

## **Episode 3.17**

### **Diminished Fifth**

Shades of red still haunted the alien skyline. Clouds no longer churned, they merely drifted along as if they were natural. They floated over the glaciers, and looked to be fading away. Night had fallen, the colours reflected off the ice. No one was around though to admire the sight, not until the centre of the cloud slid open once more. The Enterprise emerged first, quickly followed by the tiny shuttle named Ship.

"Woah," Tom said, his jaw agape as he stared at the viewscreen.

"Yeah," Lena said, though her voice made her sound disinterested. "Evil isn't always ugly, you know."

Tom smiled, "how corny of you."

Lena rolled her eyes at the same time she walked forward towards Opps. "Well you are the expert. How are we doing?"

"Our theory was right. Without the lost game fail safe frequency Damien modified his opener with, the portal doesn't have any of the pull that dragged us in. We're clear," Triah answered.

"Good. Can we close the door behind us?" Lena asked.

"Not for a while. We barely have enough power to keep the shields up," Triah replied uneasily.

"It's okay, I don't think there's much hurry here," Lena said, glancing briefly at the viewscreen.

Tom nodded and folded his arms, "true enough. How far away are we from the city, we need...?"

Lena glared toward him, instantly making him shrink down. "The priority should be locating Voyager. If the portal is here now, they might have emerged on the other side of the planet, or they could've gone into orbit."

"Yeah um, the portal's interfering with our scanners. Once we move away from its range we'll pick it up. The city's not far, won't take long," Triah said.

Tom looked a little too smug for his own good, even with Lena still staring at him.

"We're a sitting duck like this," Lena argued.

"Yeah and we still are sitting under that thing," Tom said, pointing up.

Lena took in a deep breath to compose herself. It only worked for a few seconds. "How small is this damn planet that we have only two choices on where to go? Take us part way, discreetly."

Bryan looked around nervously, he focused on his dad to avoid being glared at too. Tom gestured his hand forward, a hint to do as she said. He nodded back and got to work.

The next few minutes were a little awkward with Tom shuffling his feet and his absent minded attempt to sit in the Captain's chair a couple of times. Lena only had to stare with no expression to get him to stop, then he'd only do it again a short while later.

"The city's in visual range. Still no sign of Voyager," Triah reported.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Bryan mumbled.

"Let's see," Lena sighed.

The viewscreen so far had only shown nothing but darkened skies and a few normal clouds, then it flickered to a different point of view; the land below them. A few specs of grey almost cloaked in darkness. The image quickly zoomed in, prompting a few gasps from the bridge crew. Buildings that still stood scorched, chunks missing, with black smoke still pouring from the windows. Even buildings untouched were powerless, not a light to be seen anywhere. The darkness they had seen wasn't due to it being nighttime since the sky had been getting lighter the closer they got, the smoke from so many buildings filled their sky.

"What the... You said Damien was contained with what little Soft he had left, the rest of them were retreating..." Tom stammered toward Lena.

She was too shocked to get annoyed at him for doubting her story. "I... I did, I don't know. This doesn't look like all Game Cube damage either. What the hell happened here?"

Ship left the Enterprise's side while two shuttles took off from the two bays. Even the Captain's Yacht began to split from the ship.

To each other's distaste Tom and James were manning Ship all because Lena wouldn't let Tom near *her* Yacht. He had tried to keep his complaints mostly to himself, fearing a little for his life.

"I'm just saying, wouldn't you want to have the best pilot flying your precious yacht?" Tom muttered quietly to himself.

It wasn't quiet enough, like the rest of his rambles. He noticed once he was done that he was being stared at. Tom bit his tongue and tried to ignore it.

Finally James let up and looked ahead again. "How long until the Command Centre?"

"Two minutes," Tom replied reluctantly. "Might as well be an hour, yikes," he whispered.

"I'm sitting right next to you. I didn't lose one of my ears," James said.

Tom laughed very nervously, "yeah, good one." James sighed, apparently letting that slide. Tom took it as a cue to go on, "about that. Did your other senses, um... double? No not double, like one point five?"

"You want to know how it happened," James said in deadpan.

"No," Tom quickly said, sounding a little too outraged. "Fine, maybe a little, but I'm more curious as to why you didn't get it fixed somehow. Not one doc on your travels?" He didn't give him time to answer, not like James was going to. Tom said in a sneaky tone, "it's a look, you want people to see you and crap their pants."

James looked around at him again in such a cold manner it made Tom shudder a little. "Good job," Tom ended up saying through a lump in his throat.

The Captain's Yacht settled a few feet from the ground close to the still smouldering wreck of the factory Damien had used for his base, as well as what remained of the Pegasus.

Lena jumped down from it first, both EMH's carefully did so not as eagerly. She glanced behind her at them as the Yacht pulled up to fly toward one of the cubed craters.

"This wasn't your stop. I told you, only Damien and his goons will be here," she scolded them.

"Nevertheless, they could need treatment. Perhaps if I find one of these Softmicron we may learn more about them," the Doctor said.

Freddie seemed to disagree, he aimed his stance towards where the yacht flew. "I'll go meet up with them then, shall I?"

"Sure, just don't be too offended if when I see you again I fire or poke you with a knife," Lena said. Both EMH's stared at her blankly, annoying her again. "Shapeshifters, how many times must I send that memo?"

"How rude," Freddie commented as he walked off.

Lena looked directly at the Doctor with a tired frown, when he didn't go either she gestured her head to one side and walked in that direction. He followed closely. On route to the factory they stumbled on one of the shield generators, blackened and lying on the ground.

"It looks like it overloaded," Lena mumbled as she crouched down to get a better look. "Are they all like this, one emitter couldn't have took down the entire shield."

"Sometimes all you need is one to break the circuit," the Doctor mused.

Lena sighed and continued to scan around. Something metallic in the distance caught her eye. "What's that?"

The Doctor attempted to follow her gaze, which lead him to the smoking rubble of the Pegasus. Flames close by flickered in the breeze, casting a silver piece in orange for a moment. Afterwards it looked lighter than the rest, it stood out and so he was surprised he missed it. He assumed that was what she meant. "It looks like something escaped the disaster."

"Or it wasn't here when it happened," Lena said, she headed in its direction.

Tom followed closely behind James as he walked along a quiet street. No damage, only a large amount of litter lined the road. Most of which were banners covered in alien writing and pictures.

The spherical command centre loomed in the distance, obscured by only the taller buildings. Tom thought rightly that was James' destination, even if he never gave him a clue about where they were going at all.

It didn't take long to clear the buildings in the way, leaving only an imposing wall and gate blocked by a swarm of protestors. James stopped and tensed at the sight of them. Tom, being behind him, heard the roaring chants and random shouting before he saw anything. He stepped around him so he could see, curious as to why the populace would be protesting outside a government building at a time their city was burning from Game Cube attacks and invading aliens.

At first glance they seemed to be there for one unknown reason, but the different chants as well as the occasional roughhousing within the crowds told the pair that the crowd had different complaints to each other.

"Fight the beasts, not each other!" one part of the crowd occasionally chanted at the same time, while pushing their banners up and down.

"Cast the Humans out!" some stragglers kept trying to scream in between those.

"You are destroying the city, stop hiding..." one woman screamed during a brief lull.

Someone else shouted over her, "traitors!" seemingly in agreement since both comments were directed at two guards at the gate.

Tom understood a lot less than he did before. He had a feeling James would a little since he had spent some time in this city. When he looked toward his teammate he instead found him stealthily approaching the gate, avoiding an open approach by keeping to the walls. Tom quickly ran to follow which annoyed him.

"Quiet," James hissed back.

"Sorry," Tom said once he caught up and slowed down. "What's this about?"

"I'm not fully sure," James replied in a whisper.

Tom winced. He got the *fight the beasts* protestors, but the rest made no sense to him. The pair managed to slip into the quieter part of the crowds, allowing them to get a better look at the gate and its two guards. Tom spotted the scorch marks dotted around the building and its surrounding wall, telling him a battle had took place here and only here. "The Softmicron," he whispered to himself, suddenly wary of the protestors around him. None of them seemed to be armed, he still remained on guard.

"How dare you betray our leader!" a woman screamed close to them both, leaving Tom's ears ringing. After another *fight the beasts* chant she continued to shout, "how do you live with yourself!?"

"Turanga let them in, he's a soft touch," a man grunted toward her.

The woman marched up to him, cutting across in front of Tom and James. "He didn't let the creatures in, you idiot! The purple cubes did."

James groaned impatiently as the two arguing were in his way. Tom looked on worried and thought to mediate before there was any blood. "Hey hey, maybe you should calm down and..."

The man glowered at him so much he trembled, "Humans!" Some of the crowd turned to look with similar expressions.

"Really?" James groaned.

The man went to shove James first since he was closest. He only had to look at him to make the alien change his mind and scramble off fearfully. They weren't the only ones who the shouting had caught the attention of. The guards were glancing in their direction while reaching for a mobile phone shaped comm device.

"Great job Tom," James grumbled while reaching for his gun.

Tom's eyes widened, "no no no!" He went to grab it but quickly figured he'd regret it and pulled back. "These people hate us, don't give them any ammo."

James was temporarily put off, his hand froze in place by his side. "My son's in there. They're about to call for backup."

"You don't know that on both counts. We need to regroup, scout and plan. It's the best way and you know it. Or you used to," Tom said.

The silence he got for that seemed like minutes. In reality only a few seconds passed before he grunted and walked back the way they came. Tom gave out a nervous laugh at the angry and yet nervous stares they were getting before hurrying off after him.

Once back in the relative safety of the streets, James turned into an alleyway. Tom almost missed him. "I don't get any of this," Tom said as soon as he joined him.

James shook his head. "Damien, Wesley. They tried to pin the blame for lost Games on us."

"How? The Softmicron are clearly the aggressors here," Tom said bewilderedly.

"But they didn't do anything until Damien leashed them to keep us out of the Games, making them lose," James answered.

Tom seemed to get it, he smiled knowingly. It didn't last much longer than a couple of seconds though, "nope, still don't get it. They were invading the city."

"Some people believe what they want to," James muttered.

"What's easier you mean?" Tom said uneasily.

James glanced away and looked up toward a billowing cloud of smoke drifting over the rooftops. "Whatever makes them right."

Tom flinched at his defeated sounding tone. "That's a little cynical, isn't it? Sure history isn't on my side here, but if your city was in ruins, you were helpless against hordes of powerful aliens..." Realisation struck him in the face, "oh, that's it. You don't know what helpless feels like. Of course you'd see their ignorance as an agenda."

James gave him a dark stare that Tom was worried would turn literal at any moment. He knew better and backed off.

"On one planet the government planted explosives as a means to create their own lost Game sites," James said, pausing a moment to let that sink in. Tom watched with his jaw agape. "We don't know why. To build something new on an occupied site, to cull population or maybe for some sick tourist site, we didn't have time to find out. We won a few Games and still, this kept happening. The people thought we were to blame."

"I..." Tom tried to interrupt.

"So don't mouth off at me over things you don't understand. Got it?" James snapped.

Tom swallowed a large lump in his throat, it throbbed afterwards. "Sure, but not everyone thinks like that here. You saw it. Looks like some sort of mutiny went down here while you were gone. It's possible our people got out before it did. We don't know. We need more information."

"I know, I agreed with you there," James said irritably. "You have any ideas on how to do that?"

"Hmm well, asking around is out. Alien or Soft, we're painting target signs on us," Tom said thoughtfully. He noticed James looking shifty, his hand once more on his weapon. Tom had little time to worry as it was quickly raised and pointed over his shoulder toward two people standing behind him. Tom figured it was safe to turn around. Once he clasped his eyes on them the worry faded away.

"Oh I was right. They're fakes. What do we do?" Tani asked, her hands raised in a surrender pose.

Craig glanced at her bewilderedly, his hands doing the same. "You can tell the difference? I can't. James would do this too."

"Guys it's fine," Tom chuckled, stepping forward. James grabbed his arm to stop him.

"We don't know if it's really them," he warned him.

Tom looked very confused for a moment. Then it hit him, "oh right, shapeshifters."

"How do we know if you're really you?" Craig asked. Tom responded by pointing up at the Enterprise circling by in the sky. Craig didn't bite though, "yeah, you'd like me to look away."

Tom snickered obnoxiously and gestured behind him toward James, "oh right, wouldn't want to lose your clear advantage here."

"I dunno," Tani smiled dreamily. "James didn't have a sexy scar over his eye before."

"He also didn't use a phaser," Craig said whilst shuddering.

James wavered slightly at Tani's remark. "What the hell? How is a bloodshot eye and a scratch sexy?" he asked, exasperated. Tom tried not to laugh at him. "I got it because I lost, how is that a good thing in anyway? I don't get it."

Craig couldn't help but laugh as well, "I'm convinced. That's James."

"What?" James groaned.

"Me too," Tom said, gesturing a nod in Tani's direction. "Maybe now that's cleared up you can update us."

"Not here, it's not safe. Follow," Tani said.

Damien stared in disgust at who stood before him. Everytime they spoke, crumbs and what looked like gristle sprayed out of his mouth and sometimes into his beard. By the time he was almost done with his report there was a pile in front of him.

"I know it's been a while but I'd recognise it anywhere. I'm sure of it," Riker said after finally swallowing the last of his sandwich.

"Hmm, so the Enterprise is back in town," Damien said thoughtfully. He casually swapped his crossed legs slouched over the armrest, all while flourishing his hand. A smile spread across his face. "You know what this means." Riker was about to say something but Damien laughed before he could. "Of course you don't."

"I get the big chair? It's been fifteen years. Now's my time to shine," Riker giggled excitedly.

Damien's eyes widened, he hurried to put his feet down and stand up. "No you imbecile. Voyager is the prize, but I'd gladly take the Enterprise as a reimbursement for the loss of the Pegasus."

"How would you sit in both chairs?" Riker huffed.

Damien shook his head and walked away, waving his hand in the former first officer's face as he passed. "No, what this really means is the door to the Games Matrix is open again."

Riker looked on a little confused. "I thought that was a bad thing, sir."

"Not for me once I get a working ship that'll take me and my prize away from this wretched planet," Damien whirled around to snap at him. He brought a little device from his pocket to leer at it, his fingers encircled it protectively. "Revenge shall be served cold tonight."

"Dude, even I know that's corny," Riker smirked. Then he went into a daydream, "oh!"

"Cornish pasties?" Damien said in monotone, his face matched his voice.

"No, double fudge cheesecake with whipped cream," Riker said, he dashed off out of sight.

Damien was left behind with a confused and disgusted look on his face. "What?" he grunted after a few seconds of that. "How did he get that from corny? Never mind. Minion number 1 over there!" he barked over his shoulder.

The leader of the emergency response team flinched at his demeaning everything. Her normally pale green cheeks flushed a deep blue as her jaw clenched. "I am not your minion. I only joined the resistance to defend my *wretched* planet from the voyagers and their shapeshifters."

Damien chuckled passive aggressively, "yeah yeah. Since transporters are one of our blocked systems, plug this in," he said, brandishing a tiny mechanical box from his shirt pocket in her face. "Prepare to beam an attack force to the *enterprisers*. Anyone who tries to pull any Janeway stunts, shoot them on sight. Not that any idiots there should have command code clearance to do it."

"I can't," the woman said with smugness. Damien's good mood washed away. "They have fully functional shields."

"So? Having shields on that thing never made a difference," Damien grumbled whilst retaking his former seat.

"Unless the Enterprise happens upon us, they're not going to be close enough anyway," she said bitterly.

Damien growled as he looked all around the entire Bridge, "Janeway. Where the hell did you park this bucket?" Something metallic bumped into him from above, he looked up and scowled at whatever was responsible. A sheepish alien passing by with a toolkit hurried away. "No flight controls, no warp drive, impulse, no sensors, even the replicators are giving me attitude."

"Sir?" Riker looked confused.

"I asked Janeway's Ready Room one for a yoghurt and it squirted it in my face. That crazy woman thinks she's so smart. I'll get the command codes off her yet..." Damien grumbled as Riker tried to lick the crumbs still in his beard. He noticed and narrowed his eyes. "Wait a minute. You can use the replicators?"

Riker looked far too proud for his own good. "No need sir, I found a stash of grub in Two Forward. I saved you a chop sir because I respect you so much."

Damien stared at him blankly. Riker smiled chirpily back. Eventually Damien did break out into a devious smile. "Looks like I might be able to persuade her yet."

"Um, yes sir," Riker was confused.

"Go back there and put the rat's stove on," Damien said while climbing out of the seat. He made his way over to the Ready Room. "I just need one key ingredient."

A loud thump cut him off before he could walk through the door. Damien looked around to find Riker lying on the ground with that same chirpy smile on his face. He let out a tired sigh.

Lena and the Doctor didn't have to walk for too long before the object they spotted earlier became clear. They even noticed more of them lying, scattered across their path. All of them metallic, small containers big enough to fit one person, they reminded Lena of teeth. The Doctor had his nose in the tricorder for most of the way, hmmm'ing now and then.

"They're ours that's for sure, looks like around ten escape pods. Any lifesigns?" Lena said.

"No, but I am picking up a vast amount of thoron particles in the vicinity," the Doctor replied.

Lena's eyes darted from one side to another, "so?"

"So..." the Doctor smiled in response. Before he could explain the pair heard faint crunching approaching them. Lena swung around to the source on her left, her rifle raised slightly ready to fire. She didn't, her face softened immediately.

"So, thoron particles is an old Marquis trick to fool tricorders," a friendly face said.

"Dad?" Lena said with relief. It was short lived as a paranoid thought entered her head. "Why are you here? Where's mum?"

Chakotay's smile briefly wavered. He looked around warily before pointing a finger at his daughter. "I don't think this is the right place for long stories. We should go inside."

"Inside?" Lena laughed. "There's one?"

"Barely," Chakotay admitted, he gestured for the pair to follow him.

Papers strewn all over, bulky computers buzzing frantically like a cheap printer, blackened charred walls with only a tiny window near the ceiling. It wasn't exactly what Tom and James expected after being lead down many deep steps surrounded by walls with posters advertising pub band events. Apart from the computers the strange room fell deathly silent on their arrival. It bothered Tom a little as they walked further inside, James meanwhile only seemed put off by the constant dripping sound coming from another door near the corner.

"Cosy," Tom had to comment.

Craig glanced around at everyone staring at them. "It's okay, they're the real deal." His comment convinced most of them, they got back to work. "Yeah, it's a bit of a downgrade to the Command Centre but it does the job. So um..." he said as James continued walking and passed by him. "Okay."

"Don't take it personally," Tom said with a smile.

"I do, we weren't exactly friends the last time..." Craig mumbled nervously.

Tani laughed briefly, "I'll say. Wish I had been a fly on that wall."

Tom glanced curiously between Craig and then James, who had already scared two of the aliens from their posts as he looked at their monitors. "Oh to have the time. For the moment, I'm a little curious about how you ended up in this dive. James said you had everything mostly contained when he left."

"I guess we did. After we locked Damien up with the shield, he lost most of his forces trying to break through it," Tani said.

"Hold up. Shield? What shield?" Tom butted in.

Craig chuckled darkly, "yeah, exactly."

Tom sighed, "okay I get this less and less. What about Voyager, did it..."

Craig and Tani looked at one another as he spoke, they missed James circle back to join them. "Not everyone's here," he interrupted, startling all three of them. "Perhaps we should cut to the chase."

"Yes, or no rather. I figured we should get that out of the way first," Tani stammered. She hurried over to the only other door in the basement hideout to open it and crouch down. Her voice turned to a whisper, they only heard the words, "big surprise."

Seconds later a small figure hurried out of the door. His eyes and face lit up at the sight of the new arrivals. "Dad?" James looked on with a similar reaction as the figure bounded over to him. He knelt down in time for the small boy to wrap his arms around him tightly.

Tom looked on in more relief than anything else. He even went to wipe an invisible bead of sweat from his brow. "At least now I can call off the kid hunt. I wasn't about to tell him."

"So, this is good. Both Voyager and Enterprise back in the mix," Tani said cheerfully. "Our getting out of here is no longer a pipe dream."



Tom made a few hmm sounds while looking away, unsure of what to say to that.

James overheard, he frowned and glanced over. "Voyager should've gotten here long before us. You haven't seen it?"

Craig and Tani shared a worried expression.

Chakotay and his team lead Lena and the Doctor into what was left of Damien's lab deep in the factory. Only now it had no roof, and a fourth wall was missing.

The Doctor clasped eyes on the contraption that Annika had been tied up to. "God, do I want to know what this is for?" He studied it before pointing the tricorder towards it.

"This building seemed to be a factory which made comm devices," Chakotay said as if he didn't believe what he was saying. Lena watched him curiously. "With brainwashing machines on the side. It raises questions."

"No wonder Damien settled here," Lena said.

They both heard the Doctor grunt as he recoiled in horror. "This has elements of Borg in its technology."

"Yeah, eyebrows permanently raised," Chakotay said. "Nothing else he does, just that."

Lena huffed impatiently. "Dad, we're inside now, for the most part. I need to know."

Chakotay nodded and glanced briefly back at the others with him, standing in front of what remained of the missing wall. "Yes, it's time."

### **Several weeks earlier The Command Centre:**

Harry stared at the large viewscreen ahead of him with a defeated grimace on his face. Some people misinterpreted it as disgust, it was very similar.

Taking up most of the screen sat a Game Cube sitting dangerously close to the fiery shield that enveloped the sector Damien had set up shop in. That wasn't what Harry, or anyone for that matter were reacting to. It was the second cube falling out of the sky a little ways behind it.

"This is almost cheating," Harry said weakly.

"Uh... shouldn't we tell Mr Craig and Miss Tani since...?" Turanga stuttered.

Harry sighed, "really? Who's going to miss *that!*" he gestured to the new arrival.

Turanga wheeled himself over to Hach's station, passing the woman in charge of the emergency response team. She tensed once his back was turned, her eyes transfixed to the screen. "Patch us through, please," he said to Hach.

"*Yeah er, Anderson here,*" Craig's voice responded, panting heavily over the top of hurried footsteps. They could hear panicked shouts and screams in the background. "*We see it, it's fast... we may not make it.*"

Harry flinched, "but you were so close when the other one landed. How come you're... well, not?"

They heard further gasps for breath before he got a response. However it was Tani who did, "*duh, we were on our way back, stupid gel... guy.*"

"I'd say don't give up your day job but..." Harry muttered to himself. Tani still heard it though and grumbled something he didn't make out. "This could be another invasion, likely this one's in Damien's honour. Maybe..."

He was interrupted by several thuds from outside the room echoing down the halls. Turanga looked up in shock, Harry immediately thought to bring out his tricorder to determine the source as it continued. It was immediately swiped out of his hands, he soon found a gun pointed in his face.

"*What's that?*" Craig's voice asked.

Turanga quickly collected himself to respond, only to find Hach closing the commlink abruptly. He felt a weapon brush against the back of his head, brandished by Slax.

"What the hell is this?" Harry snapped toward his own captor.

The response team leader looked strangely apologetic despite having her thumb hovering over the fire command. "We're taking back our home."

"What are you talking about, Mows? We're not the enemy," Turanga asked calmly.

The noise coming from outside continued to get louder, whatever it was must've been getting close Harry figured.

"You, maybe not, but you allowed them in. I'm sorry sir," the team leader Mows said.

"But," Turanga began to object as the primary doors to the command room burst open. Many of his own people filed in pointing weapons at everyone who wasn't. Even though the room had been manned by twenty people, the number that weren't pointing weapons were a mere four, including Harry.

Harry didn't react as they would like, he only sighed and shook his head. "Let me get this straight. You waited until Craig and Tani were out to do this? I dunno if I should be insulted or amused."

Meanwhile crazed cackling echoed down the destroyed corridors of the Pegasus, footsteps were light and hurried. The cackle turned into joyful humming as it approached what remained of Damien's science lab.

The shadowed figure strode in purposefully, only to emerge a few seconds later followed by smoke and a loud crackling sound.

Her pace back through the same corridor was much slower, like it was in slow motion. The smoke trailing behind her though turned into a choking black and swept by her quickly enough that her silhouette vanished within it. After a while she hurried out of it, spluttering uncontrollably.

With her breath back she restarted her power walk, only faster with a smile on her face like nothing happened. Now fire raged behind her. That also quickly turned into an explosion which shattered the corridor walls, exposing it to the outside ruins, and tossed her to the floor with some new flames on her back.

A few seconds of rolling around later she picked herself up and patted soot from her arms, tutting all the while like it was a minor inconvenience. "I only wanted to look cool, sheesh!"

Annika stepped outside through the new hole over the rubble, only to be met with terrified screams.

"Aaah oh my god, it's horrible! My eyes, I will never unsee what I've seen!" Riker cried only for a few seconds. He stopped abruptly, shrugged it off and ate the twenty centimetre wide slides of black pizza.

"Eew!" Annika complained. Riker only then seemed to notice her, responding with only a meek shoulder shrug. "You're eating the crust, you pig."

Riker jumped out of his skin, dropping the pizza box on the floor he pointed something at her. "How did you get out?" He gasped, "you're here for my pizza, aren't you?"

Fire had spread mostly all around them, Riker still hung onto his gigantic slice and from what Annika could tell, one of those scalpel hybrids the Softmicron used on her. She stared at him blankly and snatched it off him before leaving him behind. He forgot about her the second he could grab his pizza box from the ground and scoff the contents.

Ahead many tiny figures assembled amongst the rubble, their height allowed them to avoid the low layer of smoke trailing from the destruction. They froze at the sight of her, their beady eyes looked at her not with fear but with hatred.

It didn't faze her one bit. "You don't remember, do you? I also know what it's like to be someone's plaything." They broke their hateful gaze to exchange silent exchanges between them. "Do you know who did this to you?" That got their attention back. She smiled at them. "I do."

They converged on her quickly despite their tiny frames. She only then felt a little nervous. A deep voice intruded in her mind, "who?"

"Oh I was expecting something squeaky, you know cute," Annika sighed in disappointment. None of them looked amused. "It's a compliment, it's better, much more powerful."

"The pathetic spiky one," the voice said. One of the little creatures turned to the others, arms gesturing. They all split up, their forms glowing and changing before her eyes into different beasts. The first one, she assumed the one who spoke to her, stayed behind and studied her carefully.

"You're telepathic, that's neat," Annika said uncomfortably.

The creature changed its form into Damien. When it opened its mouth the deep voice changed into his, "nothing so primitive, filthy Human."

Annika pouted, she checked her clothes again to wipe down further soot. "Hey, I'm on your side here. I freed you from his control."

"Yes," the fake Damien said. "It's the only reason you live. Prey you do not meet us again." He flounced off in the opposite direction.

"Hmph, touchy," Annika huffed.

Damien looked on from the cockpit of his only remaining car shaped shuttle as swarms of monsters spilled from the factory, trashing everything in their path. Their destination was the same; the red shield trapping them in the sector. It fluctuated in many spots, it looked to him like it was weakening.

"Well this is unfortunate. I think it's time to set up shop somewhere else," Damien said coolly.

"Yup," Riker agreed behind him.

His voice made Damien literally jump out of his seat and yelp like he'd seen a big spider. "You!" he snarled once he spotted him. "How did you get in here?"

"I smelled barbecue," Riker replied.

Damien ran his answer through his head a few times. He double checked to see if his ship was on fire. It wasn't. "How do I know you're the real Riker?"

Riker responded with a deep throated burp. It reeked of pizza, garlic and the disgusting fishcakes he had for breakfast.

"Never mind," Damien said whilst trying to keep his nose pinched.

He scanned the various sections of the shield under attack, watching them fluctuate as before when Annika attacked it. One section looked almost transparent, ready to breach any second. He was about to look away when the nearby tall pillars that generated it blew. The shield's weakness discovered, it didn't take long for it to fall completely.

His other hand tried to pilot the ship forward, his destination the Command Centre.

The city trembled from a deafening rumble as the second Game ripped out of the ground on its way back into the sky, only minutes after the first one left. The vibrations shook charred debris into the new cube shaped crater. Fires raged where the first Game had sat. Unlike its neighbour the second cube hadn't tore a chunk out of the city, it had left something else in its wake.

A frightened man ran and then jumped over the obstacles in his path, stumbling a few times. A couple of beasts with long claws followed relentlessly. The sight of the new hole in the ground shocked him into slowing, then he changed his escape route to run alongside it. A sheet of metal beneath his feet slid sideways, bringing him rolling to the ground.

They caught up to him then, scowling at the first glance of his face.

"Damien?" one asked like they already knew the answer was no.

The man timidly shook his head. "No, please."

"You know him?" the second one asked. It only got a headshake in return. The pair glanced at one another.

Screams echoed across the whole sector.

Harry could only gesture with an angered head shake as his hands were tied behind his back. "What's the mean..." Hach roughly pushed him down into a chair. "Hey! This city is being torn apart by aliens who see you as nothing but ants to be stepped on and..." He was given a nasty back of the head slap, disorienting him momentarily.

"Mr Kim is correct. This mutiny serves no purpose," Turanga protested. He had been forced to sit on a different seat, his wheelchair pushed far away from him, stranding him there. "Please, think about what you are doing."

Mows turned her head in his direction but could not look him in the eye. "We have. Only one person can save us now and it's not you."

One of the smaller doors on the upper level crept open an inch. Yasmin peered through the gap, then Duncan did the same underneath her. She pushed him to one side, he whispered a hey. "We've got to do something," she whispered, closing the door.

Duncan shook his head at her. "You just want to kill things."

"Nuh uh, I've grown from that," Yasmin protested. The pair and Kirsty froze at the sound of the large entrance doors parting. Many footsteps thundered down the corridor leaving to the command room. Yasmin quickly peeked through the door again in time to see whoever it was enter with no resistance from the mutineers.

"Ohno," Harry groaned.

It prompted a devious chuckle from the upper level. "Oh yes," a familiar voice sneered.

"Are you serious?" Harry stammered, struggling against his restraints. "He's not going to save you from the Softmicron. He controls the damn things!"

"Exactly," Mows said, stunning Harry into silence. "What choice do we have?"

Damien coolly walked down the steps, continuing his dark chuckle. "A choice you won't regret," he said, scanning the room for something. "Sometimes in order to win, you must fight fire with brainwashing."

"Win? What would you know about that?" Harry snapped.

He was ignored, Damien was more interested in his look around. No one could understand why he seemed to be getting more agitated the longer he did so. "Where the hell is everyone?"

Slax was the first to voice his confusion, "sir, this is everyone."

"Oh please," Damien grunted patronisingly. He arched his glare towards Harry, "you! Don't tell me you're the only one left of your pathetic ragtag bunch of hero wannabes."

Harry understood and he smiled, "do you want to add anymore adjectives to that insult? I've got all day."

"I will find them. This city is mine. The spiky headed Lena fangirl, Slayers' little sister, the two brats," Damien growled. That was the cue for Yasmin to close the door and quietly.

"Ok, this isn't good," she whispered.

Something clattered behind her, fortunately Damien's talking drowned it out for the people outside. Yasmin looked around to find Duncan lingering around what looked like a ventilation shaft near the floor, open already, big enough for at least the two kids to crawl through. Kirsty was already inside of it.

"Hey, wait for me," Yasmin whispered, hurrying to kneel down and join them.

Annika stood on the tallest thing in the sector she could find so she could watch the carnage unleashed on the city. What with the Softmicron's rampage and her contribution to it, the biggest thing was only the large box of batteries Riker found sitting in the first floor lab.

"Oops," was all she had to say to everything.

She directed her gaze to the red portal in the sky. It looked to be heading out of the city's range. A reprieve for the day. It would be back again tomorrow. Flames billowed around her, the smoke covered the entire sector like a black fog. For some reason it roused her to hum again.

Her arms stretched up into a triangle shape over her head. She spread them out as in a showy manner. Her humming turned into singing. "Fire. See it burning in the skies."

"A deadly flame that never lies," Annika continued while waving her arms around in very awkward way. If anyone could see her it would look like she was trying to do a backstroke while standing upright. As she was doing it she lowered herself down to lie across the box on her side, smiling and rubbing her hip seductively. Even though she would clearly see the shield had gone, it didn't shock her.

"Will the city stand or fall?" she crooned instead. "Fire. See it burning away his pride. It's the flame that never died." Already sick of her sultry lying down pose she got up to stand again. "His foes will be standing tall."

"Or burn in the slaughter," she tried to sing, but the smoke had made her voice a little croaky. All while she caressed herself and twisted her body a little.

Annika gestured upward, "which fate is our master?" Then she did a sweeping motion with her other arm in the direction of the monsters that weren't there anymore. "Which path will he choose?"

"Deceit or disaster. To flee or to lose," she sang, dropping her arms back to her side. Just as she did a large piece of the ceiling fell, she ducked and held her arms up to stop it. For far too long she stood there, struggling with it until she realised it wasn't that heavy and tossed it aside.

It took a few minutes to remember where she was up to. Once done her hands went to her hips and she stood tall. "Damien. He's a zero to the end," she sang bitterly. "He lives to hate and condescend."

"When evil stands to conquer all, his only hope..." she pointed up into the churning portal above. "Voyager!" Then she did a slow motion head turn and smiled like there was a camera there. "Voyager!" She moved her body around as well to do a slow head lift, her lips parted in an attempt to look sexy and powerful. Unaware that during her third rendition of, "Voyager!" and another side pose, the ship itself shot out of the portal and into the skyline not too far away from her.

She swung around for the final act, and spread her arms out above her head again. "Voyager!" She held the last note for as long as she could, but noticed the new arrival. "Wait, Voyager?" Annika immediately panicked. "I can't let them see me," she stuttered as she scrambled away. Her heel dug into the box, and unknown to her one of the batteries. It triggered a chain reaction of explosions that sent her flying into the air. "Oh sssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Meanwhile on Voyager's bridge everyone were rushing around trying to fix the damaged and sparking consoles. Most though didn't miss Annika flying directly past on the viewscreen with flames trailing behind her from her hair, screaming, "oooooooooooooooootttttt!"

"Was that?" Kathryn asked.

"Yes," everyone who saw replied.

Kathryn paced the centre of the Bridge with indifference, "good."

"Damage report," Chakotay asked.

"Hull breaches on decks two, five and twelve. Shields have burned out. Low power levels on..." Faye replied. The intruder alert alarm blared over the top of her.

Kathryn grit her teeth firmly before growling, "what the hell, how?"

Ian turned to work on the back part of Tactical, beads of sweat dripped down from his forehead. "Transporter signals coming from the Command Centre. It's Federation in origin."

"Lifesign readings are wonky. I can't tell how many there are, or what," Faye stuttered in panic. "The internal sensors took a beating in there."

"Security is responding, but they need a place to go," Ian said. Faye looked on helplessly at him.

Chakotay rose from his chair to hurry over to Kathryn. "The Softmicron?" he said in a hushed tone.

"Possibly," Kathryn whispered. She looked over her shoulder to give him a hard stare, "but how did they get their hands on one of our transporter modules?"

"The Pegasus maybe, it looks like it crashed in the city maybe a few hours ago, if the fires are anything to go by," Faye replied.

Kathryn briefly felt a little smug on hearing that, the intruder alert noise brought her back out of it immediately. "If it's them, they could pretend to be any one of us to get access to vital systems. Helm, prepare to take us far out of the city, find us a place to land."

Claire gulped air and nodded, "no probs!" she responded nervously and got straight to work.

"No one leaves the Bridge, understood? We need to sec..." Kathryn snapped at everyone.

"What about the Enterprise?" Chakotay reminded her.

Kathryn flinched. "They'll be in the same condition as us, easy picking," she said. With regret she turned to Opps, "Faye, do we have enough power to use the portal weapon again?"

"What?" Chakotay stammered.

"Uh, yes but we won't be able to re-open it," Faye squeaked in response.

"Do it," Kathryn ordered.

Chakotay gestured Faye to wait, "hang on. You're suggesting we save the Enterprise from a Softmicron invasion by locking them in their own corridor. Do you realise how insane that sounds?"

"Once we're out of transporter range we can deal with what we have, repair and come back. We're sitting ducks if we allow both ships to get taken, with one there's still a chance," Kathryn said. "Ian fire. Claire, take us out of here once it's done."

Voyager turned about, charging its deflector. Once done it fired a beam toward the portal they flew through, a few second burst calmed its storms once more.

"It's done," Ian said wistfully.

Kathryn sighed, "all right, Cla..."

"Captain!" Faye butted in, immediately fearing her deathglare. She winced in advance. "One of the intruder lifesigns differs from the others. No, make that two now. I bet it's Dam..."

"Shh!" Kathryn narrowed her eyes. She decided to think the name only instead of saying or hearing it, the camera still tried to zoom in on her face. "Oh for god's sake. Where is that little pissant?"

"Deck four, heading for a turbolift, he's not alone," Ian replied.

"Forcefields, can we lock the Bridge?" Kathryn asked.

Faye whimpered without even seeing her angered face, "no, we used most of our power to close the portal. Forcefields are down."

"Locking mechanism not responding," Ian said, gesturing to the door near him still smoking a little from fire damage.

Kathryn shrugged, clenching her fists. "No problem. I'll wait by the door with my fist ready."

"We can't guarantee what he's brought with him will be as easily disposed of. Sure you'll get Damien, but his companions could be anything," Chakotay said.

Kathryn looked around at everyone, thinking about it carefully. In her mind there was only one choice. "Get out of here. Now," she ordered firmly. The whole bridge turned to look at her in shock, Chakotay more so than her. "First chance you get, you evacuate the ship. Don't come back to the Bridge." Chakotay was about to object. "I'm not going to endanger any of you. This is between him and me. If he wants a slaughter, he's going to be disappointed."

"You can't be serious, he's always wanted Voyager and you're going to give it to him?" Ian stuttered.

Kathryn smirked, "hardly. I'll make the overcompensating dweeb squirm for a while, go." The Bridge reluctantly filed out into the other turbolift, all except Chakotay. He watched her walk to the helm.

"Kathryn," he said, prompting her to look back. "Be careful."

"Please! I'll be in touch," she smiled back warmly.

Once he was gone she laid in a new course, but didn't engage yet. "Computer, lock down all essential systems for command use only."

*"Acknowledged."*

Then she waited until the telltale sound of the turbolift doors opening.

Damien stepped out looking very smug, flanking him were Mows and two more aliens. He sneered toward Kathryn, who calmly turned her chair to greet him with a smile.

### **Present Day:**

Tom stood looking thoughtful off to one side while Tani finished recounting her side of the story. Once she was done an uncomfortable silence hung over the room.

Craig forcefully coughed, hoping to break it. "We don't know what happened to Voyager after it left the city. I wouldn't assume the worst just yet."

"I think..." Tom said, still with his back to the others. "I think I know."

Damien strode into the Conference Room with his head held up high. It didn't get the response he was after, only an eye roll from the only person there.

"Give me the codes," he snarled impatiently.

"Sure," Kathryn said flippantly. Damien missed the tone somehow and got his hopes up, it amused her greatly despite the metal forcing her wrists and ankles to the chair starting to chafe and smell of sweat. "Even if I was apparently braindead enough to fall for anything you came up with, how would you know I was giving you command codes?"

Damien narrowed his eyes on slow approach, "because Janeway Espresso 9000 is really obvious as an infinite coffee code for a replicator?"

"You've got as much chance of me giving you that as you do of getting the command codes," Kathryn laughed in response. Her face turned deadly serious in a second, "zero."

Damien sat on the table close to her, she watched him in disgust as he leaned forward, sneering in her direction. "We'll see about that."

"If you really want a coffee that badly, Neelix probably still has tanks of his homemade junk in Deck Thirteen. It's not like we keep anything else in there," Kathryn said. She turned her head away to mutter, "I must remember to throw it out later."



"Hey!" Damien snapped, slamming his hand on the table. Kathryn didn't react at all, which annoyed him even more. "Perhaps you might be more willing to comply if you knew one little thing."

Kathryn sighed sadly, "I know. Watership Down's remake wasn't as bloody as the original."

"Don't... mock me," Damien trembled at the insult, and the memory of that. "The portal to the Games Matrix is open once more. Your little scheme only wasted my time. Was it worth it?"

Kathryn hid the dread she was feeling very well. He didn't see it. "Yes."

Damien flinched. "Face it Janeway. Voyager's mine now, you are powerless to stop me..."

"Yet you still need me so you can use it, which you only want to do so you can run away and avoid the wrath of the aliens you brainwashed. So really, who's truly powerless here?" Kathryn smiled.

"I'll give you one more chance to do this the painless way," Damien grumbled, pulling away from the table to stand again. "Give me the command codes to Voyager, or I'll redirect my energies to the Enterprise."

"I don't see what's so painless about having to listen to you stamp your feet and whine about codes for a few days," Kathryn said.

Damien ground his teeth and turned his back on her to walk away. "You leave me no choice."

"Please," Kathryn scoffed, stopping him before he could leave. "If you could take the Enterprise, you would've by now. Cut this *or* crap out, you'll never trick me. Never again."

A smug smile spread across Damien's face, not that she could see it. "I doubt the Enterprise will cut their losses and leave you here. They will strike eventually, it'll be their undoing."

Kathryn yawned, since she couldn't use her hand to block it even if she wanted to it was louder than normal. "Okay."

Damien's fists clenched tightly. "That's it." He leaned forward to stick his head out of the door, "you two, take a team to the thirteenth deck. The tanks are there."

"Desperate times, huh," Kathryn smirked.

"Only for you," Damien lowered his voice to a malicious hush. He looked over his shoulder at her just in time to catch the Captain's smile fade. "How did you like yours again, straight black sludge?"

"News flash, prick. You're not as *evil genius* as you think you are," Kathryn said coldly, deathglare on max.

Damien chuckled to himself, he didn't believe that for a second. "Then why are you here, alone with no ship, no crew, no Slayer brats, nothing?" he sneered. "Face it, no one is coming to save you. Voyager is mine now, why continue to resist me?"

"I could ask the same thing. Why are you still here?" Kathryn questioned, her lips curling.

Little did they know Harry directed a similar question at his captor, only he didn't see how he took it. All he could was his back as they studied a blueprint style map of the city on the huge viewscreen. He didn't get a vocal answer either. "Well?" Harry tried again.

"I can't expect you to understand the big picture," his captor finally answered.

Harry frowned, directing his own gaze to the screen. "It's a map if that's any help."

"Amusing," his captor faked a laugh. Then he turned so Harry could see his face. "This planet is meaningless. It does house a few loose ends that need sliced off quickly."

"I didn't know Craig was a badass in secret. Maybe you should have kidnapped him instead of me," Harry smirked.

He expected bluster, but he was merely met with a blank stare. "Voyager and the Enterprise. They fled the portals. I want to know how," Damien said.

Harry's eyes widened in shock, "they did? News to me."

"Enough of the ignorant charade!" was the angry response.

"I only learned from thee very best," Harry stammered in response. "That last one was genuine though."

Damien circled around him, studying him carefully. "Fine," he huffed after two laps. "Tell me about the Slayers."

Harry sighed, "gone, lost a Game a couple of weeks back. So you can stop obsessing over finding the runaways, who is left is of no use to you."

"No," Damien said, eyes narrowing.

Harry mockingly did the same back, "yes. Why do you think the city's in such a state? Games started dropping like rain after a few more losses." He hesitated, then cringed, "no you're right. That's not why. You pissed off the Softmicron by brainwashing some of their own. Is that why..."

"Captain sir," Hach stuttered as he ran into the office.

Damien pointed a palm at him to tell him to wait. "That's not what I was asking."

"Is that how you got in?" Harry said, eyes widening in realisation. "Him, Slax, Mows. They never left, how did you replace them?"

"Oh they're the real deal," Damien sniggered, once more going into a circular pace around him. "The Softmicron are no longer enslaved. That is not your or my concern."

"Really?" Harry laughed nervously.

"You understand very little, it'd be funny if it weren't so irritating," Damien said, he shrugged, "not surprising though." When he was behind Harry he stopped to lean on the back of his chair, Harry was very aware of how close he was. If it were anyone else but Damien he'd find it a little intimidating. "You do know the Slayers though. You'll tell me about them. Their weaknesses, their strengths. What they're likely to do."

Harry frowned, only now feeling a little unnerved. "Likely, to do? Did they come back with the ships? If so, they're the least of your worries."

"My patience is wearing a little thin. Tell me or I'll bring in the runaways, as you call them, and *ask* them," Damien grumbled.

"About that Captain Damien," Hach said. He shook a little as he was stared at by both of the men. "The residual Game radiation is still clouding our scans. We can't find any Humans."

"Of course not," Damien snapped, straightening back to a standing position. "They'll be using that as a cover. A Game site is where they'll be. Go!"

"But, there are more of them than us. Are we to leave you alone?" Hach asked.

Damien rolled his eyes, "good god, how hard is it to find hired help that have brains?" Harry was about to comment on that but was interrupted by Damien slapping the back of the chair, spinning it part way around, as he marched up to Hach. "One team, check them one at a time. Do I have to write it down in giant letters with crayons for you to understand, or draw you a picture?"

Hach tried to swallow a massive lump in his throat, failed and croaked out a, "no. Excuse me." Then he ran back out of the office.

"You do have a knack for inspiring the stupid and unhelpful," Harry smirked.

Damien turned back towards him, scowling darkly. "Speaking of which, you had something to tell me?"

"Yeah, you wish. If you think I'll sell out my crewmates, you've got..." Harry said, pumped up with bravado until Damien brandished something out of his pocket and walked closer. "A knife in your hands. Neat."

"Oh, what I have in mind wouldn't be considered neat," Damien sneered.

Lena watched the Enterprise in the far distance taking a wide turn to circle the city's edge, all while sitting on the rubble where the missing wall should be. Everyone else stood huddled in a group nearby.

"Really, where?" she asked.

*"Six miles north of the city. No shields, the same damage it had when we left the Games Matrix, low power levels,"* Triah's voice answered from her commbadge.

"So Damien hasn't gotten the command codes yet?" the Doctor mused.

Chakotay smiled, "was there any doubt? It wouldn't surprise me if the Captain has made even replacing a lightbulb difficult for him."

"Six miles, we'd be hard pressed to do this if the Enterprise hadn't shown up," B'Elanna commented.

Lena looked around, "do what?"

"Might be a little overkill," Chakotay sighed. "Besides, Lena and the Doctor used a shuttle to get here. If I'm right as to why, we'll still need the pods."

"You were going to attack Voyager with escape pods?" Lena said in disbelief.

B'Elanna couldn't help but laugh at how dumb that sounded, "with no shields and probably no weapons, I'd call it board Voyager than attack. What choice did we have, walk? Besides, we spotted a few shuttles, the yacht and some alien ship. We don't need the pods."

*"I hate to rain on you but we've been trying to get in touch with our other teams. Game radiation's lingering around pockets in the city, that's been causing us a bit of a headache so..."*

"Game radiation?" B'Elanna said, sounding a little too curious.

Lena glanced toward her with a wince, "yeah it's er... radiation, because of lost... it's in the Games Matrix. It's er, it's a thing."

Chakotay laughed, "thanks, we're all up to date now."

"Yeah well I know of, but not much about it. It's left behind when a Game loses, its not a good idea to float around or walk in it in the Games Matrix, blocks sensors. You got 2/3 from what Triah said so," Lena said awkwardly.

The Doctor looked on a little worried. "That means we're stuck down here, right?" he asked. Lena nodded.

"So, escape pods?" Chakotay smiled toward B'Elanna.

She grunted impatiently, "five are ready. I could get a sixth working if I had another hour."

"That's fine. All we need now is a distraction," Chakotay said.

"Wouldn't the Enterprise showing up escorting escape pods be distracting enough?" Lena asked in a bemused tone.

Chakotay frowned, creating worry lines over his forehead. "It's not Voyager we're worried about there. Damien has control of the Command Centre, we know he has a least one hostage. One false move and..."

The Doctor brightened up. "Oh, I have the perfectly ironic solution." Everyone turned to him expecting him to continue, but all they saw was him and his emitter fading away.

"Uh, what the...?" B'Elanna stammered.

The Doctor was equally confused when he rematerialised in a charred, debris littered room, all alone. At least he thought he was until a woman cackled from the shadows.

"Ooooh lookie what we have here," she giggled. The Doctor flinched, he'd recognise Annika's voice anywhere. "I better put the kettle on, do you take two lumps of sugar?" She burst into malicious laughter that only cartoon villains or Damien would use.

"Oh dear," the Doctor whispered to himself, drowned out by her continued laughter.

Ship flew overhead as it descended, turning slightly to land directly beside one of the Enterprise shuttles. James, Tom, Craig and Tani approached carefully until the vessel touched down. Ship's doors barely had time to open when Sandi jumped out of it.

"We'd better be quick. Between Softmicron hunting parties and a group of aliens which I spotted leaving the Command Centre, we stand out like a sore thumb," she said.

"Have you heard from the Enterprise or any of our other teams?" Tom asked her.

Sandi shook her head as Kevin hurried out of the ship to join her. "I wouldn't expect to. I counted five lost Game sites, the radiation levels will be ridiculously high. You'd probably have to fly into the shuttlebay to get a signal."

"Great. Now's the perfect time to retake the Command Centre and we're understaffed," Tom muttered.

"If it's only Damien and a few of the deserters, I'd call it overkill to be honest," Craig said. He gestured his head as lightly as possible toward James, hoping he wouldn't notice with only one good eye but Tom would.

James still looked at him with a raised eyebrow. "Are you expecting me to kill the protesters as well?" he asked coldly.

Craig winced, everyone else felt awkward enough to avoid looking at either them. "No I um, I forgot... I mean, I..." Craig stammered. "Once you're inside. We um, do that, no... then get them out of the way so you can..."

"Oh god, stop," Sandi grunted. Thankfully he did and everyone else had somewhere to look. "Tall guy is right, we do have to make sure neither Softmicron or the search party know what we're doing, or they'll outnumber us greatly."

"It's Tom," Tom whispered, a little offended.

"Right," Kevin nodded. "They're outside, lets keep it that way."

"What's the problem? James goes in and gets Damien, we tell the Softmicron to wait there until he tosses him to them. Problem solved," Tani said.

Sandi laughed, thinking she was joking. She trailed off when Tani grew a little annoyed at it. "I can't count how many things are wrong with that, so, not gonna."

Tani rolled her eyes, "I'm not the idiot trying to count to zero."

"Oooh meow," Kevin snickered, prompting an elbow in the arm from his sister.

"Why would giving him this Damien pacify these things?" Sandi said, slightly bemused.

Tani scoffed, "duh, he brainwashed them, they want revenge. Who is this cow and why are we humouring her?"

Tom sighed, once more wishing he decided to stay on the Enterprise. "She's another..."

Sandi cut in quickly, "they'll not apologise for trashing this city and run along. Your scenario doesn't only hand over Damien, but give them one of the Slayers too. With both out of the picture, and no way of knowing about Lena, or us, they'll very likely think they're free to continue what they came here for to begin with; control of this planet. Whoever is left, who is not already dead, will be the first things they snuff out."

"Okay, okay," Tani said, a little shook. "I know, I thought if Damien were out of the picture, it'd..." She grew more annoyed with herself and turned away, "you know what, forget it."

Kevin chuckled nervously, raising his hands as a meek surrender pose. "Wait, lets cool our jets here. It's not that stupid. We need this Command Centre and Scar-face here wants to pummel this Damien character, but he can't get in without major carnage of protesters and guards alike. Softmicron are looking for probably Damien and us, and the rebel aliens looking only for us." Almost everyone's expressions pointed toward him were saying *so*, James' though remained blank with another eye roll. "Is no one really seeing the obvious distract opportunity here?"

"No, not really. Using us as bait isn't going to move the protesters blocking the entrance," Craig said.

Tom smiled deviously, "why would we want to move the protesters? They want what we do, don't they?"

Kevin grinned back and nodded, "now you're catching on."

Craig looked a little worried, especially when both Sandi and James appeared to be onboard with this idea as well since they didn't say anything or look annoyed with them. He glanced at Tani but she looked a little confused.

"Of course. And I have the perfect decoy in mind," Tom chuckled, his gaze drifted over to Ship.

It was a little hard to keep his balance. Chakotay grasped onto the sturdiest of the walls, which still shook from the gusts coming from above. He glanced up at the Enterprise waiting above him and the escape pods lying on the ground still being inspected by B'Elanna. Once more he inspected his

boarding party waiting crouched down nearby to avoid being swept off their feet. One member made him do a double take and a scowl.

"No Kiara," he snapped.

Kiara groaned and folded her arms stubbornly, "why? You need six people to go in the pods. Who would you rather have, me or Neelix?"

"Where is Neelix?" Chakotay wondered, the so called chef had been there the last time he looked at the team.

Lena meanwhile glanced across at the girl while trying to shield her eyes from the gravel blowing about toward her. "You're not, Damien's mine to smack around."

"As if I'd step on your toes. No, I just wanna help mum out, or grandma rather," Kiara replied. "And if you must know, I said I was hungry."

Chakotay groaned into his palm, "that's very reckless of you."

"Why? I'm hoping I'll be in the pod and away before he gets back," Kiara grinned.

"I wasn't... that wasn't the only thing I was referring to," Chakotay sighed. "Fine, but stay true to your word. Damien would use you against Lena in a heartbeat."

Kiara nodded but she looked far less enthusiastic than earlier, "no worries there."

B'Elanna walked over, wavering slightly but able to keep upright. "All pods are operational. It's time."

"Good," Chakotay said. He tapped his commbadge. "Chakotay to Enterprise, can you read us?"

"I'd like to think so, they're almost on top of us," Ian commented.

*"Quiet but clear,"* Triah's voice responded with some crackling over the top.

"We're going into the pods. Give us ten minutes before locking on, then set a course," Chakotay said.

*"Right."*

Chakotay turned to address his team, "okay, everyone to your pods. I'll make sure everyone who's left is out of range, don't want things to get messy."

"Dinner time!" Neelix shouted, suddenly right next to Kiara, shoving what looked like a flattened black pizza with green specs on it in her face. She let out a little scream as she scrambled away from the both of them. She wasn't the only one, the rest of the team scurried faster than they planned to their escape pods. Neelix looked a little upset and confused at her reaction.

"Neelix," Chakotay groaned.

Neelix immediately brightened up, "yes Commander. Is it time to retake our home?"

"Um. No, I've got a better job for you, very important," Chakotay replied. He got a beaming smile in response. "Take the others and find the Doctor. With the radiation and all, he can't have been transported too far away. I can't shake the feeling that he's been taken for a very good reason, and we can't take that risk."

"Um. I don't know. This isn't really my expertise," the Doctor stammered fearfully, all while struggling to free his hands from the ropes securing him to the armrests.

Annika giggled playfully as she swapped one catsuit and its hanger with another so quickly he couldn't see her in between swaps. What worried him most was she was holding them up so high they were covering her face, and so the catsuits ended at her knees.

"Now now, you don't need to be coy with me. I have a lot of trust in your opinion, if you're wrong I can always delete a few things to get it right," she said. "The green or the blue," once more she swapped the two over.

"Um..." the Doctor metaphorically started to sweat.

Annika huffed and swung around so her back was to him. The Doctor then chose to try to break free, all he did though was manage to make the chair jump a few paces to the left. He was about to do it a third time when he spotted Annika sitting opposite at him holding two catsuits in her lap, one bright pink and the other red. He barely had time to process that as they were thrown at him so hard they knocked him flying backwards.

"Oh, looks like it's both then," Annika laughed as if nothing happened.

The Doctor tried to shake the clothes off of him, but without his hands or legs all he could do was wobble the chair a little. The red one tumbled off after a few shakes.

"Ooooh, that is a cute pink," he heard Annika squeal before the pink was snatched off of him. He only saw her waltz off, stroking the outfit as if it were a cat. "I knew I could count on you Doc."

"Great," the Doctor said, still from his awkward sitting facing the ceiling position on the floor. "Can I go now?"

Annika squeaked like a sad puppy. "You too? Nobody likes me." He heard her sniffing. She was too far away to see for sure, and his position wasn't helping. "I tried you know. I tried to make people like me."

"Um. I've always been on your side, you know that. It's just..." the Doctor stammered.

To his surprise a couple of boot wearing feet passed by him on the left and stopped. A man's voice came from above them, "you're still not ready? You know they're going to treat you the same whatever you wear. Don't be a stereotype."

Annika gasped, first looking offended but then had a realisation that made her smile. "You're right. I'm a feminist icon, what does it matter. Turn around boys, I'll put this on." She didn't give them a chance to, she immediately started to unzip her current outfit.

The new arrival crouched down to attempt to push the Doctor around so he couldn't see, unaware that he couldn't anyway, all while spluttering nervously. That was when the Doctor got a good look at him and recognised him. "Wesley?" he said accusingly. "I thought you were dead."

Wesley wheezed after moving the Doctor a couple of inches, him talking gave him a reason to take a break so he sat beside him. "Miss Annika is the only one who is nice to me, who understands me."

"I didn't say any..." the Doctor muttered, confused and a little annoyed.

Wesley didn't seem to hear him, he was on a roll. "They just can't handle it. I'm smart and I'm helpful. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing, that's not..." the Doctor tried again.

"So I figured things out before some officers, sometimes it's refreshing, you need an outside perspective," Wesley rambled on. "Think outside the box!"

"Where's my bra stuffing?" Annika meanwhile asked desperately.

Wesley barely looked over his shoulder, "it's still plugged into the pump!"

"Oh," Annika giggled and hurried off. The Doctor only managed to hear the words, "gonna be huge today."

"Where was I?" Wesley said.

The Doctor groaned, "you were telling me what the plan was."

"Was I?" Wesley was confused for a moment, then he brightened up. "Of course I was. I'm all about plans, I'm good at them. So yes anyway, it's really quite simple. We're going home, but we have to time it perfectly."

Annika hurried back, unknown to the boys with her catsuit only half on and not the bottom part either. The legs looked peeled like a banana, they fluttered as she ran around barefoot, even the heels which bounced against her leg. "That's what we do best."

Wesley smiled, "that we do."

Even the Doctor was getting a little annoyed and squeamish. "What was the point in kidnapping me then?"

He yelped as he was picked up, chair too, and plonked back upright at the table. That was when he spotted Annika's bizarre half on catsuit as she sat in the opposite chair, hunched over so to cover one side of her leg with it. She used a little paint roller looking thing with steam coming from it to trail over the entire leg, the material stuck to her.

"Kidnapping's such a meanie word," she purred. "I thought we were friends."

"We are," the Doctor said a little too enthusiastically to hide his second thoughts.

Annika didn't spot it. With one pants leg on she swivelled around to face him and gesture to the tray on the table he didn't notice before. "Really? Goodie!" she laughed, picking the tray up and shoving it in his face. "Friendship cookies?" The Doctor stared at her, his jaw dropping angered her. "Eat them or we're not friends anymore."

"Your face, your neck, you're injured," the Doctor said sympathetically. Annika instinctively covered her face, covering up the burns and scars. "What happened?"

Inside the extremely cramped escape pod Chakotay watched the the seemingly endless countryside streaming by on the screen in front of him, eager for any sliver of grey. The computer spotted it first, bleeping at him to get his attention. "There," he said once he saw it sitting in a marshy valley, hidden by forest on the surrounding hills. He got a few acknowledged's from the comm.

"Enterprise," he said in a croaky voice, sprained from the new frog in his throat. He knew why it was there, what he wanted to say still didn't feel right. "Lock phasers on Voyager, lowest strength you can muster."

*"Check, we'll be gentle,"* Danny's voice giggled rudely, quickly followed by disgusted groans.

Chakotay sighed in anticipation. Now all he could do was wait for his literal opening.

Damien stomped out of the office, angered by the interruption, to the sounds of blaring alarms and panicked staff. "What is it, I am very busy!" he snapped.



Slax gulped air nervously, until he noticed the pair of scissors in his hands. The confusion and randomness of that pushed away any fear he had. "An unidentified ship was joyriding around the city, sir. We didn't pick it up until it flew more or less over our heads."

"So?" Damien said bluntly, with little care.

"So there's Humans onboard sir," Slax said, getting his full interest at last. "Also, it seems we're not the only one who's noticed it. I'll show you," he pointed at the giant viewscreen.

Damien looked at it before the image on it was changed. The screen showed a zoomed in aerial view of a street leading into a scorched central area filled with damaged monuments and fountains. Ship had parked next to the largest fountain. Two dots stood outside it, swarms of them though were converging on them from the street. Then the image zoomed into the front of the crowd. The whole room watched as the crowd of their own people gradually started to change into different shapes.

"The Softmicron, they're going after them," Hach said.

Damien's jaw clenched and his eyes turned cold. "Let me see the ship."

Slax nodded and quickly typed in the command to refocus the image. Then all everyone could see was a close up of Ship and its two pilots standing around like they were waiting for something.

"What?" Damien was taken aback. "Who are they?"

"I'm not sure, sir, but it looks like they've rounded them up. This is our chance," Hach said excitedly. He wasn't the only one, the whole room were buzzed.

Damien glanced around at them all. Slax looked back at him, puzzled. "Captain Damien, we can retake the city. You won't be pursued anymore. We should do something, now."

"Yes, we should," Damien said, his cold eyes narrowing toward the screen. "Use the remaining attack ships, use mine if you have to..." The whole room were more than eager to follow his orders, they knew there weren't enough ships for them all. They were picking who should go when Damien finished his order, stopping them cold, "destroy that ship."

"What?" Hach squeaked.

Damien glared at him, "you heard me."

"But..." Slax protested but dimly.

"But what?" Damien snapped, stomping over to give them both a closeup. Both of them withered a few inches. "That monstrosity flying in our sky and its Humans are the biggest threat. You see. The Softmicron are riled up because of them." The two stared at one another, sharing their uncertainty. They weren't the only ones. Damien tried to soften his face, "you trusted me to lead you. Trust me now. I know what I'm doing."

"I... I guess," Slax said, but Hach didn't look so sure.

Damien smiled coldly at them both, then Slax alone. "Then you go lead the assault team." He glanced around at everyone, who didn't seem as convinced as Slax was. It soured his mood but he managed not to show it. "Take the security forces. They'll be a better shot than button pushers."

Slax nodded, "aye Captain Damien." He hurried off alone.

"Now," Damien said as he started to pace. "Do we need to have a chat about loyalty?"

Voyager's Bridge shook gently, it was enough to throw Damien off balance as he rushed out of the Conference Room holding what looked like a spoon with brown sludge in it. Anyone who looked at him had to look at least twice again to make sure they weren't seeing things.

"What now, I have better things to do," he snarled.

"Someone is attacking us, is that better enough?" Mows sniped back.

Damien scowled at her on route to the centre of the bridge. He stared ahead at the viewscreen which confused everyone, since it was off it only looked like another wall to them. "We don't have any shields, why are they..." His face hardened, "oh I see. Return fire."

"Um, how? We can barely get the lights on in the bathrooms," Mows rolled her eyes.

"Do I have to think of every...!" Damien erupted into a full blown tantrum. It was gone just as suddenly, replaced by a smile. "Of course I do, I'm surrounded by idiots. Use the shuttlecraft, they won't be secured. If they are, go outside with phaser rifles."

"What?" Mows almost laughed.

Damien shrugged her off and turned to the alien manning Opps. "You heard me, stall them. I'll get the command codes, then we'll blow that thing out of the sky." He hurried off, nearly tripping over his own feet during another shake. The spoon slipped out of his hands, he did a juggling act before he was able to catch it again. The brown stuff was still in the spoon despite it going upside down a few times. Nobody wanted to question what it was.

Once he was gone Mows looked over to her teammate. "You're not going to..."

He laughed, "you kidding? I wouldn't go out there with a gigantic spaceship firing at me for my wife, let alone that lunatic."

The hundreds of Softmicron were closing in. The few at the front would be in killing or maiming range in a few steps. Kevin and Sandi looked very nervous, Kevin kept glancing up and around every now and then.

"Next time I have a plan sis, just hit me like you usually do," he said.

Sandi nodded, "I was going to."

A couple more steps and Kevin braced himself for a fight. Sandi merely stepped back, clutching the only weapon she had a little too tightly. Her other hand lingered in her pocket, something Kevin noticed in the corner of his eye. "Really?" he trembled.

Before she could answer they heard engines approach, fast. Kevin looked up in time to see a shuttle skim the roof of a nearby building and fly over them. Transporters whisked them away a second later, leaving the crowd befuddled.

"Phew, you cutting it close huh, I only have one pair of underwear," Kevin snarked as he sat beside Tom.

Tom pulled a face, "yeah um, ew."

Sandi shook her head, smiling a little. The object in her pocket she pressed with her thumb.

The Softmicron were still trying to figure out what happened when Ship erupted into a massive fireball, sending waves of fire in their direction.

"Last chance Janeway, the command codes," Damien snarled, pointing his weapon at Kathryn's stained face.

Kathryn kept her lips firmly together, she shook her head at him. Damien threw the spoon across the table in frustration, it bounced once, flipped over so the contents was facing down and then stuck itself to the table.

"How many are we on now?" Kathryn asked him with a smile.

Damien growled at her, "don't tempt me, Slayer incubator."

Kathryn burst into hysterical laughter, "what did you call me? That's, that's..." She tried to stop it but snorted into louder laughter. His stony face wasn't helping.

"Laugh all you want, you can't avoid the reality of it. You're nothing more to them than that," Damien sneered. It did the trick, she stopped laughing. "Especially the serial killer. How does it feel, knowing that you could die here right now and he not only wouldn't care, he'd celebrate it."

"You don't know what you're even talking about, you pathetic little cold virus. No sorry, cold viruses can be useful, they strengthen our immune systems. All you do is waste our time," Kathryn grumbled.

Damien cackled in his usual manner but was put off midway through by her rolling her eyes. He leaned in close to grab a handful of hair, "listen you..." he was promptly headbutted. He ended up on the floor seeing mini Kathryn's drinking coffee in circles around his head.

He thought it was him when the ship trembled viciously, caused by a loud bang from underneath him. It wasn't until he noticed Kathryn's worried glance toward the window that he figured it wasn't him. Not that he could get up and check on it, his head felt ten times heavier than usual and made him dizzy even thinking about moving. Instead he ended up crawling back onto the bridge.

"Hull breach on the lower decks, it's a big room with stuff in it," Riker reported from Opps. Damien could only groan. He didn't notice everyone struggling not to laugh at him and his new bump. Riker though grew a little too excited, "it's a shuttle bay, of course."

"What?" Damien said, he tried to get up and walk forward. He only managed a step before falling back to the ground.

Meanwhile the Shuttle Bay had a brand new hole in the large doors. A few escape pods flew through it to land. One landed next to what remained of a "Days Since Last Repair: 5" sign.

The protests outside the Command Centre had whittled down to nearly half size, time being a factor for most of the ones leaving. A few more had arrived as well, but nowhere near the amount that had left for the night.

Slax watched carefully while he spoke to the two guards on the other side of the gate. They didn't look too impressed with what he was telling them.

Unknown to all three of them, they were being watched by three of the new arrivals with signs they had picked up from the street, and hoods over their heads to hide their faces.

"Damien's orders. We have no choice," Slax whispered to the guards.

"We'd have to open the gate. There's still too many," guard one whispered back. He sighed reluctantly while slipping the keys through the gaps to give to Slax. "Do it quickly."

Slax took them and tried to discreetly open the door. He waited until he assumed no one was watching him, then looked down to see what he was doing. One of the three hiding amongst the protesters shuffled down slightly, stopping long before he looked up again.

"Okay, now," guard two whispered. They stepped backwards toward the gate, pushing it very slowly open.

It was almost enough to let one guard through when another of the trio pointed at them. "They're opening the gates!"

The crowd charged for them. The guards hurriedly raised their weapons, pointing them rapidly in different directions, hoping it would put them off approaching. One of them felt their weapon being pulled away from them, they looked and only saw a hooded figure before they were punched to the ground. The hooded figure pushed the gate open despite Slax trying desperately to hold it still and lock it. He ended up on his back a few feet away.

Guard two jumped around to see what happened only to get his teammate's gun pointed at his face. "Hey, how did you..." he barely had time to finish, the crowd shoved him out of their way through the open gates.

Seconds later all that was left were the three with hoods over their heads, which they immediately took off once they entered the building grounds.

"Okay, that's done, I'm still not cool about the splitting up part," Craig sighed in relief.

"Why? Someone needs to make sure Damien doesn't have an escape route," Tani said while locking the gate behind them.

"I'm still in the overkill camp. It's Damien, not some big bad overpowered giant guy with claws and stuff," Craig said.

Tani giggled, "that's quite the imagination you have Craigy. You just feel safer with James around, admit it."

Craig's jaw dropped at the insult, "no way, that's you and your weird crush."

It was Tani's turn to be offended this time, "how is it weird?"

"Admit it, you wouldn't fancy him if he couldn't kill things with his bare hands," Craig said. "Oooh, look at that scar, that's so hot."

"Well at least I'm not threatened by my crush being stronger than me that I'd accuse them of digging their own brother, you insecure idiot. Enjoy your splitting up-ness," Tani huffed and stomped off toward the Command Centre.

Craig rolled his eyes and folded his arms, "sorry. Looks like I'll be going with you for the Damien beat up. I'll keep out of your way." He turned to face James, not realising he had left as soon as they walked through the gates. He couldn't help but whimper as he ran off after Tani.

Inside an eery silence had fallen over the command room. Damien stared at the carnage of the Ship explosion on the viewscreen. He slowly turned his head toward the main entrance, smiling darkly.

Kathryn struggled in her restraints, hoping to avoid Riker's attempt to push a fresh spoon of the brown sludge into her mouth.

"You like coffee. Yum yum," he whined. All he got was a muffled groan in return. He poked her lips with it, leaving more brown stains smudged around her mouth. Considering the look in her eyes, it was a miracle he didn't burst into flames. "Come on, this hurts me more than it hurts you." The comment inspired Kathryn to stomp on his toes, making him yelp and hop around on only the good foot. He was too busy crying about it to hear the doors leading to the corridor open.

Lena ran inside breathing heavily. She spotted her mother and ran over, casually shoving Riker out of her path like he was nothing more than a fly. Upon laying eyes on her mother's face, Lena's pity for her left her feeling a little drained. "Mum, what has that creep done to you?"

"Lena?" Kathryn said, her face and eyes brightening up. "You're a sight for sore eyes."

"The spoon landed in my eye!" Riker cried. They ignored him. "It burns!"

Kathryn shook her head, painfully reminding her of the earlier headbutt. It left her a little woozy and heavy, Lena noticed her head dip down and grew even more worried. "It's felt like months since I last seen you. I missed you. Are you okay?"

"I'll live," Kathryn smiled. "And you?"

Lena exhaled sharply, she knelt down to be eye level with her and to figure out how to remove the restraints without causing any injury. "I miss my bed," she tried to laugh. Kathryn did genuinely though. "Where's Damien?"

Kathryn noticed movement in front of her despite Lena being more to her right. Anger flashed over her, "behind you, Lena."

Lena's attention darted to over her shoulder just in time to see a rifle being swung at her head. She ducked to her left to avoid the blow and grab it. The next thing she knew she was lying on her back with the room, then a sneering Damien spinning around above her.

"Lena!" Kathryn's muffled voice called for her.

"Oh so it is," Damien pretended to be surprised. His voice started to clear, the spinning slowed. "Young Janeway Junior back from the Games. Took the Matrix way around, did we?"

"You... what did you do..." Lena stuttered, grabbing the table leg to pull herself back up. Halfway up she noticed Damien had split into two, both were laughing at her. "How?"

"I'd love to take the credit here, so," Damien chuckled, cementing the two into one again. He aimed the rifle, ready to fire at her. "I will."

James walked along the corridor leading to the control room in the Command Centre. A couple of protesters ran in the opposite direction and passed him, both looking distressed. He could hear others shouting in other rooms above him. He ignored it and prepared himself; gun ready, back against the wall beside the door. A few taps opened it, he waited a few seconds before charging in. He frowned, apart from the sounds from the computers he could hear nothing from it. Nobody walked over to check on the door opening on its own. His guard was raised further.

When he walked inside he understood why the protesters he passed were running away fearfully. Bodies littered consoles and the floor, one he recognised as Hach. None of them were moving. They had clearly been in here too, they'd seen it.

Then he heard a groan come from below. James quietly walked down the steps to the lower level, spotting Turanga lying next to the stairwall. He quickened his pace to get to him.

"No, no," Turanga protested weakly, he shakily tried to get up. "Trap," he coughed through pain.

James stalled and looked around for anything that didn't look right. Apart from the bodies and the fires on the viewscreen nothing seemed out of the ordinary. He continued to tend to Turanga.

"They'll see you, no," he wheezed, pointing up at a camera on the ceiling.

James glanced up at it, smiling a little before aiming the gun at it. Once it was in sparking tatters he knelt down beside the elderly leader to help him sit up, and rest his back against the wall. The act shocked him for reasons James didn't get. "What happened in here?"

"I don't know," Turanga coughed. "He pulled me out here, said if I moved or if anyone came in the room would explode. I don't doubt him. You should..."

Knowing the old man couldn't walk, James opted to carry him to the nearby, slightly dented wheelchair lying on its side, turning it up the right way first before sitting him in it. "Then go. Tell me where Damien is and..."

Turanga looked at him fearfully, "no you mustn't. You're very much needed elsewhere, young man. I'm long since passed, my first duty is to my people. Much to do here. Thank you." He glanced toward one of the offices on the second level. "You and your friend..."

James sighed, a little torn as he didn't want to leave him on his own where a slaughter had already happened. Turanga grasped his arm and wheezed, "you must be careful. He is a... monster. So much hate, deceptively abhorrent."

There were plenty of other words James would use to describe Damien before either of the ones Turanga used, but he chose to keep that and his lack of concern over confronting him to himself. "I will," he said to reassure him.

"Good. Over confidence has lead many men and women astray, I know from experience," Turanga said, pressing the buttons on the armrest to make his chair move. It shakily did so and not in an exact straight line.

James watched him go to work at a nearby console, despite a fallen member of his team lying close to it. He shook away the comment and headed for the office Turanga gestured to. The doors parted for him, he walked in carefully with his weapon trained just in case. The shocks weren't over, as the first thing he was confronted with was Harry hanging from the ceiling, upside down. His face swollen, he wasn't sure if he was conscious until he rushed over to get him down, he painfully cried out before he could touch him.

"It's a trick, stay back," he whimpered toward him.

"What is?" James asked, glancing around.

Harry tried to shake his head, "you won't get a thing from me. I'll die first."

James winced, Harry's eyes were so swollen he'd be surprised if he could see through them at all. He assumed he had mistaken him for his torturer. "Harry, it's me, James. You'll be okay, I'll get you down."

Harry's demeanour didn't change, "you can't, I won't."

James felt a brush of a slight breeze behind him, he quickly moved to one side just in time to avoid being hit by something metallic being swung at him. He turned around to see who did it and was further surprised to find Damien standing behind him with his left arm behind his back, sneering but not as he normally did. There was pure unfiltered hatred in his eyes.

"Hmm looks like mutated rats got in. No matter," he said. James pointed the gun at him which only made him scoff. "Watch where you point that thing. It's all fun and games until someone loses an eye. Oh."

"Wha... what's, there's two? Which is..." Harry whimpered.

James was momentarily distracted by that, fortunately Damien only postured toward him with his right hand, beckoning him over. "Come on Slayer, it's only me. Try putting your toys away and fighting like a true Chosen."

To his strangely happy surprise James did toss aside the gun with no hesitation whatsoever. He marched toward him, clenching his fist. Damien chuckled, only his voice distorted, it sounded like someone else. James raised his fist, ready to strike Damien but instead found Wesley mere inches from his fist, freezing him in his tracks. "What?"

"Okay, maybe I lied about the just me," Damien or rather Wesley sniggered, before sneaking his own punch directed toward James' scarred eye. Once he stumbled back from the shock and pain of it, the imposter pulled out the large piece of metal already stained with blood from behind his back. He swung it before James had a chance to recover, this blow knocked him to the ground.

"Oh, that was too easy," Wesley laughed obnoxiously like he had won. It was rudely interrupted by James jumping back onto his feet like nothing happened, only he was mad. The fake barely had time to swear before he was pushed in the chest, sending him hurtling through the wall and back into the command room.

Harry struggled in his constraints, "um, little help now, please." James only looked at him, Harry whimpered, thinking he blew his chance earlier. He felt an arm under his shoulders, supporting his head. He wasn't sure why, "okay okay, I'm sorry, I thought you were him," he couldn't see James grab the rope above his feet and rip it. He did feel gravity try to pull him down though. He was carefully deposited on the floor, all the blood inside him tried to flow to all the correct places. "Thanks, I really thought he was trying to trick..." he said, only then realising he was talking to himself. James had rushed off through the hole as soon as he had hit the ground.

As soon as Chakotay and the rest of his team stepped onto the Bridge the aliens immediately raised their hands as a surrender. The team were a little surprised, if a bit on their guard by it. Chakotay hinted toward them to remain that way. "Okay? I expected better from a bunch of so called shapeshifters."

Mows stuttered, offended by his remark, "we're not these micron things."

B'Elanna stared at her, flummoxed and in disbelief. "Then what the hell are you doing siding with Damien? We came here to help you."

"Um," Mows' anger faded away, guilt took over. "Were. Once we captured this ship all he cared about was getting the codes. He was obsessed with leaving and the Games Matrix's status. Our people in the Command Centre have been left to their own devices since we came here. Our city's been destroyed, he's done nothing. It became obvious quickly he didn't care about us."

"Should've been from the start," B'Elanna grumbled.

Chakotay sighed, he understood B'Elanna's frustration but this wasn't the time. "Where is he and Captain Janeway?" Mows wordlessly pointed toward the Conference Room. The Commander hurried over to the door, still on his guard with phaser in hand. When he went inside he only found Kathryn tied to the chair, no one else was around.

Lena kept a watchful eye behind her as she stumbled through the corridor, Damien followed with the rifle pointed at her. "You know you've got no one to blame but yourself. Be grateful I'm not shooting you on the spot."

"No, if you did mum would never give you the codes," Lena said.

Damien sniggered toward her, "why bother, when I can take the Enterprise and its so called Captain instead? A working ship and an overpowered slave, things are looking up."

Lena stopped at the turbolift door, laughing slightly. It bothered Damien, his grip on his phaser tightened as he stopped. "And how do you plan on doing that? It's up there, we're down here. Voyager's got no systems, and if you haven't noticed we didn't come here via Enterprise's transporters."

"Hmph, they'll repair it, they'll come for you. Now, get in," Damien grunted, gesturing his rifle at the door.

"As soon as you do that, you know what'll happen," Lena smirked at him.

"What, you'll faint on me again? Oooh," Damien mocked her. Lena flinched, making him laugh further. "I always thought that Games Matrix fog was a myth. Looked like all that crap did was fog the sensors, but hey, it makes sense. They don't want their sworn enemy wandering their homestead, what better way to clean up..."

"Are you planning on shooting me anytime soon?" Lena groaned.

Damien gestured for the door again, irritated by the interruption. "Get in before I change my mind."

"Don't you mean before the so called fog wears off and I imbed you into the turbolift wall," Lena said, eyes narrowing.

"You know, you've got a point," Damien sneered, his finger hovered over the fire command. "It was fun while it lasted."

Lena dodged to the left then lunged forward to grab the weapon. Damien tried to fire once more before she took it off him, only she didn't. She was perfectly content with him holding onto it as she threw it and him toward the turbolift. The doors opened in time for him to stumble inside.

"What... you were weaker..." he stammered, dazed.

Lena soon joined him in the lift, stretching her arms and sighing. "I am. Nothing like a Damien beat 'em up won't cure." The doors shut behind her.

A bloodied Fake Wesley scrambled up on top of a computer station, only not to get over it, he ran across it to the connecting wall. Despite his hurry, James was only walking toward him at a slower than usual pace. Once the shapeshifter was a couple of metres from the wall he glanced over his shoulder to check how close his pursuer was. Almost within arms reach he ran for it, jumping only to bounce his right foot off of it, propelling him into a flying kick. James grabbed his foot before he could finish it, then hurled him once more across to the other side of the room, his airborne trip only cut off by colliding with yet another wall. This time fortunately for him he only cracked it and he fell to the ground.

He struggled to get back up in the time it took James to walk over to him, aiming a punch toward his face. Wesley ducked down just in time so the fist went through the wall instead. Thinking that would slow him down, the shapeshifter aimed an upper cut punch to his ribs. Like every other hit he attempted, it didn't get a chance to as his opponent grabbed him by the scruff of his shirt with his left and lifted him up. The right slid out of the wall like it was made of paper. Both hands holding him now, he couldn't resist when he was forcefully slammed back first into the wall.

"Um, there's power connections around there so..." Turanga meekly said from afar.

"Okay, sorry," James seemed genuinely apologetic. It threw the shapeshifter off considering his position, then was literally thrown over his opponent's shoulder as if he were nothing more than rubbish.



Fake Wesley knew when he was beat, he decided to run instead, something that was quite difficult to do with the pain he was in. This time James didn't walk after him, he ran too.

Damien threw everything he could find at Lena; cups, dirty spatulas with goop still on them, a bowl of shrivelled up fruits. Anything to distract her as he hurried into the kitchen for an actual weapon he could use on her. Lena wasn't worried, she was more concerned about the stains the spatula left on her T-shirt. Jessie lent it to her after her last one was slashed nearly to bits, she was more anxious about her reaction than her current predicament.

"Ah ha, so you did listen to me!" Damien seemed happy about something.

That was cue for Lena to take him a little seriously, she looked up to find him struggling with one of Neelix's massive soup pans. Steam was coming from it, the smell was unbearable. It reminded her of her mother's Ready Room on a really bad day. She saw him intentionally tipping it toward her, then let go completely. There was no choice but to back off. "Oh my god, what's the matter..." Lena stammered a little impatiently until she noticed he had armed himself with one of Neelix's knives. "Oh for god's sake."

"You will come with me. I want to see Janeway's face when she finds out I've Slayernapped one of her brats," Damien sneered.

"Sheesh, this is what I'm reduced to," Lena mumbled to herself. She had enough, she was tired and he was on her last nerve ten minutes ago, it must've been in the minuses. Her fist clenched, she stepped forward only to find the stuff from the pot had pooled around her feet, and it was starting to solidify into a sticky goop. She could move but slowly, the worst part was the smell, it made the both of them gag. "Why?"

Damien tried not to breathe through his nose as he answered, "why not?" He pointed the knife at her. "Face it. You can't kill me. You know I'll only take over someone new, probably you. Too exhausted from Matrix strolling to really fight me. You have no choice."

"Lena!" Kiara shouted from the nearby open door. Both Lena and Damien glanced toward her as she threw something into the room. "Catch!" Both of their eyes widened as it hurtled toward them. Damien ducked down, expecting it to hit him. It ended up landing nowhere near them, instead clobbering Riker as he walked past, stuffing his face with a disgusting sandwich the size of his head. Both him and it went flying to the floor.

Lena recognised it as one of her curved daggers she was so sure she had on her when she and the others lost that Game. Then she remembered her mum fussing over her, grabbing weapons before she left. A smile spread across her face. She quickly reached out to grab the knife before Damien could even stand back up. When he did he found it pointed at his face, freezing him on the spot.

Fake Wesley had gotten as far as the circular corridor walled by the now shattered windows before he realised he had lost his pursuer. He stopped to catch his breath but only for a moment, his whole body ached and he knew if he stayed still too long, he wouldn't be able to move again. He wandered to the lack of windows, staring at the desolate city before him.

"What a waste," he muttered to himself before turning around to continue his getaway.

His voice caught in his throat at the sight of James standing directly in front of him. He didn't have time to do anything but be punched to the ground once more. He slumped over the window frame, his hands slid on the steeply sloped tiles outside, he couldn't push back up. To his surprise James kicked him but only lightly to roll him over onto his back. Then he pressed his foot into his throat, holding him there on the frame. He held him there uncomfortably for a long minute or two, the shapeshifter spluttered at him, "you're a killer... of us. Do it. Finish me."

James stared at him in disgust. He shook his head. "No. You're not worth it."

Damien laughed nervously, "come on, you're the good one. You're not the one who kills people. Remember, I'll..."

"You tossed my family, my crew into that hellhole," Lena muttered angrily. "You enslaved the Softmicron, used them to stop James and I from getting into Games, killing god knows how many. The Softmicron only destroyed the city to find you. So many innocent people, dead because of you. Took over my ship, threatened my mother. It's your fault that city is in ruins, that I wasted weeks of my life travelling the Games Matrix, its Games, all while thinking I'd never find my home and then you taunted me for getting sick from it!" her voice raised to a shout by the time she was done. Damien tried his best not to but he flinched fearfully at her. "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't toss your dying body to them?"

"I... will only come back. I mean, you don't want..." Damien stuttered, his body was shaking but not because of him. Lena's anger was making her tremble. "They won't stop with me. They hate you as much as they do me. All you'll do is advertise you're back to them. Then you'll be the one running from them. You may be strong but they're smart, not me smart but smart enough to cause you some trouble." Lena's eyes glazed over, he knew he was getting somewhere. "If you let me go, they'll chase me without ever having to know."

Lena scoffed, "as if you'd do something that'd benefit other people."

"Oh believe me, this is purely selfish," Damien laughed.

Lena believed that at least, but still couldn't withdraw the dagger.

"There's nothing left for you here, you lost. I'd rather you left knowing that," James said, loosening his hold on the shapeshifter under his boot only slightly.

Fake Wesley sneered at him, "you think you've won? This, it's nothing. You're nothing."

James rolled his eyes and sighed impatiently, "right, I could do this all day. Can you?"

"I'm only one out of billions. You're what, out of two. Insignificant in the grand scheme. Flawed, disposable," the shapeshifter laughed mockingly. James shook his head and leaned over to grab him, about to toss him back into the building. His face morphed again, this time into one that made James' blood run cold. "Easy to manipulate," Jessie's face said.

"No, you're..." James stuttered, his grip loosened. He knew it wasn't her but still, the sight of her shook him to the core.

She laughed, kicking upwards as well as pushing him off her, he fell onto the sloped walls below. He tried desperately to grab something, anything to stop him from sliding down it. Nothing stuck out, it was all flat and steep. Little did he know he was nearing the centre of the spherical building where it would curve inward. Instead of trying to grab something he resorted to pressing, even slamming his right leg into the structure, hoping to make any kind of indentation for his hand to grab onto. It took a few attempts, each one weren't protruding enough to grasp. Eventually he made it, just in time for most of his body to be pulled over the edge. Both hands grabbed the severe dent he made, it groaned from the strain.

He tried to push his body back up, but the metal creaked as well as groaned louder than before. He felt there was no choice but for his right hand to loosen its grip and try to make another piece to grab onto.

Familiar laughter from above spurred him on. The tone of it ruined the illusion of Jessie for him. He intended to make it pay for doing that to him. But first he needed to survive it.

The Softmicron meanwhile had stood back up at the window, trying to catch a glimpse of her victory. "I've always wanted to do that to a Slayer. Thanks for being the first one I've met with any kind of life, much more fun to snuff." She turned around to walk off, only to find her face to face with seemingly herself.

"Too bad for you, this one's got me," Jessie faked a smile at it before swiping it in the face with James' gun so hard pieces of it broke off. The shapeshifter stumbled backwards through the window. Unlike James she didn't have the strength to do the same thing as him, she slid past him by only a few feet, then over the edge and fell the very long way to the ground. Since she was still in Jessie's form when she did, he instinctively reached out to grab her despite being out of arm's reach and had to fight the shock of seeing her fall to her death.

The real Jessie meanwhile carefully peered out the window to look for him, hoping he didn't end up the same way, as well as struggling to think of a rescue plan. Then something on the ground caught her eye, she hurried off to the stairs.

Chakotay rushed into the Mess Hall, pointing a phaser only to find his daughter standing in the same spot she was before, only she held the knife by her leg. At first she didn't notice him, her mind was elsewhere. He had to stand directly beside her to get her to see him, when she did she jumped at the suddenness to her. "Damien?" he asked.

"Gone. He ran away," Lena replied, both of her fists clenched.

"Don't worry about it. He'll not get far," Chakotay smiled to reassure her.

Lena sighed, "yeah. That's true."

Kathryn staggered in breathlessly to both of their surprise. Chakotay turned to her, "Kathryn, you've been tied to a chair for days. Take it eas..."

"Take it easy? While that pissant roams free on my ship, after threatening our daughter. I owe him several slaps and Leola force feeding before I'll sit down again," Kathryn snapped.

"Yeah um, he's not," Lena said. The pair glanced at her curiously. "On the ship. I saw him, escape pod."

"Oh," Kathryn sighed in disappointment while absent mindedly sitting down in the nearest seat. Chakotay smirked toward her. "I'd better get the ship back up and running then. We've got the city to sort out now." Despite her words she didn't move.

Yet another piece of the structure snapped from the strain of James trying to push himself to safety, this time it was the original piece that saved him in the first place. He desperately tried to make another one, while the weaker new one his right clutched onto groaned, even squeaked in protest. He at first missed the sound of an approaching engine, when he did notice he heard it flying from below. It spluttered a bit, went off briefly then restarted, almost like a manual car that had stalled. He dared to look down, to his surprise one of the car shaped ships was directly below him. It was still quite a fall, but survivable.

He wasn't eager about doing it, but there was little choice at this point. He let go, allowing him to fall onto the ship's roof. It left a sizeable dent as well as a sprained ankle. He didn't care, it could've been worse. Just thinking that inspired the ship to slowly move, a little juddery, down towards the ground. As soon as it reached it he slid off the roof, sighing in relief at being in one piece.

The door opened, Jessie hurried out and looked around for him. When she spotted him the biggest relieved smile appeared on her face. "Oh thank god, I wasn't sure if that was going to work."

"Jessie?" he was relieved too, in more ways than one. "How did..." He was interrupted by her hugging him tightly.

"It took some convincing the stupid whiny pilot," Jessie said slightly muffled so she pulled back to look up at him. "It wasn't hard, dunno why he made a big fuss."

"Oh, why did I think you were the one flying that thing?" James frowned.

Jessie smiled, "I did."

James nodded, then he remembered the pilot. He took a peek inside the vessel. There he found Slax looking seemingly glued to his seat, permanently terrified with his hands grasping the armrests. "Oh." He left him to recover and walked back up to Jessie.

"Such a pansy," she scoffed.

James smiled, resisting a laugh for now. "Thank you. I owe you big time."

"What am I, some random bystander? I love you, I didn't want you to die. *Thank you*, god you're an idiot, luckily of the loveable ki..." Jessie rambled a bit until he leaned in and gave her a kiss. She pretended to be huffy about it and rolled her eyes, all while her cheeks were flushing. "There, paid your debt off. Happy now?"

"Hardly," James smirked at her.

Jessie smiled sweetly at him. "Definitely a lovable idiot. But at least he's mine." She remembered something, gasped and ran for the ship again. He was confused until she returned holding what remained of his gun. "It might have some poor copy blood on it, and maybe a missing trigger, the sensor's broken."

James took it off her, trying desperately not to laugh. "That's... that's okay. I doubt I'll be needing it." He put it in his holster anyway with a shrug.

The Doctor suddenly appeared next to them, startling them both so much they jumped almost in sync. He seemed cheery though, "oh hi. Did I miss anything?"

James and Jessie looked at one another with bemused expressions.

### **Voyager:**

Kathryn waited patiently with a cup in her hands for her guest to finish staring sullenly at the planet before them. The purple clouds that lingered were gone but the black, dusty ones remained, only they looked tiny from where they were. She was about to take a sip when he turned his wheelchair around to steer it back to her desk.

"I'm sorry," he said finally.

Her surprise at him saying that almost made her drink go down the wrong way. She coughed to stop it. "What for? The Softmicron started this, Damien escalated it."

"Yes but..." Turanga said, his gaze lowering to his lap. "My people didn't trust you, and that only aggravated things further. You came here to help us and instead we caused you so much grief."

"Only a select few, you're not responsible," Kathryn smiled kindly.

"As a leader of a community, do you not hold yourself responsible for every single person in it?" Turanga asked curiously.

Kathryn's face fell, "I suppose, unless they're called Annika."

"Then you understand?" Turanga said. Kathryn nodded reluctantly. "I thank you Captain, we are very much in your debt."

"Hardly," Kathryn smiled again. "The job's not finished. I doubt we got all of the shapeshifters in your midst. We can assist in the repairs to your city. I don't fancy cutting and leaving you like this."

"You are far too kind, Captain," Turanga stammered.

Kathryn chuckled, "no, I'd call it stubborn. Besides, if you'd prefer to look at it this way, we're not in any shape to leave orbit either."

Turanga laughed with her. "If you insist, Captain. Though I am curious, what are you to do about this Damien?" Kathryn's face tightened, she allowed a large sip of her coffee. "He wielded a ship like yours but was not of the same species. I'm not blaming you for his actions, I just find it a little odd."

"Everything about that creep is odd," Kathryn muttered. "Rest assured, next time I meet him, he'll suffer for his actions. I promise you that."

Smacking lips, crunching and the occasional mmmm sounds played directly into his ear. Damien's eyes watered from widening so much, his fists clenched tightly, his mind racing with so many homicidal thoughts. His escape pod-mate continued, seemingly unaware of this.

"Oh, where did I put the tacos?" Riker asked, rolling over onto his side to inspect his side of the pod. Doing so pushed Damien further into the wall. He grunted, Riker was already taking up 75% of the tiny vessel already. Something made Riker yelp and instinctively try to sit up, bumping his head on the roof. His newly found tacos spilt all over the escape pod. Riker moaned like a child until he pulled out what was poking him in the back. Damien happened to glance over at the same time he popped the crispy fry covered in fluff into his mouth.

"Ugh," Damien groaned in disgust. To make matters even worse, Riker immediately burped, spewing crumbs and fluff everywhere. That made Damien finally snap. "Why, how... why do you follow me everywhere!"

Riker wasn't bothered by his outburst, he dipped his tacos in a sauce packet he kept in his shirt pocket. "I can't imagine how you'd cope without me, sir."

Damien grumbled unintelligibly under his breath. He promised himself he'd make that Lena pay for doing this to him. No doubt Riker being there was her fault too.

"Uhoh," Riker said.

"What? Uhoh?" Damien stammered, his eyes widening. He got a good idea what it was about the next he breathed in through his nose.

The Doctor finished tapping away on his computer, smiling broadly. "There. DNA, brain scans, blood types. Everything's all done. Now we just need to fill in all your details."

Sandi looked a little confused, "brain scans? You found his, you really are a wonder doc."

Kevin mockingly laughed at her, "so witty and original sis."

"Thank you," the Doctor beamed, having only heard the compliment. "Now I have your full names, but that's it. Lets start with date of birth."

"Oooh," both of them reacted awkwardly, leaving the hologram a little worried.

"Yeah, can we skip that? It's only going to cause major headache," Kevin said.

The Doctor stared at them a little suspiciously, "I think you're both a little old to be trying to cheat the drinking age requirements. What's the problem?"

"You have no idea," Kevin sniggered.

Sandi sighed, she knew it had to come out eventually. "Well you see Doc, time passes a little differently in the Games Matrix so um, our date of births will make us look a tad ancient."

"I see," the Doctor said, still sounding puzzled. "Does it matter? It's only for your files. Your biological age isn't affected."

"It does a tad, I still don't know what year it even is," Kevin said.

"2378," the Doctor answered carefully, still it shocked the siblings.

Kevin started to stutter, "way ancient."

"How ancient?" the Doctor asked.

Sandi hesitated before answering finally, "about two centuries, give or take a year or two."

The Doctor's jaw dropped. He decided to skip the date of birth section for the time being.

**THE END**