturally, the viewer's own moral values and emotional arousal can affect the way that the antagonists and protagonists are interpreted.

Individual characters who are representatives of their respective species, can also present an opportunity to learn about gaining empathy towards the population or species that is typically depicted as antagonists or villains (Gunderman, 2017, pp. 56–57). According to Gunderman (2017), science fiction facilitates emotional connections between the viewer and the subject and for example in *Star Trek*, real-world issues and populations are often connected to and depicted through non-existent landscapes and species (p. 57).

Gunderman further notes that as science fiction can be considered to be a lens through which the line between protagonist and antagonist can be blurred, the viewer can start developing commentary on the individual person's significance within his or her population. She uses the term geopolitics that typically vilifies an entire group in a negative light, while in reality it is the actions of particular members of these groups or species that contribute their negative reception. In real-life geopolitics, the main premise of geopolitics is that one individual's interaction with the media may be considered to be of significant importance. These interactions build upon themselves on a larger scale and can affect for example how an entire community or country is perceived by others (Gunderman, 2017, pp. 53–54). The main principle and idea behind geopolitics can also be applied in the depiction and perception of larger groups of characters in fictional media like *Star Trek*. Gunderman argues that each *Star Trek* episode creates its own geopolitical environment through the characters and story arcs. The writers aim to draw geopolitical connections from the real-world and reflect these through the plotlines. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this connection between the real-world and *Star Trek*'s storylines depends on how well the viewers can tie the depicted stories and the real-world geopolitical environment surrounding them (Gunderman, 2017, p. 54).

Somewhat similar de-villainizations have occurred in other popular franchises as well, like for example in the fantasy TV series *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019). *Game of Thrones* has several complex characters whose protagonist/antagonist binary are blurred, one of them being Jaime Lannister. In his earlier characterization during the first two seasons, he was depicted as an antagonistic character with undesirable traits like incest and betrayal (Cormier, 2019, p. 8). He for example murdered the king of Westeros, which is a kingdom the TV series is set in. Earlier, no

concrete explanation was provided for Jaime murdering the king he had sworn to protect, but it was later revealed that he did so to save millions of lives, as the king was attempting to burn the capital of Westeros in the face of defeat and usurpation (Cormier, 2019, pp. 15–16). This can be connected to the importance of historical context in the actions of a supposed or depicted villain. Furthermore, in the first season, Jaime pushes a young boy out of a tall windmill, as he accidentally spotted Jaime having sex with his own sister. This cripples the boy's legs permanently. However, in the third season, Jaime gets crippled himself, as his right, dominant hand is chopped off. As a feared master swordsman, this was devastating to Jaime's character. This is also a turning point for his characterization and signals a cyclical reversal, where Jaime is turned from a crippler to the crippled. Furthermore, it is a pivotal moment in Jaime's moral development, as he starts to change into an honorable and good-willed personality (Cormier, 2019, p. 16). As is the case with the de-villainization of the Cardassians, when Jaime is crippled, it does not render his action of crippling the young boy acceptable. However, the viewer is likely to build some empathy towards Jaime, as he becomes crippled himself and faces several difficulties because of it.

In modern-day villainizing of individuals or groups, their historical context is often not considered, which leads to the perceiving them as the Other (Gunderman, 2017, p. 56). Gunderman (2017) further notes, "This dichotomy can create an immediate barrier to empathy, lessening the possibility for reconciliation and understanding between the protagonist and their associated antagonist" (p. 56). By the term Other Gunderman refers to an individual or group who are perceived as foreign, unknown and villainized. The de-villainization of science fiction antagonists presents an opportunity to use historical context for influencing the viewer's perception of the Othered groups. A critical part in the de-villainization of the Cardassians is to look for their depicted backstory. They were once known as the Hebitian civilization and inhabitants of the planet Cardassia Prime. The planet's natural resources had heavily declined and the Hebitian civilization was nearly driven to extinction due to starvation. The surviving members formed a military alliance that spread to the Milky Way galaxy, which lead to military conflicts with other planets. Considering and understanding this historical context with the Cardassians, as they became ruthless and violent in their military exploration, is crucial to understanding their actions. This same principle applies to any villainized group (Gunderman, 2017, p. 57).

Films do not often present a wider geopolitical conflict between the protagonists and the antagonists, which leads to the antagonists as being perceived as Othered. Furthermore, this results in a lack of empathy towards them. The blurring of this dichotomy may lead to the dissolution and deconstruction of the protagonist/antagonist binary. Understanding the background and social upbringing of the antagonists does not render their actions morally acceptable, excusable or unpunishable. This also does not necessarily portray them in a non-antagonistic way, but nevertheless is important to understanding the reasoning behind the antagonists. However, this empathic reading is important for the viewer in order to gain some sympathy towards the antagonistic groups (Gunderman, 2017, p. 59).

3.5 On the captivity narrative in *Star Trek: First Contact*

As was discussed in [3.4], the theme of the Other is also an important part in Tindol's study. He argues in his study that the Borg are partially depicted to represent the threat of world communism: "Seemingly paralleling anti-Communism in its most paranoid manifestations, the fear of the Borg is the fear of a dire fate to which death is decidedly preferable" (Tindol, 2012, p. 152). However, Tindol (2012) argues that they also represent a modern manifestation of an American literary genre, the captivity narrative, where death is often seen as preferable to being dragged away by an Other to an undesired place (Tindol, 2012, p. 152). An important reasoning behind this thinking is the preservation of one's individuality and identity, which must be protected from being corrupted by the dreaded Other (Tindol, 2012, p. 153). Tindol (2012) further notes how the captivity narrative is a "tale of the individual who was taken hostage and forced not only to seek out new reservoirs of resourcefulness, but also to maintain rigid devotion to a way of life that contrasted to that which the captors were attempting to impose" (p. 153).

Tindol uses the film *Star Trek: First Contact* as the main focus of his study. The film features the Borg as the main antagonists. They travel 300 years back in time to assimilate the Earth's population to prevent the Federation from being formed. Tindol points out how in the film, virtually all the characters prefer death to being assimilated by the Borg. Furthermore, Picard tells the Enterprise's crew to kill all the Borg drones without hesitation, even former crew members or friends had they been assimilated. Picard even shoots one freshly assimilated crewman himself, even though the

crewman was yelling 'help me' (Tindol, 2012, p. 155). According to Tindol (2012), "*Star Trek: First Contact* is relentless in discounting any possible benefit that could come from an encounter with an alien form such as the Borg" (p. 156). He also argues that the film depicts the only viable responses against the Borg in the *Star Trek* universe is to destroy all the Borg drones and every link to the Borg. Tindol notes how the film is in contradiction with the traditional optimism in *Star Trek*:

The only viable response to the Borg in the *Star Trek* universe is an all-out an unyielding effort to destroy not only every Borg drone, but every link to and manifestation of the Borg universe. The only good Borg is a dead Borg, one must assume, which is a surprising contradiction considering that *Star Trek* is a science-fiction franchise that has been lauded for decades for its humanity and tolerance. (Tindol, 2012, pp. 156–157)

However, it is important to note that Tindol's study focuses solely on the depiction of the Borg in *Star Trek: First Contact*, which was made several years after the Borg debuted on *TNG*. The Borg's depiction was also reimagined quite heavily for the film, as they were given a singular leader, even though the initial idea for the Borg was to function as a hive mind without a leader or hierarchy. Furthermore, the film depicts the Borg as completely Othered beings with little to no positive traits, whereas the depiction of the Borg in *TNG* is more blurred, especially in their later appearances in the series. However, the captivity narrative that Tindol refers to, is also evident in *TNG* through the characterization of Borg; some characters are depicted to prefer death to being assimilated by the Borg and losing their individuality and humanity.

4 Analysis

The relevant episodes to this study are analyzed in this section, beginning with the episode “Q Who,” “The Best of Both Worlds” and “The Best of Both Worlds, Part II.” The focus in analyzing these three episodes is the depiction and characterization of the Borg in them and how they interact with the main characters of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Due to the script’s large scope in “The Best of Both Worlds” and “The Best of Both Worlds, Part II,” their story will be summarized in the beginning of section 4.2.1 and only the relevant scenes will be examined more thoroughly. Later, the episode “I Borg” is examined in more detail, as nearly all the scenes in the episode revolve around Hugh and his characterization.

4.1 Introduction of the Other: the Borg in the episode “Q Who”

Q, a powerful and nearly omnipotent being, wants to join the *Enterprise*’s crew to provide assistance against an unknown danger he claims the *Enterprise* and Federation are not prepared for. As the captain of the *Enterprise*, Picard refuses, as Q has been troublesome for them in their previous encounters and because this, they do not trust Q. Picard ensures they are ready for whatever dangers ahead. Q leaves and uses his powers to take the *Enterprise* to a place 7000 light-years away. Shortly after, they are being scanned by a Borg ship. The *Enterprise* hails them to no avail.

Enterprise’s first encounter with the Borg depicts the Borg as Othered beings (see Tindol 2012). This is first noticeable as the Borg ignore the *Enterprise*’s attempt to hail them. Typically in *Star Trek*, the villainous species like the Romulans and Cardassians, answer whenever the lead characters attempt to hail them. Usually, they either attempt to intimidate or banter for a bit before a battle occurs. However, as the Borg do not react to the *Enterprise*’s hails at all, it immediately depicts them as foreign and different to other species in *Star Trek*’s world. This also gives an unpleasant first impression of the Borg, as this situation differs greatly from how the *Enterprise* usually deals with other enemies.

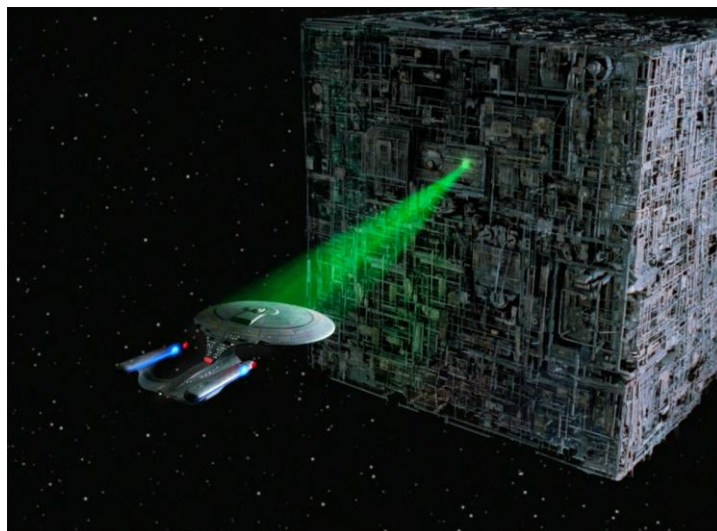
Furthermore, in comparison to typical *Star Trek* starships, the Borg ship has a completely different appearance. Usually, Starfleet ships have similar and identifiable designs; they have a saucer section

in the front of the ship, two nacelles in the back and a part that connects them (see figures 1 and 2). Many villain starships are also typically identifiable as starships, as they have a somewhat similar structure and they have visible windows, lights and a command bridge (see figure 1). However, the Borg ship is cubical, lacks any windows, lights, nacelles or a visible command bridge (see figure 2). In addition to that, the Borg ship is depicted to be much larger than the *Enterprise* or traditional villain ships, which immediately signals to the viewer that it is likely a very powerful ship. The design of the Borg ship appears as an important and arguably even a conscious choice to make the Borg seem different, foreign, threatening and Othered.

Figure 1. *USS Enterprise* and *Reklar*, a Cardassian vessel (Image: Memory Alpha)



Figure 2. *USS Enterprise* and the Borg ship (Image: Memory Alpha)



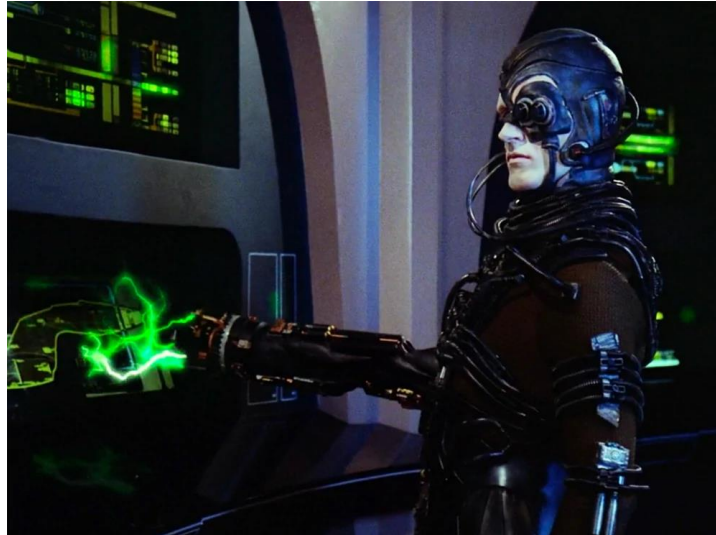
Shortly after encountering the Borg ship in “Q Who,” a single Borg drone beams onboard the *Enterprise*’s engineering room. The term ‘beam’ is used in *Star Trek* for instant transporting, which is done with a device called the transporter that is equipped in most starships. Geordi informs Picard of this and Picard, Worf and a security guard come to engineering. Q arrives there too and describes the Borg drone to Picard: “Interesting, isn’t it? Not a he, not a she. Not like anything you’ve ever seen. An enhanced humanoid” (Bowman, 1989, 21:50). Q’s description of the Borg implies they are genderless, and his choice of dialogue further highlights the Borg as completely alien and Othered to the extreme. It is also established that they are not machines, but a hybrid of a humanoid and a machine. It is interesting to note that later in the series, the Borg characters are depicted to have genders, for example Hugh is noticeably a young male, whereas Seven of Nine, a Borg character in *Star Trek: Voyager*, is a female. The genderless depiction of the Borg in “Q Who” further highlights their Otherness and differences to the other species of *Star Trek*, as usually all species are depicted to have two genders, male and female.

The threatening silence continues as the drone ignores Picard when he attempts to talk to it, but proceeds to download information from the ship’s computer and causes some electrical disruptions. Worf shoots the drone with a phaser – *Star Trek*’s term for a laser gun – but the drone is unaffected. Worf tries again with a more powerful shot, which stuns the Borg drone, and it collapses on the floor. Shortly, another drone beams next to the collapsed one. Worf shoots it too, but the drone generates a small force field that blocks the laser. The drone pays no attention to Picard, Worf and Geordi. However, it does look at them briefly after Worf shoots it. The drone collects some machine parts from the collapsed drone and they both beam away to the Borg ship.

In this scene, the Borg are depicted to only be interested in the technology they could acquire from the *Enterprise*. The Borg drone is depicted to not show any interest in Picard, Worf, Geordi and a security guard, and its physical superiority to the humans and Worf is established here, as it throws a security guard with one hand and sends him several meters away. However, the drone does not attack the main characters in this scene. It only throws the guard after the guard attempts to interfere with the drone when it is accessing the ship’s computer. Thus, the Borg are not necessarily depicted as evil beings here, yet different, and still threatening and dangerous.

The drone's physical appearance is also depicted to be very alien and technology oriented. It is shown to be a humanoid with several cybernetic parts and a mechanized arm instead of a regular arm with a hand and fingers (see figure 3).

Figure 3. The first Borg drone shown in *Star Trek* (Image: Memory Alpha)



In addition to the Borg's physical superiority, it is also established that a single Borg drone is powerful and dangerous from a technological perspective, as it causes visible electrical disruptions in the *Enterprise* while accessing the ship's computer. Typically, no single person of a villainized species is depicted to be able to cause these kinds of disruptions in another ship in *TNG*. This highlights the Borg's dangerousness and Otherness.

The drone is also depicted to show no interest in the main characters. It ignores all of Picard's attempts to communicate and reason with it. Usually, the villainous characters in *Star Trek* communicate with the main characters through conversation and are shown to be somewhat reasonable. It is established later in this episode that the Borg are able to communicate and understand *TNG*'s main characters. However, they seem to be only interested in the *Enterprise*'s technology in "Q Who." The main characters are purely biological characters and possess no technology in their bodies, so that is the likely reason the Borg are not interested in them. Another reason could be that the Borg simply think of the main characters as lower life forms not worthy of their attention. This scene also depicts the Borg's hive mind-like features: the second Borg drone that appears on the *Enterprise*, simply continues the first drone's task. The collective nature of their

consciousness is further established when Worf shoots the second drone; the first one had adapted to Worf's weapon and this adaption has been shared with the second drone through their Borg Collective.

In the next scene, the Borg ship hails the *Enterprise*. Picard begins to speak to them, but the Borg talk over him, stating that the *Enterprise* should not defend themselves. The Borg ship places a tractor beam on *Enterprise* and drills a small part of the ship away to study its technology. *Enterprise* manages to neutralize the Borg ship for a while. A bit later, Riker, Data and Worf beam onboard the Borg ship. While there, Riker wonders why the Borg ignore them. All the drones are in a stasis and connected to the walls and panels of the ship. Riker discovers that the Borg ship has a nursery with several humanoid infants with Borg implants attached to them. He deduces that the Borg link an artificial intelligence with the humanoid brain. The Borg ship starts to regenerate itself. Data concludes that the Borg must have ignored them, as their collective effort is directed to repair their ship. Picard orders them to return to the *Enterprise* because of this.

In this scene, it is established that the Borg do understand English when they make a brief communication to the *Enterprise*. However, their speech is very monotone and robotic. They also continue to be indifferent to the main characters, as they cut off Picard's sentence and ignore it. As the Borg talk over Picard, it showcases how they do not condescend to interact with the *Enterprise's* crew, who they see as insignificant beings. The Borg are also not depicted to assimilate other biological beings in this episode. Instead, they simply acquire the technology of others and destroy the residents. As the Borg nursery is shown, it is not established what species the infants are originally. A viewer might interpret the Borg to be born as biological beings and then enhanced with technology to become cyborgs. The later depiction of the Borg reveals that they assimilate other beings, but it is nevertheless interesting to note how the Borg are depicted slightly differently in their first appearance. However, the reveal of the nursery is an especially efficient way of creating an image of a terrifying collective enemy.

After Riker, Data and Worf return to the *Enterprise*, they escape the scene and the Borg pursue the *Enterprise* while still regenerating their ship. *Enterprise* fires photon torpedoes, but the Borg ship is unaffected. The Borg ship destroys the *Enterprise's* shields and locks them in a tractor beam. Riker orders Worf to prepare photon torpedoes, as the two ships get closer to each other. Data notes

how at this range, the *Enterprise* could be destroyed if they fire torpedoes without shields. Riker looks at Picard and Picard nods. Before firing the torpedoes, Q is about to leave, but Picard shows humility in the face of such a great threat and admits to Q that he was wrong about them being ready for anything. After this, Q takes the *Enterprise* back where they were in the beginning of the episode.

The Borg's technological superiority is further highlighted in this scene. Previously, no other ships have been able to regenerate themselves, whereas the Borg ship is able to do so rather rapidly. The Borg ship is also able to disable the *Enterprise's* shield very quickly. *Enterprise* is depicted to be the most powerful ship of Starfleet, so the Borg's dominance over them further depicts them to be vastly superior technologically. The captivity narrative (see Tindol 2012) is also somewhat visible in this scene; the main characters seem to be willing to destroy themselves along with the *Enterprise* rather than forfeiting it to by the Borg – an Othered group. However, it is not certain what the Borg might have done with the crew, as it is yet to be established in the series that they assimilate biological beings to their Collective.

When looking at “Q Who” from a geopolitical point of view, the episode does not present a wider geopolitical conflict between the Borg and the crew of the *Enterprise*. Gunderman (2017) points out how this type of characterization leads to the antagonists as being perceived as Othered beings (p. 59). This is definitely noticeable in the episode. The episode also does not aim to establish any empathy towards the Borg with the possible exception of the nursery. However, even the nursery scene does not reveal whether the infants are born as Borg or infants assimilated from other cultures. Furthermore, the episode does not reveal proper background information on the Borg's origins or social upbringing. There is an individual representation of the Borg when the first drone beams to the *Enterprise*. In geopolitics, the role of an individual character and its characterization is seen to be significantly important in how the group it is representing is perceived (Gunderman, 2017, pp. 53–54). The drone is depicted to be a machine-like automaton indifferent to the main characters. Its movement and actions are also depicted to be very alien and different to the main characters or previously encountered villainized characters in the series, like the Romulans or Cardassians. Gunderman notes how the actions and movements of an antagonist are seen foreign, unnecessary, violent, threatening or ‘bad’ (Gunderman, 2017, p. 56). While the two Borg drones are not necessarily ‘evil’ in this scene, they definitely appear to be foreign and threatening and show

some violent features, as the Borg violently throws the security guard away. Due to this, both the main characters and the viewer perceive the Borg as antagonistic and Othered.

Furthermore, there are several similarities in the Borg's depiction in this episode when compared to Braine's (1994) study. He notes how the Borg are depicted as a technological nightmare. In addition to that, the Borg are described to be relentless, destructive and indifferent to other organic species (Braine, 1994, p.10). Braine (1994) also notes how the Borg are depicted to portray "technology beyond human control, the organic consumed by the machine" (p. 10). In "Q Who," this is represented on several occasions, as the Borg are depicted to not show any interest in the main characters and they think nothing of them. The origin of the Borg is not revealed in *TNG*, but "Q Who" hints at the Borg being a species or society consumed by technology with the portrayal of the Borg nursery. The Borg also work in direct opposition of the episode's protagonists and their society, which further adds to their antagonism. "Q Who" does not provide any real historic context or background to allow the viewer to feel empathic towards the Borg. The episode aligns the viewer by giving only a somewhat limited amount of information on the Borg, but certainly does not create allegiance (see Tseng 2013), as the Borg's depiction is not aiming to give emotional arousal towards them. The Borg's societal environment is described quite detailed in the episode when Riker, Data and Worf are onboard the Borg ship. However, the environment does not depict the Borg in a positive or sympathetic way, as it appears alien and inhuman.

4.2.1 From "Q Who" to "The Best of Both Worlds" – Picard is assimilated by the Borg

Roughly a year after the events of "Q Who," Starfleet suspects the Borg have arrived in Federation space after the disappearance of a Federation colony on the planet Joret IV. *Enterprise* is sent to investigate the colony and they find it destroyed by the Borg. Lieutenant Commander Shelby, a Borg specialist, is temporarily assigned to the *Enterprise* to assist in the investigation. The Borg wish to find Picard and assimilate him to their Collective due to Picard's knowledge of Starfleet and the Federation. Later in the episode, Picard is assimilated to the Borg Collective, and he assumes a new identity as Locutus of Borg. This is an important moment in the Borg's characterization in *TNG*, as this is the first and only time when a main character becomes a Borg drone in the series. Thus, the episode offers a different approach in how the viewer perceives the Borg, as they are not depicted

only as faceless automatons. Instead, a familiar and important main character is turned into one. In the first part of “The Best of Both Worlds,” *Enterprise’s* crew unsuccessfully attempts to retrieve and rescue Picard from a Borg ship after his assimilation. As the Borg ship is preparing to leave for Earth to assimilate its populace, Riker is given a field promotion as the captain of the *Enterprise* with Picard seemingly gone. He is forced to order the *Enterprise* to destroy the Borg ship with Picard onboard. However, this attempt fails and Riker struggles to find a strategy for defeating the Borg invasion. The Borg ship leaves for Earth and destroys 40 Federation ships at Wolf 359, a solar system near Earth. Later, Riker realizes that the Collective used Picard’s knowledge to defeat the Federation’s armada. This gives an even more terrifying depiction of the Borg, as it is established that they can adapt and use their victims’ knowledge and use it against them. In the second half of “The Best of Both Worlds, Part II,” Riker sends an away team to the Borg cube to successfully retrieve Picard. An away team is a small team consisting of crew members sent on a mission, typically to explore or do scientific research. Riker, Data and Crusher turn the tables against the Borg by using Picard’s connection to the Collective to put them in hibernation, successfully defeating the Borg invasion.

4.2.2 The technological superiority of the Borg depicted in “The Best of Both Worlds”

The Borg’s destructiveness is depicted in the opening scene of “The Best of Both Worlds,” when Riker, Data, Worf and Geordi arrive on Joutet IV. The colony is shown to be completely gone and there is a large crater in its place (see figure 4). No other species is depicted to have caused destruction of this scale previously in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, which highlights the dangerousness of the Borg. After the opening scene, the Borg’s technological superiority is further depicted, as Picard, Riker, Shelby and Admiral Hanson discuss that they are not ready to face the Borg.

Figure 4. A destroyed Federation colony on Jouret IV (Image: IMDb)



Later in the episode, when the Borg ship and the *Enterprise* engage in their first battle, the Borg are depicted to easily overwhelm the *Enterprise*. Furthermore, when a few Borg drones beam to the *Enterprise*'s command bridge, they effortlessly overwhelm Riker and Worf and capture Picard. The Borg ship is also later shown to have easily defeated 40 Starfleet ships at Wolf 359, as the *Enterprise* arrives there.

4.2.3 The captivity narrative in "The Best of Both Worlds"

When Picard is brought to the Borg ship, the Borg Collective communicates with him. They wish to use Picard as their spokesperson in the assimilation of Earth's populace. Picard answers that "I will resist you with my last ounce of strength," to which the Borg reply, "Strength is irrelevant. Resistance is futile. We wish to improve ourselves. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness to our own. Your culture will adapt to service ours" (Bole, 1990a, 33:16–33:30). The Borg ignore when Picard replies, "We would rather die" (Bole, 1990a, 33:43).

There was already a hint of the captivity narrative shortly in "Q Who," when both Riker and Picard were willing to possibly sacrifice the *Enterprise* instead of surrendering it to the Borg. However, the captivity narrative is depicted much more clearly and literally in this scene. In "Q Who," there was not any concrete indication that the *Enterprise*'s crew would be turned into Borg drones had the Borg retrieved the *Enterprise*, so it could be interpreted that Picard and Riker were simply willing to

destroy the *Enterprise* and killing its crew instead of giving their technology to the Borg. However, in Picard's conversation with the Borg Collective, he literally says that his people would rather die than be turned to Borg drones. This can directly be connected to the captivity narrative that Tindol (2012) mentions in his study: "That war kills, then, is not precisely the point, nor is the fact that hostages sometimes do not survive; that one must preserve his or her soul from corruption is another matter entirely" (p. 153). Picard is depicted in this spirit – to be ready to die rather than being corrupted by an Other, which in this case means the assimilation by the Borg. When assimilated by the Borg, Picard loses his 'soul,' which in this case means his sense of individuality and personality. This scene also reflects a thematic of hyper rationalism against faith, where the Borg represent hyper rationalism and Picard represents faith. The Borg consider their deeds to be purely rational and thus just, while Picard feels that his actions are correct through his morals.

It is also interesting to note that there are slight differences in the depiction of the Borg between "Q Who" and "The Best of Both Worlds." In "Q Who," they were only depicted to acquire technology from other cultures and if faced with resistance, they would destroy the opposition. However, in "The Best of Both Worlds," it is established that they also assimilate persons. Their main reasoning for assimilating Picard is his knowledge as an experienced captain. However, when the Borg leave for Earth, their reasoning is depicted to be the assimilation of Earth's populace.

4.2.4 The action patterns of the Borg and their first sign of weakness

At first when Worf, Data, Crusher and Shelby are aboard the Borg vessel, the Borg ignore them. The Borg only start acknowledging the away team when they destroy some of the ship's inner distribution panels. This gives a very machine-like depiction of the drones, highlighting their Otherness, as they seem to operate with one task in mind; some drones go to repair these panels, while others proceed to eliminate the away team. This is also the first scene where some of the Borg's weaknesses is highlighted; the away team uses phasers that operate on different frequency levels and the Borg have difficulty in adapting to them in the beginning. The away team is able to defend themselves for some time, but quickly, the Borg adapt to their modified phaser frequencies.

4.2.5 Picard as Locutus; hints at his old personality and individuality?

In the final scene of the first episode, the Borg ship hails the Enterprise. Picard, having been turned to a Borg drone, speaks to them: "I am Locutus of Borg. Resistance is futile. Your life as it has been is over. From this time forward, you will service us" (Bole, 1990a, 43:56). "The knowledge and the experience of the human Picard is part of us now" (Bole, 1990b, 2:52). "Your resistance is hopeless, Number One" (Bole, 1990b, 3:03). Locutus is depicted to be the first and only Borg so far who refers to himself as "I," which hints at a sense individuality in Locutus. In fact, no other individual Borg drone has been depicted to speak before Locutus, as it has always been the entire Collective that speaks. When looking at Locutus' second line of dialogue, it becomes clear that Locutus is depicted to consider himself as a new person, as he refers to Picard in third person. Locutus is depicted to have the experience and knowledge of Picard and it is also clear he considers Picard dead. However, his last line of dialogue hints that there could still be some residue of Picard's personality in Locutus, as he refers to Riker as Number One, just as Picard usually does. After hearing these two words, Troi and Riker are clearly shocked. It could be possible that Locutus was simply trying to intimidate or play mind games with Riker. However, previously the Borg have not been depicted to do either of these, but merely state matters as facts. If they have, for example, said that the *Enterprise* is technologically inferior and therefore should not resist them, it has been depicted as a factual statement from the Borg. Due to this, it is more likely that there are hints of Picard's personality and possibly individuality left in Locutus. Another sign of Locutus having some of Picard's consciousness left is shown when the Borg make further modifications to Picard's body; he is seen to shed a single tear while quietly staring away with an otherwise emotionless face. While these modifications are depicted to look physically unpleasant, it is more likely that Picard is showing emotional damage, as his humanity and individuality are being stripped away. This arguably creates emotional viewer allegiance (see Tseng 2013) towards Picard, as the viewer is likely to feel emotion and compassion for Picard's humanity being taken away and him being depicted to be in emotional pain.

4.2.6 Divided perceptions of Picard as Locutus

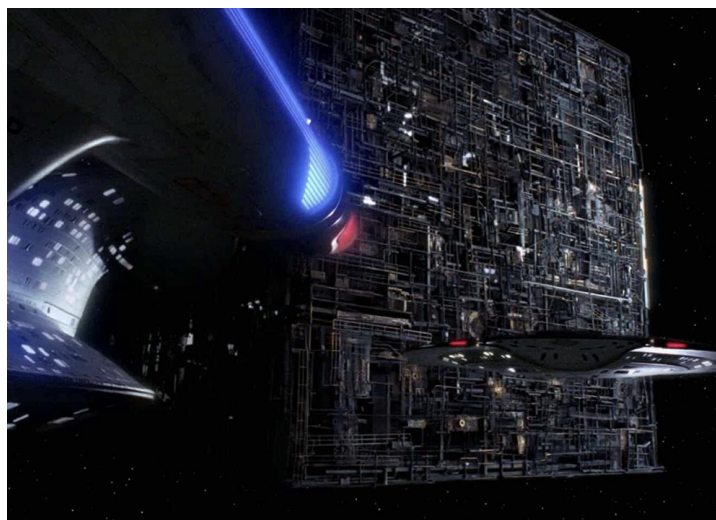
Before the battle at Wolf 359, Admiral Hanson, who is a friend of Picard and in command of the armada in the upcoming battle, contacts the *Enterprise* to discuss Picard and the Borg invasion. Hanson describes Picard as a casualty of war. Later, he says, “A great man has been lost. Your Captain. My friend” (Bole, 1990b, 6:55). He concludes by saying “Commander Riker. I hereby promote you to the field commission of captain. The *Enterprise* is your ship now. Congratulations” (7:00-7:10). Crusher is depicted to show a sign of doubt towards Hanson’s stance on Picard. This is perhaps due to Crusher and Picard’s close relationship, as it has been hinted in the series that they have romantic feelings for each other. Hanson is depicted to clearly consider Picard dead. Otherwise, he would not have referred to the *Enterprise* as Riker’s ship.

Later, Guinan comes to encourage and counsel Riker: “The only one who can turn this around is you. You’re gonna have to do something you don’t want to do. You have to let go of Picard” (Bole, 1990b, 14:45-14:54). Riker replies that “Maybe you haven’t heard. I tried to kill him yesterday” (Bole, 1990b, 14:56). Guinan answers “You tried to kill whatever that is on the Borg ship, not Picard” (Bole, 1990b, 15:01). Guinan’s proposed course of action seems to assume that success against a dehumanized opponent requires letting go of personal attachments and emotions, which in this case refers to Picard. In this scene, it is noticeable that Guinan considers Picard dead, as he calls Picard ‘whatever that is on the Borg ship.’ Guinan is also depicted to reflect the captivity narrative in her thinking, as she would prefer Picard to die rather than staying as a slave for the Borg. Tindol (2012) notes how in the film *Star Trek: First Contact*, “the fear of the Borg is the fear of a dire fate to which death is decidedly preferable” (p. 152). This same kind of thinking is reflected through Guinan in her conversation with Riker. However, it is important to note that the other main characters do not seem to share this view and they are depicted to be more optimistic about retrieving Picard. Guinan further tells Riker – calling him captain – that the captain’s chair is now his. Riker seems reluctant to take the captain’s chair, as he looks at the chair for a while and while sitting on it, he has an unsatisfied expression and sighs loudly. When Guinan calls Riker captain, it is also an important statement on Guinan’s behalf that she has given up on Picard’s life and has accepted Riker as the new leader of the ship. Riker is clearly having trouble of accepting Picard’s fate. His stance towards Picard also likely signals of his uncertainty about the Picard/Locutus situation. Riker is also depicted to show remorse in that he tried to destroy the Borg ship with Picard

onboard it. Riker's conflict and uncertainty regarding Picard are further reflected and highlighted on his reluctance before sitting on the captain's chair.

Later, Riker has laid a plan to rescue Picard. He hails the Borg ship, and they respond. This is the first time that a Borg ship answers a hail. It is somewhat significant in their characterization, as this is the first time the Borg are depicted as being somewhat reasonable, perhaps due to Picard's assimilation. Riker states to Locutus that they wish to end the hostilities. Locutus answers, "Then you must unconditionally surrender (Bole, 1990b, 19:15). Locutus deduces that Riker is just attempting to deceive the Borg. Riker notes how he never lied to Picard and that Picard trusted him. Locutus answers, "Picard implicitly trusted you" (Bole, 1990b, 19:48). Riker ordered the Enterprise's saucer section to be separated from the ship's secondary hull (see figure 5) to cause a diversion.

Figure 5. Enterprise facing the Borg ship with the saucer section separated (Image: IMDb)



Shortly after, when the Enterprise and the Borg ship engage in a battle again, Wesley Crusher says to Riker, "They're ignoring the saucer section completely." Riker utters to himself "Just as you should, Captain" (Bole, 1990b, 21:53), with a faint smile, referring to Locutus using Picard's knowledge for ignoring the saucer section. In this scene, Locutus is again depicted to possess Picard's knowledge, as he acknowledges the trust between Riker and Picard. More importantly, recognition and alignment (see Tseng 2013) can be used to decipher Riker's stance towards Picard: Riker's final piece of dialogue, 'Just as you should, Captain,' reveals that he has not given up on

Picard and does indeed consider Picard to be still alive and retrievable, as Riker calls Locutus Captain when talking to himself. Riker's smile is a further indication of this.

After retrieving Locutus, Crusher wakes him in sickbay and talks to him: "Jean-Luc. It's Beverly" (Bole, 1990b, 26:37). He opens his eyes and answers, "Beverly. Crusher, doctor" (Bole, 1990b, 26:50). Usually, the other characters refer to Picard as Captain or by his last name. However, Crusher typically calls him by his first name, Jean-Luc and Picard also calls Crusher by her first name, Beverly. Locutus reacting to Crusher's dialogue and the name 'Jean-Luc' could further indicate that there is still Picard's consciousness in Locutus. However, it could also simply mean that Locutus decides to react, as he knows that he is being called; he is aware that the others know that he possesses Picard's body and knowledge. However, even if Locutus has some of Picard's consciousness and behavior, he is still clearly mostly acting as Locutus, as he refers to Crusher in a Borg-like manner, stating her 'designation' instead of talking to her in a more recognizable, humane manner.

Next, Locutus says, "I am onboard the Enterprise. Incorrect strategy, Number One" (Bole, 1990b, 27:00–27:10). He further continues, "There is no need for apprehension. I intend no harm. No harm. I will continue aboard this ship to speak for the Borg" (Bole, 1990b, 27:33–27:43). When Locutus inspects Worf, he says Klingons will also be assimilated. Worf angrily says their empire will never yield, to which Locutus replies, "Why do you resist? We only wish to raise quality of life for all species" (Bole, 1990b, 29:31).

Locutus continues to call Riker Number One, which further hints at a slight sign of Picard's personality and consciousness being alive. Also, some individuality of Locutus can be further noticed in this scene, as he keeps referring to himself as 'I' instead of 'we,' as the Borg typically do. However, he further notes how he speaks for the Borg, so while referring to himself as 'I,' he rather speaking as an individual representative of the hive mind instead of a truly individual being. This is also the first time where the antagonism of the Borg is slightly blurred. Even though they have been depicted to destroy any opposition, their intent is not necessarily depicted to be evil when examined from the Borg's point of view, as their desire is to improve themselves, as well as others. So, the Borg are depicted to not consider themselves to be evil or antagonistic. This may be the first hint foreshadowing the de-villainization of the Borg that is depicted later in the episode "I Borg." Their way of assimilation is, of course, seen as antagonistic and not an improvement from the other

cultures' point of view, as usually the loss of individuality and being altered to become someone else are considered to be highly undesirable.

4.3.1 The characterization and de-villainization of the Borg in the episode "I Borg"

"I Borg" is analyzed in this section, focusing on how the character of Hugh is characterized in it and what kind of themes are represented and reflected through his characterization. Over the course of the episode, Hugh is de-villainized and humanized while becoming an individual, which increases viewer allegiance. This happens in the interaction between Hugh and the central characters of the episode.

4.3.2 Vulnerability of the Borg is shown

Enterprise is charting star systems in an area that is being considered for colonization. Picard, Riker and Troi are discussing, while Data detects an unknown transmission signal from a nearby moon. Riker notes that the signal could be a distress call, as the moon seems capable of supporting life. Riker prepares an away team to the moon, consisting of himself, Worf and Crusher. They beam to the moon using the *Enterprise's* transporter.

When the characters arrive on the moon, they find a crashed spaceship with one survivor; Hugh, a young Borg drone, badly hurt and barely alive. Hugh does not have a name yet, but he will be referred to as Hugh in order to avoid confusion with the other Borg. Hugh is given his name later in the episode. There are also four dead Borg drones on the crash site. Picard orders them to leave Hugh to die and return to the ship immediately due to his past experience with the Borg. Riker and Worf seem to agree with him, but Crusher wants to bring Hugh aboard the *Enterprise* and heal him, which Picard reluctantly agrees to. Crusher wants to transport Hugh into the sickbay, but Picard adamantly orders for him to be transported to the ship's detention cell.

In this scene, the vulnerability of the Borg is shown, as they were depicted with very little weaknesses in "Q Who" and the two-parter "The Best of Both Worlds." One of the Borg bodies has its brain exposed (see figure 6), which humanizes the Borg, as the brain highlights that despite being

cybernetic beings, they are also partly living humanoids. The visible brain could also be a visual storytelling tool so that the viewer would feel empathy towards the deceased Borg; if they were portrayed here as merely robotic beings, a dead robot-like body would be unlikely to have as big of an impact on the viewer's allegiance towards the Borg. Gunderman (2017) also points out that the normalization of antagonists is one of the attributes to de-villainizing antagonistic characters (p. 56). While the exposed brain does not make the Borg suddenly become 'good,' it still humanizes them and is a slight step towards the de-villainization and normalization of the Borg in this episode.

Figure 6. A dead Borg drone with its brain exposed (Image: IMDb)



Picard and Crusher's different stances towards Hugh create a stark contrast between the two characters. The divided stances that Admiral Hanson and Guinan had with the *Enterprise's* crew in "The Best of Both Worlds" is repeated here. Picard is usually depicted to be very civilized and diplomatic. However, in this scene and the beginning of the episode, his actions and views toward Hugh and the Borg in general depict Picard as a grudge-bearing victim who later in the episode comes around and overcomes his hatred of the Borg. Picard's hates the Borg due to him being previously assimilated by them. In contrast to Picard, Crusher's stance for treating Hugh portrays her as a liberal-minded humanist who believes in treating those who are weak, vulnerable or injured in a civilized manner, no matter if they are evil or potential threats.

Troi, as the ship's counsellor, offers to help Picard because of his past experience with the Borg, but Picard assures he does not need help. Next, the unconscious and injured Hugh is being treated in

the *Enterprise's* sickbay. Picard starts to develop a plan, where Data and Geordi plant a virus to Hugh and return him to the Borg Collective, which would likely infect the Collective and kill all the Borg in a couple months. Picard holds a meeting regarding this plan. Crusher seems to be against the idea of what would essentially be a genocide, while Riker seems to concur with Picard. Because being assimilated by the Borg in "The Best of Both Worlds," Picard is acting partially on a vengeful and subjective basis. However, the Borg are also a very dangerous threat to the Federation and Picard knows this. Picard eventually healed physically from the assimilation but visibly has still not mentally healed, as he shows great resentment towards Hugh, even though he seems quite harmless on his own. In this scene, it becomes obvious that Picard shows hints of trauma from his time as Locutus. Troi is depicted to treat Picard's experiences as traumatic experiences by topicalizing the issue.

Furthermore, the Borg have also been depicted previously as a dangerous threat to Starfleet and the Federation, as their aim is to assimilate technology and other cultures and add them to their Collective. This is likely why Riker seems to concur with Picard on destroying the entire Borg Collective. Because Riker was almost forced to kill Picard as Locutus in "The Best of Both Worlds," he has another reason to be willing to kill all the Borg. Riker has always been depicted to have deep respect towards Picard and to consider him a friend, so Riker's forced attempt at killing Picard in "The Best of Both Worlds" has likely left some traumatic and unpleasant memories of the Borg for him too.

Later, Hugh has regained consciousness and the senior officers go to inspect him, while he is being held behind a force field in the cell. Hugh is trying to find an access terminal to contact the Borg Collective. Crusher deciphers that he must be hungry and requires nutrition; they feed on energy in the form of organic molecules. Picard orders Geordi to feed Hugh. Crusher deduces that Hugh is scared, as it is his first time being alone from the Borg Collective, in an unknown place. It could be possible that Picard is allowing Hugh to have nutrition, so that he would survive, as Picard needed him to carry the planned virus to the Borg Collective. Crusher's dialogue is used to create empathy towards Hugh, as she refers to him being scared. Hugh itself is still portrayed to be quite machine-like, as he ignores the humans and is monitoring and exploring the cell that he is in. This is also the first time in the series that the Borg are shown to require any form of nutrition, which further highlights that they do have vulnerabilities and needs. It also strengthens the image and that they are partly organic life-forms instead of just machines. Gunderman (2017) notes how some of the

traits in the actions and movements of the antagonists are typically seen as foreign, violent, threatening, unnecessary or bad (p. 57). Hugh's actions in this scene do not represent any of these traits except foreignness, as he does not pay any attention to the main characters observing him. Furthermore, Hugh acts and moves in a robotic manner while searching for nutrition and an access point. However, Hugh is not depicted to be antagonizing, aggressive or threatening here. Hugh's depiction of being scared and in need of nutrition are used to humanize and normalize him. However, Hugh is still being depicted as an Othered being, as he is vastly different in his behavior and movement when compared to the main characters.

4.3.3 Hugh gets a name, development into individuality begins

Geordi, accompanied by Worf, prepares nutrition for Hugh, who speaks for the first time in this episode: "We are Borg. You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile" (Lederman, 1992, 14:35). Hugh also states that 'we' must return to the Collective, referring only to himself. Geordi asks who he means by 'we,' to which Hugh answers "We... are Borg" (Lederman, 1992, 15:04). When Geordi asks for Hugh's name, he does not know what the term means, but when Geordi asks for his identification, he identifies himself as Third of Five. In Hugh's group, there were four other Borg and each one had a similarly stylized identification. Geordi ironically comments, "It does kind of suit you" (Lederman, 1992, 15:28). After Geordi has installed the energy nutrition, he and Worf leave the cell, with Worf pointing his phaser constantly at Hugh. As Worf is pointing his phaser at Hugh, it is established that the main characters consider Hugh and the Borg to be highly dangerous, even though Hugh is alone here. Hugh feeds itself and asks Geordi why they are helping him, to which Geordi, a bit ironically, replies "I'm just a nice guy at heart" (Lederman, 1992, 16:41). Hugh states that Geordi and the others are not Borg and will be assimilated.

In this scene, Hugh is not acting as an individual, as he refers to himself as 'we' and thinks of himself as a small part of the Borg Collective. He is also depicted to be quite robotic, as his voice is very monotone, and he speaks with slight pauses between the words. However, Hugh also seems to start developing some form of individual thinking, as he questions why he is being helped with the nutrition. However, it is instantly made clear that his thinking of the ship's crew has not changed, as he expresses his and the Borg's will to assimilate them. Hugh's real name, Third of Five, also implies

that the Borg do not consider themselves as individuals, because their name is essentially just a number. Even though Hugh is not necessarily depicted as a villain here, the episode has not yet depicted the process of de-villainizing Hugh, as the viewer has not been given much acknowledgment or awareness of the Borg's cultural conditions. Even though Hugh is depicted to be somewhat confused, he is still interacting with the characters in an Othered, Borg-like manner. The episode has not provided reasoning or understanding to the Borg culture yet and what Hugh's own individual thoughts are, as he is still depicted to be an automaton-like being.

Geordi prepares to do some tests with Hugh to learn about him and eventually apply the virus into him. He says to Crusher that if Hugh co-operates, he feeds him, but Crusher thinks they are treating Hugh like a rat in a test laboratory. They transport Hugh to the sickbay inside a small test chamber (see figure 7) and begin the tests to study his physiology, cybernetic parts and information processing capabilities.

Figure 7. Geordi preparing a test chamber for Hugh (Image: IMDb)



Crusher seems uneasy about using Hugh as an instrument of destruction. Geordi introduces Doctor Crusher and 'Third of Five' to each other, to which Hugh asks what a doctor is. Crusher explains that "A doctor heals the sick and repairs the injured" (Lederman, 1992, 18:33). Hugh states that the sick and injured are reabsorbed and replaced, to which Crusher points out that it did not happen with Hugh and that they saved his life, to which Hugh asks why they did so. Crusher says it is her duty to

help those who are hurt. Hugh asks Geordi if giving food is his duty, to which Geordi answers affirmatively. Geordi tells they are going to run some tests. Hugh is not familiar with the term and states again that they will be assimilated. Geordi asks if they could ask Hugh some questions, to which he reacts a bit confusingly, but decides to co-operate. Hugh asks for Geordi and Crusher's 'designations.' Crusher answers that instead of designations, they use names, and she tells her and Geordi's names. Hugh asks whether he has a name. Geordi asks if he would like to have a name, but Hugh acts still a bit confused. Geordi gives Hugh his name, from the term 'you.' Hugh accepts the name but continues to refer to himself as 'we.'

In this scene, Crusher's empathy towards Hugh is shown to depict noble human activity, where Crusher helps Hugh overcome the traditional Borg way of life and help achieve individuality. When Crusher greets Hugh, it is interesting that he does not greet her back and instead, asks what a doctor is. It is likely because Hugh is not acting as an individual and still thinks like a Borg; as they are a collective, inter-connected singular mind, it would be illogical for them to greet each other and that is likely why he does not greet Crusher. It is also displayed that Hugh is curious, as he instantly asks what different unknown words like the 'doctor' and 'test' mean. Hugh further displays his curiosity by asking the names of Geordi and Crusher. Hugh is also willing to have a name, which indicates that he either starts to develop some form of individuality or wants to develop. However, even after receiving his name, Hugh still refers to himself as 'we,' which shows that he is not yet depicted as fully thinking as an individual. Hugh getting a name could also be viewed as a metaphor for baptism, a Christian rite of admission and adoption. Name giving is considered a spiritual event in many other cultures as well. *Star Trek* has typically taken a neutral, non-religious stance in its storytelling. However, it often reflects the society we live in as an analogy, for example our society's different customs and practices, including some religious themes and traditions. Hugh's baptism can also be viewed as the depiction of the first major step towards a new identity for him, which develops through the episode. Hugh getting a name is also an important part in the normalization of Hugh's characterization. As Gunderman (2017) notes, an important part in de-villainization is the normalization of the villainized characters (p. 56). Hugh being named 'Hugh' instead of 'Third of Five' is an important step in his characterization from an Othered being to a more approachable and relatable person.

Furthermore, in this scene, more information on the Borg culture is also revealed; they are represented as a collective that do not save injured Borg drones and instead, replace them, which is naturally different to humans or Starfleet protocol. The characters in this scene and piece of dialogue – regarding the weak and injured – define and establish what it means to be ‘a good human being’ in the *Star Trek* world. The contrary views between the Borg and humans for treating the weak and injured also creates a stark contrast between the humans and the Borg, where the human way is seen as the morally right choice, while the Borg way of replacing the weak and injured is seen as morally wrong and ‘bad.’ However, Hugh is not depicted to be evil here, but rather misguided by what he has previously learned among the Borg. Often, the world of *Star Trek* reflects the same moral values that are kept in high regard in Western society and this scene and piece of dialogue between Hugh, Geordi and Crusher are examples of such reflection. This can be observed by applying Eder’s four-leveled framework that Tseng (2013) refers to for character analysis (p. 590). In this scene, Hugh is depicted on the third level, symbol, a higher descriptive level. Hugh is the character asking questions about the humanistic moral values, whereas Geordi and Crusher, representing the fourth level in their depiction, symptom, are depicted as role models conveying these values to both Hugh and the viewer. However, it could be argued that the intention to destroy the entire Borg Collective could be seen as utilitarian. The justification for the implementation of the virus is that the Borg Collective’s destruction would be in the name of greater good, as they pose a great danger to other cultures in *Star Trek*. Crusher brings up the morality of implementing the virus during the episode, but it could be argued that what they are intending to do is nevertheless morally wrong, as the virus could destroy an entire species. However, the Borg’s view on assimilating others can also be seen as utilitarian, as Hugh, and Locutus in “The Best of Both Worlds,” state that the assimilation improves the other species. From the Borg’s point of view, this would maximize well-being for the others and the Borg use this to justify and rationalize their actions.

After some tests, Geordi and Crusher deduce that Hugh is highly advanced due to his cybernetic implants. Geordi inspects Hugh’s cybernetic eyepiece, to which Hugh comments that when “When you are assimilated, you will have a similar device” (Lederman, 1992, 21:20). Crusher says that they do not wish to be assimilated. Hugh asks what will happen to him after the tests. Geordi says that they will send Hugh home and Hugh states that he will rejoin the Collective. After that, Geordi visibly is having second thoughts about applying the virus to Hugh. In this scene, Hugh is depicted to be quite innocent and a different point of view is given to the Borg assimilation; after Crusher and

Geordi note how advanced Hugh's eyepiece is, Hugh innocently states that they will get similar ones after the assimilation. Instead of taunting them by saying this, Hugh is depicted to innocently think that an eyepiece like his would improve the lives of humans from a technical perspective. Furthermore, Geordi is blind and only sees through an infrared vision using his visor. While Hugh does not specifically mean Geordi with his statement about the eyepiece, it is nevertheless interesting to note that Hugh likely wants to improve especially Geordi's life due to Hugh being depicted to have grown fond of him. As this scene also shows that Hugh is slowly starting to develop a sense of individuality and personality, his impending doom with the planned virus is used to create empathy towards him. This would not be the case if Hugh were still depicted as a typical Borg, which is a near-mindless, robotic automaton. However, Hugh's characterization has already shown noticeable signs of individuality, humanization and de-villainization, which raises viewer allegiance towards him.

4.3.4 Hugh is de-villainized, individuality develops further

Geordi talks with Guinan about Hugh and having second thoughts about using him to destroy the entire Borg Collective. Guinan is shocked that they have given Hugh a name. Geordi also compares Hugh to a lost child: "I don't know. It's... It's like he's just some kid who's far away from home" (Lederman, 1992, 23:00). Guinan tells Geordi that he is the second person comparing 'it,' referring to Hugh, to a lost child. She continues by saying that the Borg will come looking for Hugh and destroy them if they do not destroy the Borg first. As in "The Best of Both Worlds," Guinan's role is to act again as the person who is part of the *Enterprise's* society but acts again as the pessimist in the group. This highlights the main characters' righteous and moral actions.

Data and Riker detect that a Borg vessel is arriving in 31 hours to their current location, looking for survivors from the crashed Borg ship. Guinan proceeds to talk with Hugh and ironically asks if they will assimilate her. Hugh wonders if Guinan wants to be assimilated, to which she answers "No, but that's what you... things do, isn't it?" (Lederman, 1992, 25:20). Hugh nods as a yes. Guinan says the phrase 'Resistance is futile' to Hugh. He answers by repeating the phrase, to which Guinan replies again that it is not. She tells how her people fought against the Borg when they came to assimilate them and that her people were nearly wiped out into extinction by this. Hugh says, "Resistance is

not futile?" (Lederman, 1992, 25:46), this time as a question. He deduces that Guinan must feel lonely. Hugh says that he is also lonely. Guinan stares at Hugh thoughtfully.

With his conversation with Guinan, Hugh is depicted as starting to learn sympathy. He has felt lonely the whole time he has been onboard the *Enterprise* and he now visibly sympathizes with Guinan; Hugh rightfully deduces that Guinan must also feel lonely, as she is far away from her own species and they are nearly extinct. Guinan is also depicted to be visibly surprised at Hugh's sense of empathy, which means that she is starting to feel differently about Hugh; earlier, she did not want to talk to Hugh at all, and simply considered all the Borg to be evil beings who destroy and assimilate other cultures, but she likely recognizes that Hugh has started developing a sense of individuality and sympathy. Furthermore, when Hugh repeats the phrase 'Resistance is futile,' he does so with a rising intonation. There are likely several reasons for the rise in intonation. Hugh most likely presents the phrase as a question. This instead means that Hugh is starting to show signs of doubt towards the Borg's assimilation process. Previously in the episode, when he was being held in the cell, Hugh repeated this phrase with a monotonous and robotic voice. This showed that he was still acting and talking like a regular Borg drone and instead of being an individual, he was a part of a hive mind and a collective. Hugh is depicted to show signs of doubt and question the Borg's morals, which is an important step towards individualization in Hugh's characterization.

Guinan and Picard are both depicted as the vengeful characters who have previous, negative experience with the Borg. When Guinan talks with Geordi, she refers to Hugh as 'it' instead of 'him,' just as Picard. Additionally, when talking directly to Hugh, Guinan does not seem to have a suitable word to describe the Borg and she uses the term 'things' when referring to them. However, she has a slight pause before doing so; "that's what you... things do, isn't it?" (Lederman, 1992, 25:20). Calling the Borg 'things' reflects how Guinan considers them to be robotic, faceless objects, as she does not use a more favorable term like 'beings,' 'your species' or even 'creatures.' However, this conversation is the turning point for Guinan's stance towards the Borg, as afterwards, she is the one who convinces Picard to come around and forgive Hugh and the Borg.

After Hugh's conversation with Guinan, Geordi is examining Hugh. Hugh keeps repeatedly asking him why he does that. Geordi replies that he wishes to learn more about Hugh and the Borg, because humans want to learn about other species. Hugh says that they assimilate other species, so they

know everything about them. Hugh asks Geordi about assimilation; “Is that not easier?” (Lederman, 1992, 27:15), to which Geordi responds that maybe it is, but humans do not assimilate others. Hugh asks for reasoning behind this. Geordi teaches Hugh about individuality and points out that Hugh refers to himself as ‘we’ instead of ‘I.’ Hugh asks Geordi if he feels ever lonely, to which Geordi replies “Sometimes. But that’s why we have friends” (Lederman, 1992, 28:16). Hugh is not familiar with the term friend, so Geordi explains it to him; he explains that friends are “Someone you can talk to, who will be with you when you’re lonely. Someone... someone who will make you feel better” (Lederman, 1992, 28:23). Hugh answers: “Like Geordi... and Hugh” (Lederman, 1992, 28:33). After this, Geordi stares at Hugh and using alignment, it is clear by his expression that Geordi’s attitude towards Hugh starts to change.

Hugh’s curiosity was already established earlier and is further highlighted in this scene, as he repeatedly asks Geordi about humans. Hugh also clearly does not think negatively about assimilation, as this scene implies that the Borg would assimilate others to get information as efficiently as possible, even though assimilation is undesirable from the other cultures’ point of view. Hugh does not understand this, as he has not understood empathy before. Earlier in the episode, it was also shown that Hugh is capable of feeling empathy, but this is the first scene where it is shown that he feels affection towards Geordi and considers him a friend. Hugh’s voice has also changed slightly, as it is not quite as monotone and robotic anymore. Instead of constant slight pauses between the words, he now speaks in a more human and natural manner. Regarding the Borg assimilation others, it could be argued that the information the Borg gather by assimilation is rather limited, as they only assimilate the technology, knowledge and experiences of others, but the assimilated drones do not keep the essence and personalities of their victims. Because of this, the Borg do not for example understand human emotions and what it truly means to be human.

It is also interesting to note that in “I Borg,” Hugh looks slightly more human when compared to most of the Borg drones in the episodes “Q Who” and the two-parter “The Best of Both Worlds.” While not having much difference in his looks when compared to most Borg drones, Hugh lacks the gun-resembling arm that most Borg drones have. Instead, Hugh has an arm that resembles more a traditional human hand with five fingers (see figures 8 and 9). This is a slight further normalization and humanization of Hugh’s appearance, as the other Borg drones are depicted to have a slightly more Othered and foreign appearance.

Figure 8. A Borg drone in “The Best of Both Worlds” (Image: Memory Alpha)



Figure 9. Hugh (on the right) and two Borg drones in “I Borg” (Image: IMDb)



4.3.5 A change in perceptions: Hugh as an individual

Later, Geordi and Data present the virus they are planning to apply to Hugh. In the scene, Data seems neutral about the issue and Picard seems satisfied with their plan. After Data leaves, Geordi expresses that he is having concerns and second thoughts about the plan. Geordi has noticed that Hugh is not as he expected; he has feelings and is home sick. Picard notes that centuries ago, when

laboratory animals were used in experiments, the scientists sometimes became attached to them and it became a problem if the experiments killed the animals. Picard further comments that “I would suggest that you un-attach yourself from the Borg Mr. La Forge” (Lederman, 1992, 30:26). Geordi seems uneasy about this.

In this scene, Picard compares Hugh to laboratory animals. In the real world, experiments that kill laboratory animals are considered inhuman and unethical, especially if they cause pain to the animals. They are also largely forbidden in the western world. As Tseng (2013) suggests, allegiance has both cognitive and affective dimensions and the viewer’s allegiance to the characters is mediated partly through the behavior and actions of the characters (p. 589). In this particular scene, it is Picard’s harsh behavior and attitude towards Hugh that is used to raise empathy in the viewer towards Hugh. Hugh has already been also de-villainized in the episode, as the viewer has been given a lot of new information about him as an individual and for example, he now considers Geordi to be his friend. An important theme in this scene and Picard’s behavior in the first half of the episode is that Hugh’s characterization is used to blur the protagonist and antagonist threshold (see Gunderman 2017) in Picard’s characterization. Picard is partly depicted to act on a vengeful basis, but another reasoning behind his actions and plans for using Hugh as an instrument of destruction is that Picard wants to protect the people of the *Enterprise* and Earth from a possible Borg assimilation. He has discovered a possible way of destroying the entire Borg Collective within the developed virus. However, in doing so, Picard would have to kill Hugh, a de-villainized character. Furthermore, as Hugh has been depicted to enjoy his newly found sense of individuality, it is reasonable to expect the same from other Borg drones that could possibly be liberated from their Collective. As Gunderman (2017) points out, a protagonist is typically depicted to represent a moral actor in a situation whose actions are in the interest and well-being of the main characters (p. 52). Picard’s status as protagonist who does the morally right decisions is blurred, as from the point of view of humans, it would be an easier and quicker way to destroy the Borg threat, as they have been established as a major threat to humans. However, Hugh’s characterization has changed from a mindless Borg drone to a sympathetic, individual character over the course of the episode. Because of this, Picard’s intentions are not depicted to be morally acceptable or humanistic. While Picard is not necessarily depicted as an antagonist in this scene, the traditional values of a protagonist are blurred.

The next scene takes place late in the evening. Guinan comes to Picard's quarters to discuss about Hugh. She asks whether Picard is surprised about Hugh and tells Picard that Geordi named him Hugh. Picard did not know earlier that Hugh had been given a name. Guinan tells Picard that she began to think of Hugh as an individual being when she talked to him face-to-face. Picard tells Guinan that he has not talked to 'it,' referring to Hugh, because there is no reason to do so. Guinan refers to Hugh as a person, but Picard gets upset and angrily yells at Guinan that "It's not a person, damn it! It's a Borg!" (Lederman, 1992, 32:29). Guinan convinces Picard to talk with Hugh face-to-face, because she does not consider Hugh to be a Borg anymore, but an individual. Picard says that Hugh's name and young age do not mean that he is not a Borg nor innocent and angrily tells Guinan he will not change his plan to apply the virus.

Here, both Picard and Guinan's allegiance towards Hugh is brought up. While Picard's stance has not changed yet, Guinan is depicted as the moral compass here, effectively guiding Picard to do the right thing. It is also interesting, when comparing Picard and Guinan's dialogue, both of their allegiance is shown through their usage of pronouns: Guinan refers to Hugh as 'him,' whereas Picard only refers to Hugh as 'it,' speaking about Hugh like he was a machine or non-sentient being. Furthermore, even after Picard learns that Hugh has been given a name, he still refers to him as either 'it' or simply 'Borg,' while Guinan keeps referring to Hugh by his name and as 'him' instead of 'it.' This further demonstrates Picard and Guinan's allegiance and creates a stark contrast about their thinking; Guinan thinks of Hugh as an individual and a person, while Picard thinks of him as a faceless representation of an evil species, who is a non-sentient, machine-like being instead of an individual person.

Furthermore, Picard's dialogue to Guinan about Hugh represents a conflict that foreshadows Picard's forgiveness. Picard's outburst depicts him in an unfavorable light to the viewer, as Hugh's personality has to this point of the episode been depicted to change from the robotic hive mind-oriented drone to a person who shows signs of doubt, individuality and even empathy. As Gunderman (2017) points out, this has been done by separating an individual character, in this case Hugh, from an antagonized and villainized species (pp. 56–57). Picard's outburst is also depicted as his lowest point in the episode; previously Picard's disdain and hatred for the Borg has been shown in a less abrupt manner. Picard is also usually depicted as a civilized diplomat, but here he is the only main character in the episode who does not consider or value Hugh as an individual person.

Instead, Picard considers Hugh as a representative of an evil, villainous species. However, Picard's outburst also acts as the beginning of a turning point in his stance towards Hugh, which foreshadows his forgiveness that takes place later.

4.3.6 Hugh's sense of individuality grows stronger and Hugh is fully de-villainized

Picard agrees to meet Hugh and has him transported to his ready room. Hugh is accompanied by Worf as security. Picard orders Worf to wait outside. Worf is a bit uneasy and is about to say something but leaves. Hugh, visibly happy, recognizes Picard and refers to him as Locutus. Picard plays along and acts as he would still be Locutus. Hugh asks 'Locutus' why he is here, to which Picard states that he is observing the primitive culture of the *Enterprise* and he is onboard to facilitate its incorporation into the Borg Collective. Picard asks Hugh to identify himself, to which Hugh replies simply Hugh as his identification. Picard repeats the question and Hugh looks a bit confused. He repeats that "We are Hugh" (Lederman, 1992, 34:38). Picard says that it is not a Borg identification, after which Hugh identifies himself as Third of Five. Picard states that this culture will be assimilated, referring to the *Enterprise*. Hugh responds that they do not want it and they will resist 'us' referring to the Borg assimilation. Picard states that all will be assimilated, but Hugh states that Geordi does not wish to be assimilated and would rather die. Picard states that Geordi will die if he resists them, to which Hugh responds that "No. Geordi must not die. Geordi is a friend." (Lederman, 1992, 35:41). Picard orders Hugh to assist him in assimilating the *Enterprise* and Hugh replies "I will not" (Lederman, 1992, 35:58). Picard is shocked at Hugh's answer and repeats the word 'I' that Hugh said. Hugh repeats that he – referring again to himself as I – will not assist 'Locutus' and says that "Geordi must not be assimilated" (Lederman, 1992, 36:08). Picard tells Hugh "But you are Borg" to which Hugh replies "No. I am Hugh" (Lederman, 1992, 36:13–36:17). Picard stares at Hugh and is visibly shocked and thoughtful.

Here, Hugh is depicted to finally have become completely an individual and it is also shown that he has become un-attached from the traditional Borg mindset. Using recognition and alignment, Hugh's personality and mindset can be deciphered through his actions and dialogue: in this scene, he believes that Picard is still Locutus. Hugh is happy to recognize 'Locutus,' which signals that Hugh has indeed been feeling lonely, as he is happy to meet another representative of his species. The

reason Picard is acting as Locutus is that he wishes to see whether Hugh is still thinking like a typical Borg drone. After Picard notices that Hugh is unwilling to assimilate the *Enterprise* and Hugh becomes visibly sad at the notion of Geordi possibly being killed, it is revealed that Hugh's depiction has finally changed so that he has become an individual, sentient being. Furthermore, as Gunderman (2017) points out, an individual representative of a previously antagonized species can present an opportunity to gain empathy towards them (p. 56– 57). In this scene, Hugh is acting as an individual and his character is completely de-villainized here, as he no longer refers to himself as 'we' and instead, uses the pronoun 'I.' This is an important step in the humanization and normalization of Hugh's character. This is also the first time he is depicted to openly reject the idea of assimilating the *Enterprise's* crew; earlier in the episode, he was aiming and willing to do so, but during the course of the episode, the other characters' actions and behavior have affected Hugh. Gunderman (2017) also notes that one of the characteristics of a protagonist is to act as a moral figure that acts in the interest of well-being and desires of the main characters and their society (p. 52). In this case, they are the *Enterprise* and its crew and Hugh does not wish to assimilate them anymore, unlike earlier in the episode. Because of Hugh's actions in this scene, he has changed into a protagonist.

Picard holds a meeting with the senior officers and tells them that he changed his mind, as he realized that Hugh has developed individuality. He also tells them that they would be no better than the Borg if they were to perform a genocide against them. Picard wants to hear what options they have with Hugh. Riker suggests wiping Hugh's memory and returning him to the crash site where they found him, but the others disagree, as it would not be right to take away Hugh's newly developed individuality. They agree to leave Hugh's memory intact and return him to the Borg Collective in the hopes that Hugh's sense of individuality would spread in the Collective, which would grant all of the Borg individuality. Crusher says that it might be possible that Hugh does not want to return to the Collective at all.

Picard refers to Hugh as 'him' for the first time in this scene, which is used to depict that he has changed his mind about Hugh and now considers him to be a person instead of a typical Borg drone. The episode has not had a traditional antagonist, but Picard has been presented with some antagonistic features until his conversation with Hugh: protagonists typically represent a moral actor with good-intentioned actions and antagonists do the opposite, and before Picard's

conversation and this meeting, he has been willing to eventually kill both Hugh and the entire Borg Collective. Previously, the Borg were depicted as simply a dangerous threat to humans and the Federation, but by Hugh's sense and development of individuality and by observing his innocent and good-willed actions and behavior, the depiction of the Borg has been de-villainized during the course of the episode. Some of the characters like Geordi and Crusher were able to accept and notice that Hugh was not villainous, but Picard only does so later in the episode. However, even though Picard is depicted with some antagonistic features earlier in the episode, he was never an antagonist in the traditional sense. The Borg had previously been depicted as threatening and dangerous beings with little to no redeeming qualities and Picard was forced to kill thousands of humans as Locutus. Because of this, Picard's stance towards the Borg was more subjective compared to the other characters. However, Picard's speech here presents traditional Christian values about ethics, morality and forgiveness. Picard represents forgiveness with his dialogue and actions. Picard acts as an important, central figure in the characterization and de-villainization of Hugh, as he has the most radical change of attitude towards Hugh and the Borg during the episode. Viewer allegiance increases with the characterization of Picard, as his characterization has both cognitive and affective aspects.

In the next scene, Picard and Geordi meet with Hugh, Geordi greets Hugh and Hugh greets him back. They tell Hugh that a Borg ship is approaching the crash site and Hugh can choose what to do; remain on the *Enterprise* or return to the crash site. Hugh says that his will is irrelevant, to which Geordi replies it is not. Hugh says that no Borg can leave the Collective and the Borg would look for him until he is found. Picard states that "We must know what **you** want," to which Hugh replies that "You are many. What I want. What I want is not important" (Lederman, 1992, 39:20–39:23). Hugh does not fully understand that he has a choice to make but understands it after Picard and Geordi ask him again. Hugh says he would like to stay with Geordi but it would be too dangerous, as the Borg would follow him. Because of this, Hugh wishes to be returned to the crash site.

This is the first time Hugh is depicted to greet someone back, which means that he is a bit more accustomed to human behavior a bit more, which further humanizes Hugh, as his movement and actions are further normalized from a humanistic point of view. Hugh is also depicted to be visibly happy when he sees Geordi, which is a sign of affection. This scene further characterizes Hugh as a good-willed protagonist. As Gunderman (2017) points out, protagonists act as moral characters in

situations (p. 52), which again in this situation refers to the *Enterprise*, its crew and Geordi, who Hugh has clearly become attached to. Gunderman (2017) also notes how individual representatives, when separated from their 'hives,' can have a significant impact in showing either positive or negative attributes about a previously villainized species (p. 54). Naturally, Hugh is representing the Borg here and his actions are depicted to be positive and good-willed. In de-villainization, some of the attributes of antagonists are threatening, bad, violent or foreign, whereas the actions and movements of the protagonists are normalized (Gunderman, 2017, p. 56). In this scene, Hugh's actions and behavior have become almost completely human-like and they have been normalized to resemble a traditional human, as he does not speak in a robotic voice anymore and he is not portrayed as threatening in any way. Furthermore, he has acquired many human traits, such as greeting others and compassion, as he cares for the well-being of his new friends.

There is also a cyclical reversal (see Cormier 2019) in Hugh's characterization. Previously, the Borg assimilated Picard and used Picard's knowledge to kill thousands of humans. In "I Borg," Hugh is the one who is 'assimilated' by humans, though Hugh's 'assimilation' to the human culture is arguably not a forced one, as he is depicted to gradually and naturally become more humanized and de-villainized. However, the humans initially intended to use a similar tactic than the Borg used in "The Best of Both Worlds," which is to use their enemy's knowledge against themselves to destroy their species. One of the aims of a utopian depiction is to represent what the future will hopefully be like (see Weldes 2003) and as Picard and the other key characters come around and choose not to destroy their enemy, this depiction reflects an arguably positive and optimistic view on humans. Perhaps the episode is also trying to convey a message to the viewer that it is desirable to let go of vengeance and prejudice.

As the Geordi, Picard and Crusher prepare to beam Hugh to the crash site, Crusher says her farewells to Hugh and tells it was nice to get to know him, smiling while she says so, which is used to show Crusher's affection towards Hugh. Hugh follows with "Goodbye Beverly. You saved my life" (Lederman, 1992, 41:03). Geordi wishes to accompany Hugh to the planet. Picard farewells Hugh smilingly. Hugh tells Picard he does not want to forget that he is Hugh, which highlights that Hugh does not wish to lose his newly found individuality. After that, Geordi and Hugh are beamed to the crash site. *Enterprise* hides itself from the approaching Borg ship by positioning themselves in the solar system's star's chromosphere. Hugh's notion of the term 'my life' further shows that Hugh

thinks of himself as an individual, as normally a single Borg drone is considered only a small fraction of the Collective. Picard shows affection towards Hugh, as he smiles at him while bidding farewell, which reminds and highlights that Picard's thinking of Hugh and the Borg has been changed. Earlier in the episode, it was evident that Picard hated all the Borg, including Hugh and was not even willing to meet him.

On the crash site, Geordi and Hugh bid each other farewell and Hugh says that he will try to remember Geordi. After this, Geordi sighs, which implies he is seemingly sad for Hugh's departure. After this, two Borg drones beam down to the crash site and retrieve Hugh. They ignore Geordi, as the Borg typically only assimilate entire species and not individuals. They beam the deceased Borg drones away and reinstate Hugh back to the Collective. Just before beaming themselves away, Hugh quickly looks at Geordi, which shocks him. The two other Borg drones are not necessarily portrayed here as antagonists, but they have some features that can be considered to be antagonistic, which in this case are the foreign movement and actions of the Borg, as they move in a very alien-like and robotic manner. On one hand, this creates a contrast towards Hugh, as Hugh has been portrayed in an increasingly human-like and normalized way towards the end of the episode. Furthermore, Hugh's final look at Geordi reveals that he has kept his sense of individuality and memories as Hugh.

When comparing the characterization of the Borg in *TNG* to Tindol's study on the Borg and the captivity narrative in the film *Star Trek: First Contact*, the film and the TV series are in direct contrast with each other. Tindol notes how the film discounts any positive sides or benefits with an encounter with the Borg. The film depicts that the only viable solution is to kill all the Borg and destroy every link to the Borg collective. Typically, *Star Trek* has been praised for its humanity and tolerance. Furthermore, in the film's narrative, all persons assimilated by the Borg are irredeemable and must be killed, even if they are friends or colleagues (Tindol, 2012, pp. 156–157). Even though the captivity narrative is noticeable in *TNG*'s depiction of the Borg as well, the TV series and especially "I Borg" give a much more optimistic view of the captivity narrative and the Borg. This is done in the development of the Borg's characterization. The crew of the *Enterprise* was able to rescue Picard and restore his humanity in "The Best of Both Worlds." They also befriended Hugh over the course of "I Borg" and Hugh's characterization turned him from an Othered being to a good-willed protagonist. In the film's narrative, Locutus and Hugh would have been killed and the film arguably casts humanity and possible encounters with the Borg in a more pessimistic light.

5 Discussion

When looking at the Borg through empathic reading in their original characterization in the episode “Q Who,” The Borg are depicted in a clear black-and-white manner and they act solely as Othered antagonists. There are virtually no redeeming qualities depicted with encountering the Borg in “Q Who.” They are also depicted to be technologically far superior and undefeatable to Starfleet and the Federation. The Borg’s depiction also reflects in a dystopian society in “Q Who” where technology and industrialization have taken over. Furthermore, all the inhabitants of this society are depicted to be near-mindless, faceless machine-like drones that lack individuality.

In the two-part episode “The Best of Both Worlds,” the Borg’s depiction and characterization remain largely the same; there are no redeeming qualities depicted in their characterization. The Borg are also depicted to be destructive and unreasonable, though Locutus seems to offer some slight signs of reasonability, albeit with unfair and strict conditions. They are again depicted as clear antagonists and they are characterized to be a dangerous threat to humans, the Federation and other cultures due to their assimilation and technical superiority. The captivity narrative, where death is often seen as preferable to being corrupted and taken away by an Other, was hinted at in “Q Who,” but it is much more clearly noticeable in “The Best of Both Worlds,” as Picard claims that he and his society would rather die than become part of the Borg Collective, an Othered population. However, it is important to note that the captivity narrative is not shared through the characterization of all the characters in “The Best of Both Worlds.” Key characters like Riker and Crusher seem to have a more humanitarian and optimistic view of Picard when he is turned into a Borg drone, as they believe he can be rescued and restored back to his own self.

However, there is significant development in the characterization of the Borg in the episode “I Borg.” Their characterization and antagonism are blurred in the episode “I Borg.” This is done through the characterization of Hugh when he is separated from the Borg Collective. The Borg and specifically Hugh are de-villainized through the characterization of Hugh, as the Borg were previously depicted to be very foreign, alien-like and dangerous beings with no redeeming qualities. In the beginning of “I Borg,” Hugh acts as the Borg normally do; he speaks in a very machine-like manner, moves in a mechanical way and he is initially not interested in humans, other than wanting to assimilate them. However, as the episode progresses, Hugh is normalized, which can be seen in

his actions and interaction with the main characters of *TNG*, specifically Geordi, as Hugh starts to develop affection towards him. Hugh's friendship with Geordi is an especially important factor in the episode, as it further normalizes Hugh and is used to show the positive aspects of Hugh when he becomes very protective of Geordi's well-being and safety. Another important character in Hugh's de-villainization is Crusher. She treated Hugh with a humanitarian and liberal manner from the beginning and she was the first person to consider Hugh a scared individual who needs help. By the course of the episode, Hugh develops into an individual being, capable of moral decisions and critical thinking. He also develops a personality during the episode, even though he is a machine-like automaton in the beginning. Furthermore, Hugh is shown to feel empathy when he understands Guinan's loneliness for example. Later in the episode, Hugh is depicted as a moral actor in the episode, as he chooses to act against his wishes in order to protect his newly found friends, when he decides it would be too dangerous to continue his life onboard the *Enterprise*. An important aspect in de-villainizing the Borg in "I Borg" can be noticed with empathic reading, as more insight is given into the Borg culture through Hugh's characterization and interaction with the main characters.

The main themes reflected in "I Borg" are prejudice, racism, forgiveness and individuality. Initially, Picard and Guinan are depicted to show resentment and prejudice towards Hugh and the Borg, but both let go of these, as they realize that Hugh has developed into an individual, good person. "I Borg" also depicts an optimistic, utopian view of humanity through the characterization of the main characters of *TNG*. Geordi and Crusher are depicted to more easily provide assistance for Hugh and accept him as an individual, innocent and person. Picard and Guinan's resentment towards Hugh and the Borg are justified in the context of the story, as they both have been violated by the Borg previously in the series. Furthermore, the Borg have also been previously depicted as dangerous, threatening and unreasonable. However, all the main characters are depicted to be able to forgo their resentment and prejudice towards their enemy, the Borg and they decide not to destroy them, even though they had a likely chance of doing so. They also eventually save Hugh and help him develop into an individual being. This casts a positive and optimistic view on humanity through the characterization of key characters in "I Borg." Parrinder (2000) notes how the depiction of utopia in science fiction can be used to improve the societies we live in (p. 23). Perhaps this is one of the intentions that the writers of "I Borg" aim to convey. The episode asks the viewer to consider tolerance and inclusiveness, even against enemies, and let go of prejudice and vengeance.

A continuing theme with the Borg is their threat against humanity and other civilizations of *Star Trek*. The basic idea of the Borg is of course very dystopian, as they lack individuality and wish to assimilate other cultures by turning them into other Borg drones. However, the episode “I Borg” gives a more positive and hopeful depiction of not just the human characters, but also the Borg, as Hugh changes from a near-mindless automaton to a very humane and caring individual. The end of the episode also implies that Hugh’s individuality could spread in the Borg Collective. This could be seen as both positive and negative; from the point of view of humans, it would be positive, as it could alter the Borg to become ‘good’ who would not rather assimilate others anymore. Furthermore, Hugh seems to be quite satisfied with his newly developed individuality and wishes not to become a near-mindless automaton again. However, one could argue that it could be unethical to change the nature of another species, in this case the Borg, from their collective hive mind to a group of individuals. Hugh can also be interpreted as a metaphor for a defector or a dissident, who manages to escape from an undesired or oppressed society or nation and then realizes that there are alternatives to his previous values and way of life.

Finally, Hugh is also depicted to be an outsider in the *Enterprise*’s society. Hugh’s depiction can be compared to Data and Spock, who are non-human characters in environments that are dominated by humans. Data and Spock are also outsiders who adjust to the human environment. Both are depicted to show fascination towards humans and humanity. Furthermore, both display humane features like curiosity, loyalty and ethics (Braine, 1994, pp. 9–10). Similar features can be noticed in Hugh’s characterization; he displays curiosity by asking the human characters about their values, customs and culture, which are largely humanistic, liberal and western values typically seen in a positive light. This is partly used to reflect these values to the viewer.

One problem with this study is that as film and TV analysis, the findings can be somewhat subjective, because different viewers might interpret and analyze the same things differently. There can be various different reasons for this subjectivity, be it the viewer’s general knowledge, education or nationality. The viewer’s own values are also an important factor in this type of analysis. The same applies to literature analysis as well. For further studies, it would be interesting to study the characterization of the Borg and Hugh in relation to other Borg characters in the franchise. The Borg make an appearance in one episode of *Star Trek: Enterprise* and they have a prominent role in the later seasons of *Star Trek: Voyager*, specifically the character of Seven of Nine. She is a human-Borg

hybrid who is one of the series' regular protagonists in the later seasons. Furthermore, the characterization of Hugh could also be studied in relation to other fictional characters who were first representatives of an antagonistic group and whose was later blurred or reversed. However, this would raise the scope of the study considerably, so it would require a longer, more comprehensive study. Another possible problem would be that the characterization of the Borg was somewhat reimagined in their later appearances, for example in *Star Trek: Voyager* and in the film *Star Trek: First Contact*, which creates contradicting depiction and views on the Borg.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze how the Borg are characterized and depicted in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and how this characterization develops. Another focus was to analyze the Borg's de-villainization through the character of Hugh in the episode "I Borg." Furthermore, this study aimed to analyze what kind of themes are represented and reflected with the characterization of the Borg. These questions were addressed by following the actions and interactions of the key characters of *TNG*, the Borg and the character of Hugh.

The Borg are first characterized as villainous and dangerous Othered beings in "Q Who" and the two-parter "The Best of Both Worlds." One of the themes that emerges in their characterization in these episodes is a technological, dystopian society, and the Borg are depicted to show no positive or redeemable qualities. Another theme that comes up in these episodes is the captivity narrative, as most of the main characters seem to prefer death to being changed into a Borg drone, which would strip them of their individuality and personality. The Borg are also characterized as Othered beings, as they are depicted to be foreign and alien in their actions and interaction with the main characters. The Borg see the main characters as inferior life-forms and are only interested in acquiring the main characters' technology in "Q Who." However, the Borg are not depicted necessarily as evil beings. Rather, they appear to be indifferent to the main characters in "Q Who." In addition to this, in "The Best of Both Worlds," the Borg are characterized to not see themselves as villains and they are depicted to rather consider themselves to improve other societies by assimilating them. However, this naturally goes against *Star Trek's* liberal, humanistic world view. "The Best of Both Worlds" also creates viewer allegiance towards the Borg, as Picard is assimilated into a Borg drone. This gives a different perspective to the Borg's characterization, as a familiar main character is turned into a Borg, which makes the Borg's depiction more complex and not as black-and-white.

Hugh's characterization in "I Borg" plays an important role in the development of the Borg's characterization and increasing viewer allegiance towards the Borg. In their initial appearance, the Borg were depicted purely as antagonists. "I Borg" is the first time where an individual Borg is taken from the Borg Collective and more understanding is given to the mindset and culture of the Borg. Hugh's role as an individual Borg character is used to develop and blur the characterization of the

Borg, as he is depicted to change from a typical Borg drone to a good-willed, innocent protagonist. This gives also a more optimistic view in the depiction of the Borg as a whole, as the episode hints that the sense of individuality could spread in the Collective. Furthermore, Hugh's characterization is also used to reflect *Star Trek's* liberal, humanistic values and the utopian depiction of humanity to the viewer through Hugh's interaction with the main characters of *TNG*.

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