BORG TACTICAL CUBE

Specifcation

Type: Class-4 Tactical Cube
In Service: 2370s
Length: 3040 Meters
Crew: Approximately 64,000
Top Speed: Transwarp capable
Weaponry: Beam weapons, Photonics Missiles
Status: Destroyed 2377
DATA FEED
All Borg drones, no matter how far apart they were in the galaxy, were joined in a hive mind, or collective consciousness, via their neural transceivers. Each Borg ship was equipped with a vinculum that interconnected the minds of all drones on board, while another device called the central plexus connected all their ships together.

The Borg tactical cube appeared to be a similar size to other Borg cubes, meaning it was vast. It had an internal volume of 28 cubic kilometers with each side measuring 3040 meters (more than three kilometers). This meant it was more like a mobile city-state than a spaceship.

Seven of Nine described the tactical cube as being "heavily armed," indicating that it also possessed superior firepower compared to a standard Borg cube. It was certainly equipped with powerful beam and projectile weapons, while it also displayed the ability to access Voyager’s tactical controls in order to lower the Starfleet ship’s shields.

INTERNAL CONFIGURATION
The interior of the tactical cube appeared to be similar to other Borg cubes in that it featured a generalized design with no specific command center, living quarters or engineering sections. The internal architecture did appear to differ in one significant way, however, in that its central plexus was protected by multi-regenerative security fields. The central plexus was one of the most important components of a Borg vessel, as it was the communication device that linked the ship to all other Borg ships. This meant that the status of each Borg cube, or whatever information it assimilated,
was instantaneously broadcast to every other Borg cube, no matter how far apart they were from each other. This was one of the Borg’s greatest strengths as it allowed them to act as one, and coordinate their efforts in a way no other species was able to do.

Given the importance of the central plexus, it was afforded a high level of protection, and on a tactical cube it was located in an area surrounded by multi-regenerative security grids. These ensured that not only would it be protected from damage in an external attack, but also that any intruders would be detected long before they could reach this vital area.

Ironically, while the central plexus provided the Borg with one of their greatest strengths, it also proved to be an area of vulnerability that the Voyager crew were able to exploit. When Captain Janeway learned that there were thousands of Borg drones who were living as individuals free from the Borg Collective in an artificial construct known as Unimatrix Zero, she was determined to help them.

INFECTING THE CUBE
A plan was formulated to infect the central plexus of a Borg tactical cube with a nanovirus that would then be instantly disseminated throughout the Collective. The nanovirus was designed to allow the members of Unimatrix Zero to retain their individuality in the real world, and in the process create a Borg resistance movement from within.

As there was no hope of an away team reaching the tactical cube’s central plexus without being detected, the Doctor administered them with a neural suppressant that temporarily allowed them to retain their individuality and carry out their mission.

Once on board the tactical cube, the away team made their way to the central plexus via a primary access port that was separate from the main power grid. By this point, Voyager was struggling to repel the assault by the tactical cube, but the virus had taken effect. In an effort to stop the away team from escaping, the Borg Queen ordered the tactical cube to self-destruct, but they were beamed back to Voyager with just seconds to spare.
Thanks to its highly decentralized structure, it was estimated that a Borg cube could remain functional even if 78% of it was rendered inoperable.

The Borg tactical cube encountered by the crew of Voyager was referred to as tactical cube 138 by the Borg Queen, perhaps indicating that there were at least 138 of them. Seven of Nine referred to it as a class-4 tactical cube.

DATA FEED

A Borg sphere commandeered by Korok, a former Klingon who possessed the mutated gene that allowed him to be part of Unimatrix Zero, helped save Captain Janeway, Tuvok and Torres from the tactical cube. His sphere targeted the shields of the tactical cube in sub-grid 42, causing them to destabilize enough for the away team to be beamed to safety.

The Delta Flyer was blown to pieces by a Borg projectile fired from the tactical cube just after the away team had managed to transport across to it through a minor fluctuation in its enhanced shields.

The Delta Flyer was then able to fly close enough to the cube to beam the away team through the damaged shield grid. Immediately after the successful transport, the Delta Flyer was blown to molecules by a short barrage of Borg torpedoes, but by this time the away team were on their way to successfully deploying the nanovirus in the central plexus of the tactical cube.

PERILOUS PLAN

The U.S.S. Voyager NCC-74656 undertook one of its most dangerous missions when it engaged a Borg tactical cube in battle in order to get the partially assimilated Janeway, Tuvok and Torres aboard the Borg ship. Voyager concentrated its fire on the secondary emitter on the ventral axis of the cube, which eventually produced a 0.06 terahertz fluctuation in one of its shield grids. The Delta Flyer was then able to fly close enough to the cube to beam the away team through the damaged shield grid. Immediately after the successful transport, the Delta Flyer was blown to molecules by a short barrage of Borg torpedoes, but by this time the away team were on their way to successfully deploying the nanovirus in the central plexus of the tactical cube.

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The number of drones aboard a Borg cube could vary widely. Some cubes had a complement of just 5,000, while others had 64,000. The Borg cube encountered by Seven of Nine’s parents was said to have as many as 129,000 on board.

HULLY RESILIENT

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How do you make a Borg cube look tougher and more aggressive?

Doug Drexler decided what it needed was a flak jacket.

When it was time to design the Borg tactical cube for "Unimatrix Zero," the art department had already left on hiatus between seasons, so the job was given to visual effects house Foundation Imaging. Fortunately, their staff included Doug Drexler, who had spent several years in the art department of STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE after a spell in the makeup department of STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION.

"I was the only guy on the STAR TREK: VOYAGER team at Foundation who was a sketcher," said Drexler. "If Rick (Stembach) was too busy, or the art department had left for hiatus, Rob (Bonchune) or Mojo (Libowitz) would ask me to bash out ideas. This was the case when I worked in the DEEP SPACE NINE art department as well. If John Eaves was busy I would pinch-hit. I enjoyed designing, but I think that I wouldn’t have wanted to be the lead illustrator. It was a tough job. This way I got to dabble. "When Rob told me that they wanted a new type of Borg cube, I was kind of amused," continued Drexler. "After all, a cube is a cube, right?"

With this difficult brief in mind, Drexler sat down and worked up several rough sketches. He said experience had
One of Drexler’s designs depicted a pyramid. He never expected this to be accepted, but submitted it as an in-joke – making the shape of the different Borg vessels the same as the UPN logo, which consisted of a cube, a sphere and a pyramid. At that point, Borg ship design had mainly been a cube and a ball. The pyramid (triangle) would have completed the thing with tongue planted firmly in cheek. I knew the powers-that-be wanted a cube, but I couldn’t resist.

CG MODEL

Drexler described the drawing that was chosen as basically “a Borg cube wearing a flak jacket!” Having designed the ship, he handed it on to his friend Koji Kuramura, who built the final model. “Koji sat right behind me,” said Drexler. “As he worked, he’d call me over for a look-see and I’d put in my two cents’ worth. If he needed clarification or more detailed sketches I would kick a few out for him.”

Drexler says that most of the detailing was added at this stage. “You’ll notice that my sketches were done in rather broad strokes. They were all there in the model. It was crazy to try and spell out all the mega-nooks and hyper-crannies of a Borg contrivance.”

Redesigning the Borg cube was a tough assignment. Drexler likened it to being asked to restyle a basketball – just about impossible. Some of his ideas included adding sharp pointy masts, spears and antennas. “As a joke I even drew one up that was a pyramid. You know, the UPN (United Paramount Network) symbol ... a square, a ball, and a triangle. At that point, Borg ship design had mainly been a cube and a ball. The pyramid (triangle) would have completed the thing with tongue planted firmly in cheek. I knew the powers-that-be wanted a cube, but I couldn’t resist.”
THE BORG EVOLVE

The Borg were always immensely popular, but if they were to remain compelling the writers realized they would have to be far more than just automatons relentlessly assimilating everything in their path.

When writers Brannon Braga and Ronald D. Moore began work on ST:TNG: FIRST CONTACT, they were both excited by the possibilities of doing the Borg on a feature budget. Braga remembered that their first draft of the story involved time travel, but, in the early stages, the Borg didn’t have a leader.

BORG QUEEN

“We actually had a story for the movie without the Borg Queen,” said Braga. “But, we realized – actually it came from a note from Jonathan Dolgen, head of features over here – we needed to put a face on these villains. He was right; we couldn’t have sustained a movie with just the faceless hordes. So we invented the Queen. I think that was a really good thing to do. It gave the Borg a voice. It gave them a character.”

Braga explained that there was a good reason for making the Borg’s leader a woman. She could be a seductress who could tempt Data with that most basic of human needs – sex. As Braga said, “We knew immediately once we came up with the Queen that she was going to be ‘creepy-sassy.’ The Borg was this faceless horde and we wanted this villain to be a seductress, but be creepy at the same time.”

As Braga, who later became STAR TREK: VOYAGER’s executive producer, said, she also gave the Borg a much-needed identity – finally they had a voice that could espouse a philosophy more than just ‘resistance is futile.’

EMERGING THEMES

“All sorts of themes came out of FIRST CONTACT with the Queen that we would end up using quite a bit on VOYAGER,” said Braga. “We started coming up with ideas of what was the Borg’s world view – the quest for perfection, the idea that most things were viewed as weaknesses: the idea that the Borg, in fact, believed that they were helping others by bringing them to perfection. That it was a strangely philanthropic goal that the Borg had. On VOYAGER, we continued to stand upon individuality versus the hive mind. The struggle of Seven of Nine to some degree was embodied in the struggle of Data and the Borg Queen. That kind of moral berter between the Queen and Data would be visited again and again on VOYAGER, whether it was between Janeway and Seven, or Seven and the Queen, or Janeway and the Queen.”

RETURN TO TELEVISION

Once FIRST CONTACT was over, it was inevitable that the Borg’s next appearance would be on television. As it turned out, the Borg only started to feature on VOYAGER when Braga took control of the writing staff in the third season. The two-part ‘Scorpion,’ was one of ST:TNG’s most cinematic stories. It featured an all-out war between the Borg and Species 8472 and, in the second part, introduced us to Seven of Nine, the Borg drone who would become a crew member.

As Braga explained, ‘Scorpion’ was based on a relatively simple premise. “The origin of that show was ‘somebody is kicking the Borg’s butt,’ then it evolved into Janeway’s going to make an alliance with the Borg. A ‘deal with the devil’ was an interesting idea.” He added that it was only as the Borg Queen, or Janeway and the Queen.

Once it was decided to bring Seven of Nine aboard, it became the mouthpiece of the Borg, and ensured they were no longer a ‘faceless hordes.’ She also embodied everything that was lacking in the Borg – she was an emotionally and sexually aware individual who understood exactly how to tempt Data.

The Borg became an essential part of ST:V discovery. When Seven joined the crew in its fourth season, it felt to the Borg an acceptable price to pay to control their ship and their entire world. Yet, even here, the Borg remained a formidable foe. As a seductive, charismatic, and dangerous woman, the Borg Queen represented all that the Borg stood for, and everything that the Federation was not. She was a reminder of the dangers that lurked in the darkness, and a symbol of the Borg’s ultimate ambition. As Braga said, “If we wanted this villain to be a seductress, but be creepy at the same time.”

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Hugh was one of the Borg that had been freed from the Collective in "1, Borg." This had been a very successful episode, but he was very mechanical and robotic. Braga said he wanted to talk with former drones – on TNG, a drone, Hugh, had been liberated from the collective in the episode "I, Borg" and had returned in "Descent."

Whereas Hugh was confused by leaving the collective and soon rejected the Borg, Seven was much more focused and angry. "Seven was disconnected and she was not confused," said Braga. "She wanted to go back, and even after a long time she thought of the Borg as a superior species, but she grew to appreciate her humanity enough that she was willing to protect it."

Seven reached her most important crossroads in "Dark Frontier" when she rejected the opportunity to rejoin the Borg in favor of her life on Voyager. This telefilm also featured the return of the Borg Queen, a character Braga had always planned to bring back.

"Janeway was the surrogate mother and the Queen was the natural mother," said Braga. "and it was a struggle for Seven between the two of them. You got a nice emotional investment for Janeway and the Queen, and you put Seven in the middle, and she was torn about her loyalties."

DIFFERENT KIND OF DRONE

Seven's creators also had some experience of dealing with former drones – on TNG, another drone, Hugh, had been liberated from the collective in the episode "I, Borg" and had returned in "Descent."

"I think that the way it happened was I was talking to (producer) Joe Menosky in the middle of the night and I said how cool it would be to put a Borg on board and what would happen if a crew member was a Borg? I called Rick Berman and it was his idea to make it a female, and it kind of went from there," said Braga. "She was very, very confused before and suddenly she couldn't hear the voices of drones all around her; she was losing her children and it was freaking her out."

Braga had no doubts that the Borg were being used well on VGR and that he was quick to point out that it was difficult to keep dealing with, and overcoming, such a powerful foe. "No enemy's invincible. In fact, ironically, the problem was not that they were invincible; the problem became that the seemingly invincible foe became vulnerable. Every time we met them, we got away. At this point in the game you started to wonder, well, instead of sending one cube, how about 50?"

In the end, Braga was also keen to push into new aspects of the Borg, and he was convinced that this was the best way to keep them interesting. "It was really a matter of making sure that Voyager was always somewhat creepy and repulsive, but we also knew from the Borg Queen that they could be kinky-sexy, so we saw Seven of Nine pretty clearly from the beginning."

QUEEN UNDER PRESSURE

"Unimatrix Zero" revealed that some drones had been living an alternate life in cyberspace while they were regenerating. The story ended with the destruction of Unimatrix Zero, but left the resistance intact. Braga's main aim wasn't to alter the Borg forever, rather to show us a new side to the Borg Queen, who was deeply disturbed at the thought she might lose control of the Collective. "We wanted to give Susanna Thompson, who played the Queen, something interesting to do, and again we didn't want to just wheel out the Borg Queen: we wanted to show new dimensions, so we thought it would be fun to see her unravel a bit. She'd never been threatened before and suddenly she couldn't hear the voices of drones all around her; she was losing her children and it was freaking her out."

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ON SCREEN

TRIVIA

An unforeseen problem occurred just prior to the filming of ‘Unimatrix Zero, Part I’ when Jeri Ryan broke her foot tripping on a step. Production designer Richard James had to keep this in mind when he designed the set for Unimatrix Zero, which took the form of a lush forest. He said, “We mounded up the shubbery to hide Jeri’s broken foot and had to keep the paths flat.” Director Allan Kroeker added, “We used every trick we could think of to make Jeri walk. One scene was a kind of walk-and-talk Steadicam shot in the forest. She had to use a cane, but we managed to hide it.”

One of the decapitated Borg heads that was seen in ‘Unimatrix Zero’ was actually a mold of Brent Spiner’s (Data’s) head, and had been previously used in STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION.

Mark Deakins, who played Axum in ‘Unimatrix Zero,’ had previously appeared as Tournel, a member of the Ba’ku in STAR TREK: INSURRECTION, and Turanj, a Hirogen hunter on the STAR TREK: VOYAGER episodes ‘The Killing Game, Part I & II.’

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