

## Episode 2.06

### Game Over

#### **Holodeck 2:**

Every single Voyager crewmember were sitting in cinema seats facing a huge cinema screen. Neelix's movie was playing and it was obviously not catching many's interest. The majority were fast asleep, while most of the ones who weren't asleep were struggling not to do the same thing.

Only Neelix, the Doctor, Emma and Lilly were actually watching it.

The credits finally came on the screen. Everyone started cheering and clapping. Neelix stood up as a few crewmembers started to walk out.

"Where are you all going? It's only the beginning credits," Neelix said.

Everyone groaned in response. The ones who had gotten up were forced to sit down again.

"Tell me Neelix, is there any killing in this film?" Emma asked, who had the unfortunate luck of sitting next to Neelix.

"No of course not!" he snapped in dismay.

Emma slumped in her seat, disappointed, but not enough to stop munching on her popcorn. "Oh I was promised a comedy." Neelix stared at her with wide eyes.

Tom put his feet up so they were in between Emma's seat and Lilly's. Both scowled and were about to snap at him when he did something far worse. A loud crunch was heard through the whole cinema.

"Anyone want any nachos?" Tom asked, oblivious to the glares.

Everyone cheered as Emma's half empty bottle of pop flew into his face, sending him and his food flying.

#### **One hour later:**

"Oh look, there's me!" Lilly screamed as she pointed at the screen.

By the time anyone could react, her one second cameo peering through some crowds was long over. The focus instead seemed to be Harry looking like he couldn't find a toilet and had to hold it in, with his hair dripping into his face as if somebody tossed some water over him.

"Oh Julie. Weak people see our beautiful diversity as a threat to them. No one understands that better than I," Harry tried to sound upset. "We will..." A rolled up piece of paper flew into his eye and he started screaming, running around.

"Emma, would you put down that crossbow!" Neelix's voice shouted from off screen.

"I can't help it," Emma's giggled.

The Neelix in the cinema started to sweat, "how did that take make it into the film? I'm sure I cut it."

#### **Two hours later:**

Morgan groaned loudly, "how long is this stupid film?"

The next shot showed the starship that looked like a poor knock off of Voyager, break in half like a twig. The screams that came from it were very poorly done, almost sounded sarcastic.

Emma burst out laughing at it, waking a few people nearby up.

Neelix wasn't amused, but mainly because somebody was constantly kicking his chair. He looked around to find it was Kiara. He turned to Morgan next to her. "It's nearly finished."

"But it's been three hours. Why are films always so long?" Morgan whined as she slouched back in her chair. Something heavy slammed into her shoulder. She looked down, ready to smack whoever caused it until she noticed it was James' sleeping head. "That's it. This film better end before he starts drooling on me."

"I thought that was Craig's job," quite a few people whispered.

"Hey I don't drool on her!" Craig pouted angrily from behind them.

The film finally finished. A cloud of dust overwhelmed the cinema as everyone rushed out. Neelix, the Doctor, and everyone who were asleep were left behind.

"Do you think I should write a sequel?" Neelix asked.

For some reason all that was heard were crickets as tumbleweed blew past the screen.

Neelix's eyes perked up, "ooh, that'd go great in my Leola fruit pie." He dashed off.

"So, how does that make you feel?"

If looks could kill, there'd already be a funeral. Jessie sat back in the seat, eyes narrowing at the suddenly nervous counsellor. "A little uncomfortable. I could do with a cushion."

"No, no Jessie. I was joking," the counsellor stuttered.

Jessie's facade cracked, she sniggered at him. "One of these days you'll make a good one, Andrew."

The counsellor, Andrew, breathed a huge sigh of relief and then smiled. "How many times? Andy." Jessie shook her head with a grimace. "Okay, worth a shot. So, seriously, how are you doing?"

"I managed an hour's sleep last night," Jessie answered.

Andrew tried to brighten his smile but it only appeared strained. "Oh, that's progress."

"Not really," Jessie mumbled, glancing down at her lap. Andrew waited for her to go on. A little over a minute later she meekly looked up, averting her eyes to avoid eye contact. "My pillow was waterlogged; it was either the nightmares or I'm crying while I'm asleep now."

"I know it doesn't feel like it, but it sounds like you're getting better," Andrew said. As he expected he got a bemused expression back. "You're grieving, you're no longer holding it all in anymore."

"Grieving?" Jessie said, scoffing in disbelief. "I'm glad he's gone."

Andrew was taken aback. He leaned forward and quickly tapped on his computer. "Really? That's a bold statement. I thought he was your life long friend. It's way too soon to be..."

Jessie looked very flustered, "what, no. I meant Simon." Andrew froze, his face turned red as well. "I told you five times. I'm not trying to avoid him or push him away. I just need to sort my head out, which is why I'm here. Right?"

"Well," Andrew said hesitantly. Jessie's hardening stare in his direction made him rethink his words. "I didn't mean grieving in the conventional someone's dead or not around sense. You're grieving what you've lost."

"Lost?" Jessie said quietly, it was barely a whimper. She rapidly shook her head. "Please," she forcefully scowled, "this revelation, it doesn't have to change anything. All I want is to get back to normal."

"Is that what you really want?" Andrew asked.

"You know," Jessie grumbled, "that's more annoying than *how does that make you feel.*"

Andrew gave her a friendly smile. "When was the last time you talked to your friend?"

"Maybe we should go back to talking about Simon," Jessie said quickly, shuddering briefly. "God, it's all his fault you know."

"Is it? You said there were incidents before he came here," Andrew said. Jessie flinched and looked away. "Have you talked to James at all since our last appointment?"

Jessie nodded, "sure." Andrew was silent, staring at her patiently. It made her groan, "he said morning, I said hi. It was awkward and I took my breakfast into my room. I hate it, I hate everything about this."

Andrew noticed the telltale sign she was trying to avoid crying, her turning her head away and pretending to scratch under her eye. He pushed a little box over to her. "Is it really Simon you blame this situation on?"

"What?" Jessie blurted out as her head turned to face him again, her eyes wide. "Yes, we were fine. I wasn't thinking straight, and James, he... I can't blame him. He did the right thing. I'm glad he did." A little bleep coming from her jacket pocket made her tense. She took it out and stared at it for a while.

"Hmm," Andrew said while nodding lightly.

Jessie sighed and tapped in the response; *I'm sorry, I'm on duty tomorrow.*

"I thought you were off tomorrow," Andrew said.

Jessie's head snapped up, her face red with embarrassment but her eyes were fiery. "Do you mind?"

"I do, but you mumble aloud what you write," Andrew nervously responded. Jessie mumbled some words, including swearwords as she shoved the PADD back in her pocket. "Seems to me like you do blame someone else for this. When you realise and admit it, I imagine it'll be a lot less awkward than it is now."

"I don't blame James. How many times..." Jessie snapped. She groaned impatiently, "I'm not mad at him, nor am I dodging him. You got it backwards."

Andrew quietly chuckled. "Do I? I never named anyone, that was you."

Jessie wasn't sure what to say to that. Her hands absentmindedly gripped each edge of her seat. She grumbled to herself, "well who else could you have meant?"

### **The Bridge:**

Since Harry was stuck in Sickbay for stupidly assuming the pie Neelix was serving was replicated, the night shift needed a new acting Captain. A compromise had to be made in the end.

"Yey, I found your ship!" Morgan yelled from the Captain's chair.

"Yeah, but I've already sank three of yours," James said from the first officer's seat.

Morgan narrowed her eyes so much they were twitching. "You're lucky this is my first time playing Battleship."

James laughed at both her comment and her face. "You don't remember trying to hide the two piece ships in your hair when you were, well kid-Kiara?"

"No," Morgan answered slowly until she remembered. "Oh, I remember winning."

"I'm not surprised, you had next to no ships on the board," James said.

"I still got one of your ships, so there," Morgan said and she followed that with a tongue sticking out.

Little did she know Craig was watching from Jessie's usual station with the biggest pout possible. "It's not fair, Morgan used to like me."

He didn't realise he said that a little too loud until he heard a snort of laughter from the helm. "Keep dreaming, loser boy," Tani said, briefly looking over her shoulder at him.

"Oooh, is that the torpedo launchers?" a few people heard Emma say.

"Nooooo!" most of them yelled, turning around desperately toward Tactical.

Morgan though groaned, "James..."

"Yeah, yeah," James mumbled, already tapping on the shared computer between the two command chairs.

"Aaaaw," came the immediate response from Tactical.

Morgan shook her head impatiently, "you may as well take over it."

"Why, because you can't cheat in a digital version of Battleship?" James chuckled.

"No, but you can. I'm onto you!" Morgan barked at him. Since it was her turn she poured over the screen, looking for anything unusual. Then she remembered, "oh crap. Tactical. Craig, you take over."

Craig's eyes widened at the mention of his name, he even blushed slightly. "Sure, anything for you Morgan." He ran over to Tactical.

James glanced over toward him with disgust on his face. Good thing too because for that he was treated to Emma giving Craig a knee between the legs and him toppling to the floor.

"Is that what you were talking about?" he asked Morgan in a whisper.

Morgan made a little mmhmm noise as she made her move.

"Are you almost done? I've got a Captain's seat to definitely earn," a bored Lilly at Opps asked.

Morgan laughed toward her while James made his move. "You haven't got a hope in hell, silly Lilly." Then she noticed one of her boats sinking, her face paled. "No, my submarine. I'll get you for that!"

James sniggered to himself, "next time don't park your ships all in one corner."

Lilly seemed to look smug after that. "The chair's mine," she whispered. The display before her flashed, she did a quick scan. The results she got were more confusing than before the scan. "Er, since when do we fly into storm clouds on random planets?"

Morgan and James shared a similar confused frown. Morgan bolted out of her chair to go to the helm. "What the hell, Tani?"

"On screen," James asked.

"You haven't won yet," Morgan growled over her shoulder.

The viewscreen flickered on anyway. Just as Lilly said, the entire width of it was taken up by the curvature of a planet suffering from a large storm, purple in colour.

"I'm not that close. It's pretty," Tani protested. She noticed the alert telling them about the low orbit and storm, she laughed meekly. "Ok, that one's probably my fault."

"Which one, because I'm sure flying next to a pretty planet is at least," James groaned.

Tani coyly smiled while her back was to everyone. She giggled as if he complimented her. "Must be fate, I say."

Morgan rolled her eyes, "what are you talking about..." Tani pointed at the viewscreen. Morgan followed her finger, only then noticing the storm. Her jaw dropped and face turned white. "Oh crappie."

"We're too close, we've got to get out of orbit. I've never seen anything like this," Lilly said.

Morgan timidly shook her head, only James saw it since he was closest. He looked on, very concerned. He was about to make another order when the ship trembled.

"We can't," Morgan said at the same time, putting him off further. "I have a feeling I know the answer, but are there people on this planet?"

Lilly looked down at a different panel, got confused, then went to another panel. "Yeah, there's a colony. The storm's too high up to really bother them, they'll just get a funky looking sky."

"Won't be for long," Tani said.

Morgan leaned her hand on the back corner of Tani's chair. She was starting to look nervous as well. "Find us somewhere to land." Tani nodded.

"What? You heard her, the only people in danger are us if we don't leave," James stammered.

"That's not true," Morgan said. She turned on her heel to look him in the eye. "It's our obligation to help them."

James stared at her with a growing frown, he walked over to her as well. She tensed, and turned back to face the viewscreen.

"If that storm's going to threaten the colony, how is landing going to help them?" James asked.

"You really don't know?" Morgan groaned, partly rolling her eyes. She turned her head slightly to barely look over her shoulder at him. "I guess you'll find out soon enough."

"Tani?" James hesitantly said.

Tani moaned and glanced up at Morgan, trying her best to look sorry for herself. Morgan widened her eyes, mouthing no. Then she reached over to press something on the helm. Everyone heard the telltale sound of the landing struts extending.

"Oh yeah, that's a good idea," Tani laughed her nervousness off.

Lilly glanced between Morgan and Tani at the helm, then James, getting more annoyed by the minute. "Um, can anyone see that thing coming from the storm on the sensors? Cos I'm not too keen on landing when..." The ship rumbled, telling her she was too late. James though turned to stare at her quizzically. She shrugged, "I dunno, a mass of energy emerged from under the storm. It's heading our way."

"What?" James snapped.

Morgan walked over to him looking surprisingly calm. "Relax. That's normal."

"I know you're a Voyager kid, but this isn't actually the definition of normal," James muttered.

"Twelve seconds till impact," Lilly cringed as she clung to Opps.

After ten seconds a purple light engulfed the entire ship.

When the light faded everyone found their previous surroundings had vanished, replaced by a massive empty room. They also noticed a lot more people were standing around them than before. People who had been sitting, lying down, eating had to get up off a cold steel floor. Anyone who were sleeping at the time were roused by the confused conversations all around them.

Kathryn was already annoyed until she noticed she was still in her night dress, which had averted a few scared for their lives eyes. That didn't save some, a few were death glared into shivers.

"Where is..." she growled, looking around for her target. Once found she stomped over on her bare feet to them.

Morgan noticed her and winced, "uhoh, grounded time."

"Morgan, James..." Kathryn snapped. Lilly attempted to slink off. "Tilly!"

"Um, it's Lilly," Lilly grunted.

Kathryn scowled, she'd forgotten Lilly was one of the rare few that found her glares funny though. "What the hell have you gotten us into this time? I made sure to arrange this detention night shift in the emptiest sector we've seen in months. If some racist aliens stop by, I swear to god..."

"Don't blame me, I just wanted to play Battleships," Morgan said innocently.

James almost blew her cover with his facial twitch in her direction.

Lilly though was less discreet, "no, I recall you telling Tani to fly us into this."

Tom was the next to find them. He either hadn't noticed he was still in his boxer shorts and food stained t-shirt, or he didn't care one bit. Anyone who clapped eyes on him started to smirk. "What exactly is this?" he asked.

"It's called a Game Cube," Morgan quickly replied. She expected the blank stares, still she sighed in frustration.

James frowned, "a Game Cube? That sounds familiar."

"Oh good," Morgan groaned.

Tom nodded, eyes lighting up. "Oh yeah I used to own them all, I loved vintage anything. I had the Game Cube, the Wii..."

Everyone chose to ignore him, which he didn't notice.

"Doesn't look very game like to me. Where's the ship?" Kathryn snapped.

"Well, it won't yet. Voyager's safe as well, if we win," Morgan answered. She had a quick scan around. "We just have to wait for it to tell us what kind it is."

"Switch U3D, Xbox Minus 180, Playstation 10K," Tom continued to ramble.

Fortunately a computerised voice echoed all around them. *"Game loaded. One on one creature knockout challenge. No time limits, seven players, one creature per entrant. Whichever side wins four matches wins the game."*

"Creature knockout?" Chakotay chewed on both words.

Morgan started to feel nervous again, "oh had to be, didn't it?"

The voice continued, "anyone who wishes to represent the players, report to the menu to gain access to the arena."

Before anyone could ask, a massive square shaped console appeared in the middle of everyone. At first glance it appeared to be blank, but when anyone approached it a little light beam would scan them and display a faint hologram of them above the console. Naturally everyone near it backed away quickly.

Morgan and Tani headed over to it. "It's all right. We've seen this menu interface before," Tani said.

"Yeah but there's only two of us this time. You know what happens when the AI fills in for the players," Morgan said to her.

Chakotay cleared his throat from behind her. "Would either of you be kind enough to explain... well anything."

"Um, think of it as a holodeck," Morgan improvised with an awkward smile.

"Yeah sure," Tani laughed and nodded, not sincerely. "A holodeck that kills you when you lose."

Morgan glared at her exactly like her mother would. Tani averted her eye. "We won't die. We have the failsafe frequency."

Anyone standing near Kathryn could see she was ready to blow; eyebrow twitching, hands on hips, stoney, tightened face.

Chakotay decided to ask for her. "I assume that winning gives us back Voyager, right?" Morgan nodded with a nervous smile. "Okay. So what's a creature challenge?"

"I assume this is where Neelix's stews will come in handy," Tom commented.

"They're... holograms of various different creatures that can fight at your command. We have a few we've used in these before," Tani said.

"Oh like Pokémon," Craig cheerfully said on approach.

Both Morgan and Tani glowered at him, stopping him in his tracks. "No!"

Morgan let out a sigh to calm herself, "they usually represent your inner self, so it only listens to you. We got ours at some stupid forest place with even stupider challenges."

"I know it," Tom and Craig both said, almost in unison.

Morgan and Tani looked at them shocked, they also noticed James seemed to recognise it too.

"You do? So did you get some of your own?" Tani asked.

"You mean those things we used to fight that Q on the holodeck a few years ago?" they heard Jessie ask. They couldn't see her until some tall guy was pushed out of the way, then she was able to approach the others. "I remember Harry's being a frog, and Tom's..."

Tom panicked and waved his hands in front of himself as she approached him. "Haha, no no, no need to mention my awesome fire dragon. I don't want to brag."

"You mean your wife's fire dragon?" James said with a slight smirk.

"Ok. Somebody go find Harry and B'Elanna..." Kathryn started to order.

Chakotay winced, "Harry's probably still got a *furball* lodged in his throat."

Kathryn shrugged it off, "bring him anyway. So, how do we use these creatures?"

"Easy. You will them here, they'll come," Morgan answered.

"Even though they're apparently holograms gathering dust in our main computer, okay," Tom sounded very uncertain. He got a couple of questionable frowns from the two teen girls. "What?"

Tani passed a side eye to Morgan, "holograms? That would explain..."

"No, it does the opposite," Morgan said, trying to repress a cringe. Fortunately for her Chakotay returned with B'Elanna. "Okay we got seven players then."

James glanced between them and the others, "maybe we should wait until someone finds Harry."

Tom nodded furiously, "I can't believe it, today's the day I agree with James."

B'Elanna's growl froze the helmsman on the spot, she scowled at him and James for the same amount of time to be fair. "What, because I'm pregnant I can't tell some Digimon what to do?"

"Digimon," Tani said thoughtfully, she turned to a twitching Morgan, "that sounds like a better..."

"Harry can't talk, B'Elanna's in," Morgan blurted out, choosing to ignore the frowns coming at her from James and Jessie. "Let's go get logged in," she hurriedly turned back to the computer.

"Hey hey, they were summoned by thoughts. Harry can still play," Tom pointed out. "We should be choosing which monster has a better chance of winning."

Not long later the seven chosen players were teleported inside a paved sports stadium, blocked at the sidelines by glass. Tom remained behind with the rest of the crew, pouting huffily to everyone else's amusement. A giant screen showing the inside of the stadium replaced the console so they could watch.

*"Beginning Creature Knockout Challenge, Round One,"* the computer voice said. A hologram loaded at the opposite side of the stadium.

"So, about the killing us if we lose, um..." Craig said very nervously. "I'm going last."

B'Elanna frowned intensely, scaring him into becoming an inch or two shorter. "It kills us if we lose at Totally Not Digimon or Pokémon?"

Morgan sighed impatiently. "It won't. I'll activate the failsafe frequency if we lose. We'll win so it doesn't matter."

"So with a failsafe, we don't need to worry about winning then?" Craig sighed in relief.

*"Player One selected; Tani Henderson."* Tani barely had time to look worried, she was transported to the other side of the glass.

"No, we do. The failsafe only allows us to survive the trip back to where the Game came from," Morgan said.

"Which is?" James asked as if he didn't want to really know.

Tani meanwhile watched the hologram opposite point in her direction. Its shadow distorted, then began to emerge from the ground. Tani smiled when it formed into what looked like a 3D shadow of a large rodent.

"No problem," she sneered. Closing her eyes, she swirled around while raising her right arm. Her shadow rippled, expanded and grew by her feet into something with spikes all around it. "Let's do this Star." B'Elanna and Jessie noticed Morgan shake her head quickly.

*"Round One: begin."*

Tani's star shaped shadow span around in circles around its mouse opponent, which stayed on the spot, watching it with sparks of electricity building from its puffed cheeks. It bolted upright. Tani's dove from where it was, directly at it, spinning so fast the spikes couldn't be seen.

"Got it," Tani smiled.

Within inches of striking it, a flash of yellow light emanated from the mouse so strong Tani had to look away. When she looked back her own shadow had returned to normal.

*"Round One goes to the AI."*

Tani reappeared with the others looking sheepish. "I'm sorry guys. I thought I could outrun it."

Morgan smiled weakly at her. "It's okay. We've still got a few chances." She looked at the others, "it's a bit worrying that the computer decides who goes. Quickly, you summon the creature by thinking..."

*"Player Two selected; James Stuart."*

"About it and," Morgan said at the same time. James was then spirited away like Tani had been. "Oh shoot!" she snapped, stamping her foot.

Tani laughed at her friend very nervously, she got a scowl for it. "I thought you said he..."

"I did, but Games are brand new to him," Morgan cut in.

B'Elanna coughed, "us." Morgan stared at her tiredly. "It's too late for him, but maybe we should get a fresher while he loses badly."

"Fine," Morgan groaned. She hinted for the rest of the players to gather around. They all did but Jessie, she kept a little ways back and watched the match start up.

Inside the arena, James was trying to remember how the shadow holograms appeared the first and last time it happened.

"By thinking what..." he mumbled at the same time his opponent unleashed their shadow. He remembered the faint outline of the creature, a four legged he assumed dog with pointed ears. Thinking it made it form in front of him and assume a battle stance.

Only then he noticed his opposing shadow. Its heaving lower half shaped like an overgrown potato, pointed arms, its lack of a head, a fluttery leaf shape hanging over its head via a thorn protruding from its back. It looked very familiar.

James tried to shake that off when his previous shadow split and morphed into the exact same thing, only his screamed in high pitch. He rolled his eyes, "oh you got to be kidding me."

"What's happening?" Jessie asked, getting the others attention.

Morgan ran over, her eyes widened to bulging. "How's he got two creatures?"

"I don't know, we all got one," B'Elanna said.

Craig winced, "it looks a little like..." The others looked at him.

The second shadow lunged for the opponent's, while the original four legged one remained, looking as confused as James was.

"The evolved creature we found on Deck Thirteen. It seemed to be under James' command, until it ate Damien," Craig muttered.

Morgan frowned, "wait, what?"

"Take it back," Tani whispered.

Morgan shook her head, "how can he? He won't know how."

*"Player Two is disqualified. Round Two goes to the AI."*

Seconds later James was transported back to the others, still with the same confused look on his face. "Uh... what the hell?"

No one knew what to say to him, they didn't know either.

*"Player Three selected; Morgan Janeway."*

Morgan looked relieved as she was taken away next. "Finally. Let's do this." She hunched forward and pointed at the opponent. Her shadow turned into a large, overweight creature with bunny like ears. Jessie shuddered at the sight of it and turned away. Meanwhile Morgan's opponent appeared to be dragon shaped, making Morgan smile in relief and a little darkly.

"Oh good, I need some ice cubes for my drink later," she sneered. A powerful torrent of water shot out of her shadow towards the dragon. Halfway there it began to freeze. When it struck the opponent, the same happened to it. It dropped to the ground with a massive thud.

*"Round Three goes to the Player."*

Morgan reappeared amongst the others smiling a little too much. "And that's how it's done."

Tani stared at her friend blankly. "Ice cubes? And you call yourself a Janeway."

"Hey," Morgan protested and huffed. "What was wrong with it?"

B'Elanna shrugged, "maybe an iceberg to sink the Titanic joke would've fared better?"

"The what?" Morgan mumbled.

"The ship in Neelix's movie," James tried to say with a straight face. Despite B'Elanna and Craig staring at him as if he were an idiot and Harry smirking, Morgan took him seriously and nodded in understanding.

*"Player Four selected; Harry Kim."*

The smirk dropped off Harry's face in an instant. He made a little scratchy moan as he disappeared.

Quite a lot of awkward minutes passed in the arena as Harry stood, grimacing when he wasn't thinking things over.

"So, a frog huh? What type is it?" Tani asked. She got many blank stares in response. "Both mine and Morgan's are dual water types, mine's telepathic while hers..."

"Ice," Morgan quickly blurted out.

Tani chuckled to herself, "another kind of dragon killer. I dunno what James's was, but the second one looked grassy."

Craig's face lit up, "oh it was like this Little Shop of Horror's thing. So yeah grass."

"And Harry's?" Tani questioned.

B'Elanna groaned but not because of what seemed to her like a stupid question, but the answer, "frogs are water creatures. How many types are there, two?"

Morgan thought about it, "about twenty, they sometimes add new ones. Water is most common, so... great."

The group turned to see if Harry had done anything yet. Fortunately his large, frog shaped shadow standing on its hind legs had been summoned, but nothing else was happening.

"Maybe... can you hit it?" Harry mumbled. The frog leapt out and tried to bitch slap its very sturdy, almost rock shaped opponent.

Morgan and Tani groaned to themselves, Tani covered her face.

Harry seemed pleased with that despite the other creature barely reacting to it. "Okay um, you're a frog, big tongues..." While he was mumbling, the frog extended its tongue to wrap around its foe, sparks flying from it.

"Oh crappie," Morgan said. Everyone but Tani glanced at her. "His looks electric."

"So?" Jessie wondered.

Tani pointed at the battle, anyone who looked back noticed the opponent once more looking unimpressed by the attack.

"It's a rock monster, they're almost always grounded," Morgan explained anyway.

Harry was still thinking of what to do when the living boulder had enough and tackled his frog once into submission.

*"Round Four goes to the AI."*

Despite that Harry came back still looking pleased with himself. "That was kinda fun. Tom and I can make a fun holodeck program out of this game."

Morgan ground her teeth. "Whoever's next has to win or we're screwed. *Great job.*"

"Correction, everyone next has to win. We're losing 3-1, and we only have three people left," Tani said with a touch of guilt in her voice.

Jessie and Craig both looked very nervous, all while B'Elanna looked more than up for that pressure.

*"Player Five selected; Jessie Rex."*

"Jess quick, what's yours?" Morgan quickly asked.

Jessie frowned, "I dunno, a cat..." She was gone before she could think of a type.

"Morgan," Tani said wearily, gesturing to her empty pocket. "What are we gonna use to generate the failsafe signal?"

Morgan sighed impatiently, "I dunno. Tricorders, commbadges. Maybe she'll do fine though..." Tani didn't look as sure, then she gestured her head in the direction of Craig. It wasn't discreet, he spotted it and pouted.

"I'll get on it," Tani whispered.

In the arena, a cat shaped shadow appeared in front of Jessie. Ahead of her looked like a walking tree, which distracted her a little from the pressure she was under.

The opponent charged at her shadow slowly, hers dodged out of the way in a flash. Jessie's face brightened up a little, "I remember what this does." Seconds later her shadow glowed and sparked. The other shadow shook it off as if it were nothing. It countered with a powder from its lack of head, showering the cat.

"What?" Jessie stammered as it dropped to the ground.

"Woah, woah! That's it?" Craig shouted in B'Elanna's ear accidentally. She shoved him away for it.

Morgan shook her head, "it must've been a sleep powder. Otherwise the Game would be over."

"Okay, how does she wake it up?" James asked.

Tani cringed, "blind luck? Maybe she can annoy it awake." She ignored the scowls and annoyed tuts she got for the comment, and knocked on the glass. "Hey, tell it about your new outfit!"

Jessie didn't hear her, she could only look on helplessly as the much larger shadow tackled hers over and over.

"Yeah that's hilarious. With advice like that, I can see why an experienced Games player lost quicker than all the newbies," James grumbled.

Tani froze and looked around at him, her face looking like she'd been slapped. That was replaced by annoyance when Morgan laughed, she assumed at her expense.

*"Round Five goes to the AI. Game Over, AI wins."*

Nobody had time to really react. A purple light washed over the entire arena, blinding their view. When it finally died down, most of the crew were wondering if their eyes were damaged from it when all they saw were the clashing blue and red of the energy tunnel they had arrived in.

Morgan glanced around at what seemed to be the whole crew of Voyager gathered around her and the others. "Well, we made it," she said quietly.

Kathryn cleared her throat aggressively. The people in between her and Morgan quickly scampered well away. "Morgan. You'd better have a damned good explanation. Where is this?"

Morgan briefly flinched at her mother's stare daggers and so looked off to one side. "Like I said; the failsafe frequency brings us along with the Game to its origin. It's been nicknamed the Games Matrix; where time has no meaning."

Tom looked surprisingly eager. "Oh really? So where's my bitching cars and boats, with my adoring family waving me off with tears in their eyes?"

Kathryn shook. Chakotay panicked and quickly thought to intervene. "That's the Nexus."

"And don't ask where your cool sunglasses and Kung Foo skills are either, for all our sakes," Craig said, gesturing his head toward Kathryn.

Tom rolled his eyes. "You lot, you suck all the fun energy out of everything. Fine, lets be miserable and terrified, shall we?"

Chakotay sighed very loudly, "what can we expect from this place and how do we get the ship back?"

"It's pretty much where the Games are made. The what we call AI use it to travel in between Games. Like a giant maze," Morgan answered. "They're not going to be happy that we're here."

"Why is that?" Annika scowled.

"Because this is their dwelling, their base of operations," a man's voice said from outside the crew's perimeter. He got most people's attention mostly because of his bleach blonde hair, but also because his features made him appear Human. He ignored that as he made his way to the centre.

Tani groaned in disgust, "oh god, it's our Watcher."

"The who?" Harry tried to ask through his sore throat.

No one really heard him, so Tom asked the similar, "the what? Sounds pervy."

This time Kathryn was going to say something, but the new arrival beat her to it. "I am one of the few remaining Watchers of the Games. I was born with the power to sense them, which aids the..." he cleared his throat, "people who play them."

"He used to train us when we were aboard the Borg Sphere," Morgan said.

The Watcher fixed the crooked glasses on his nose, smiling broadly. "While it is wonderful to see you and Tani again, how did you get here?"

"The last game, take a guess," Tani said with a touch of guilt.

"I see," the Watcher nodded. "I can sense that there is a Game compiling that'll return you to, not the same place you came from, but as close as you're going to get. Maybe a hundred lightyears or so."

"If it's in the right direction, that's not so bad," Craig commented.

The Watcher chuckled and peered over his glasses at him. "It's also the hardest game style we've encountered so far."

Morgan raised her shoulders anxiously, "you mean the Hunt?"

"I'm afraid so, though I've heard they're constantly changing the rules for it. I don't know for certain what you're going to be up against," Watcher replied.

Kathryn shrugged as if she didn't care, everyone around her assumed she wasn't surprised. "So harder than shadow rock, paper, scissors?"

"It's the most dangerous at least. A team of anywhere between ten and fifteen players are pit against twice as many AI. One team must be eliminated for the other to win," Morgan explained.

"You mean killed off?" Tom stuttered.

Kathryn's eyes unconsciously drifted in Annika's direction. She noticed and wasn't amused.

"Not really. The Games themselves can't kill you, until you lose them. You can be injured though. What counts as elimination could be anything from three or more hits to knocked unconscious," Watcher answered.

"Usually, if not always unconscious," Tani added on.

The Watcher clicked his tongue disapprovingly. "No, one Hunt I watched over used a lives system. You were knocked over, or out I suppose, too many times you'd be kicked out."

"I thought they were meant to be rare," Morgan said uncomfortably.

"I've noticed many of the more physical games over the months, while mundane puzzle or adventure styled ones have become the new rare. We used to get less of them than the Slayers to fight them, which by the way, I'd recommend," Watcher said.

Morgan rolled her eyes and looked away. "Oh, not this again."

Kathryn frowned, "what?" She pointed an icy stare at the indifferent Watcher. "My sixteen year old daughter's not going in some death match. We'll find another way."

The Watcher chuckled patronisingly. "I wouldn't dream of it." Morgan flinched and tensed her shoulders. "Morgan has the gift, no doubt, but she's not ready for such a thing. Too delicate, too soft, too compassionate, too human."

"Clearly you don't know Humans," Tom commented.

"Or Morgan," James added on.

Morgan pointed a narrowed eye stare at him, making him laugh quietly. The Watcher followed both his voice and her stare.

"You made it quite clear last time," Morgan said without looking at the Watcher.

Chakotay discreetly turned his head to one side and back. "Then why mention it at all?"

"No reason," the Watcher said flippantly, "except a naive thought you'd have someone else up your sleeve. I'm afraid we'll have to make do with what we have." He turned towards Morgan once more. "Might you have any suggestions?"

"Why ask me?" Morgan muttered while giving him a bitter side eye. "You always know."

"Hmm," Watcher sighed. "I thought you might have some thoughts before I do. Very well. Whoever is in charge, might I have your permission to train a select group to take part in this Game?"

Kathryn folded her arms tightly. Chakotay and Tuvok waited for her to ask their opinion, even though they knew better. "If there are no Games close to where we were, or closer to the Alpha Quadrant." She was put off by the Watcher's obnoxious snort.

"The only risk as I understand it, is a risk of injuries and ending up back here," Chakotay said. He got a few nods. "If it's our only way..."

"It is. There's no other way out," Tani said grimly.

"And the longer we stay here, the more likely it is we'll be targeted," Watcher said, swirling around on the spot and looking at everyone. "Hmm, it might be a long shot, but I think a place nearby looked big enough to hide this crew. My trainees will remain here. The rest shall follow me."

The Watcher looked upon his fourteen new students, as well as Morgan, studying them carefully.

"I thought you weren't invited," James whispered to her.

Morgan smirked, "that's never stopped me before."

"That remains to be seen," Watcher said to her annoyance. He began to pace along the line of people. "If you want to stay safe in the Hunt, first thing is you must overcome your fear. Your compassion for others will cloud your judgement. These are not people you are killing, they are insentient pixels programmed to kill you with no hesitation."

Sid nodded furiously, "good, good. I'm liking this so far." A few people groaned.

"Yeah, we're not bringing him if we want to win," James said while Morgan stared at the strange guy on her other side.

The Watcher shook his comment off and continued, "you must be ruthless, show them no mercy. If they see that fear, that hesitation, they'll take advantage of it. Anger will be your ally here. It's powerful, it takes over the many other emotions that'll hinder you. You must learn to use your anger as a tool or weapon. Without it, you will not win."

"Well this should be no problem. Just send James, Jessie, Morgan and Janeway without a coffee in and we'll win in record time," Tom sniggered.

"That'd only work if you were the AI," James commented. Tom scowled.

Jessie then wondered why she was stood next to Tom. She pointed her thumb at him, "why did you pick him?"

The Watcher only gave her a shrug as an answer. He noticed Sid putting his hand up.

"How high is the injury level in this thing? Are we talking boring paper cuts or will it go up to first degree burns, or more?" Sid giggled.

"Um. It... depends," the Watcher said. "Perhaps you should sit this one out."

"Oh, what if the AI chopped off someone's head? Would you still have it when the Game ended?" Emma asked.

The Watcher looked like he was regretting his earlier idea. "Yes, but you'd have the scars from it. Does anyone have any questions that are relevant to winning?"

"Are there any weapons or tools that'll assist us?" Annika asked.

"Excellent question," Watcher beamed, Annika looked smug in return. "Most Hunts allow you to pick a weapon before logging in. Only one so far hasn't done this."

"Chainsaws?" Emma squeaked.

The Watcher frowned, "that's not a weapon." Most of his trainees laughed nervously in response. "If that's all, I must get started. First, I will choose suitable training partners that match your skill level."

Everyone looked at Tom, his head darted around as if he were being accused of something. "Oh," he said in realisation, "there are fifteen of us."

"That's all right, one will train with me," Watcher said. "First, perhaps Morgan can train with Tani again..." He frowned, confused. "Where is she?"

"Yeah um, she didn't want to come," Morgan said, sounding a little put out. "That's why there's an odd amount."

"Oh," the Watcher didn't sound concerned, "no matter. Lets see." He scanned the line a few times. "Chainsaw girl and..." He stopped in front of Annika. "You two are polar opposites." Annika sighed in relief, Emma pouted. "However, a match up like yours can prove fruitful. One could stand to learn some new tricks, while the other..."

"Is chopped to pieces. Again," Morgan commented.

Annika sent a dark stare her way. "Yes, thank you for reminding everyone of what you did to me."

"Oh my god, it wasn't me, it was the ghost," Morgan growled.

The Watcher glanced between them, tempted to change his mind. He shook his head. "Yes, chainsaw girl and the blonde woman with the buggy eyes. Training between you two would benefit both."

"Yeah right," Annika scoffed, passing an accusing stare at Morgan and James.

"Hmm, the angry woman and..." the Watcher mused, to the confusion of half of the group, including Morgan.

"Which angry woman?" Tom sniggered.

Jessie was stared at next to his amusement. The Watcher smiled, "ah, you'd be perfect."

"Oh this is bullcrap," people heard Kathryn snap from the end of the line. Everyone looked at her in time to see her nudge Emma in the arm. "I'll swap you and pay you back later."

Emma sneered back at her, "sure, that'll be a hundred cups of Americano."

Kathryn trembled, eye twitching. Anyone nearby heard her squeak. "Never mind."

"I..." Jessie stuttered, frowning slightly, "I dunno if I should be offended or the opposite."

Tom tried his best not to laugh, "I'd say both."

The Watcher had continued pairing up the line while they'd been talking, most of them unknown crewmembers. He was left with Tom, Sid, James and Morgan. He had a smile on his face, "well that's easy..."

"Tom paired with James or Morgan?" Kathryn suggested hopefully.

Tom whined, "hey, um... I mean thanks for saying I'm of similar skill level." He laughed very nervously.

"The weirdo who wants to get hurt and the guy I'd only suggest sending in if we didn't have enough players," the Watcher said.

"Oh I dunno, this murder match thing sounds right up James's alley," Tom tried to sound amused, but he knew who the Watcher really meant.

The Watcher, and everyone else but Sid for that matter, ignored him. "Which leaves my dear pupil Morgan paired up with this..." He eyed James curiously, which he responded with an annoyed eyebrow raise. "Interesting fellow."

Morgan rolled her eyes and clenched her jaw, while Jessie looked over with a worried expression on her face.

"So how exactly is my perfect training partner Jessie?" Kathryn snapped.

The Watcher chuckled as he made his way over to her. "I sense some... unresolved disdain, as well as the similar threat level you two have."

"No kidding," Tom's laugh caught in his throat.

"Now," the Watcher interrupted with a sharp clap. "We do not have much time. What we need to do is work on what fighting skills you do have; see if they open you up to attack, learn new tactics. To this end I suggest each coupling practice fighting one another. This way you'll see each other's strengths and weaknesses."

Emma giggled then grinned maliciously. Annika wasn't surprised at all though, she looked bored instead of worried.

"Now pair up and spread out," the Watcher ordered. He waited for the line to break apart into couples. Most did, but the ones who remained where they were got his attention quickly. "Is there a problem, Morgan?"

Morgan grimaced at him. "You didn't say why we were paired up," she said, pointing at James.

"I saw no need to," the Watcher smiled and very politely.

James sighed a little impatiently, "you must have, since you paired me up with a Game Cube Slayer."

"It's just Games Slayer," the Watcher chuckled obnoxiously. That earned him two cold stares, which didn't deter him. He focused on Morgan, blanking James out completely. "Don't tell me he's completely ignorant, and that's why you didn't mention him earlier."

"Excuse me," James cleared his throat irritably, "maybe we should do a swap, as clearly I should be *learning* from you." The third person standing near them took one look at Morgan, whimpered and ran off.

Morgan glanced back at him briefly. "James, he doesn't mean anything..." James shook his head and walked away a few paces. "You know?"

"Of course I know," the Watcher said, laughing afterwards. "The question is still why are you protecting him? His performance in the Creature Battle isn't an indicator of how he'd do in a simple fight to the death."

"Well..." Morgan started to reply but hesitated. "I'm not, I just thought you'd be discreet about it and not an asshole. My mistake."

"Hmm I see," the Watcher said in a patronising tone. "I don't see what the problem is. You finally have a sparring partner worthy of you. Isn't that better than having to hold back with poor Tani? This way you'll tap into your potential."

Morgan's eyes narrowed, "right... yeah."

The Watcher smiled in a smug, patronising manner and walked away towards the pairs, expecting them to be already sparring. All he found was Annika lying on the ground sporting a brand new bump on the head.

"Um. That was qui..." he said until he noticed Emma hide a tricorder behind her back abruptly. "Where did you get that?"

"Get what?" Emma innocently asked. At the same time she casually tossed the tricorder in a random direction. Naturally it ended up in Annika's face as she was sitting up.

It rolled over to where Sid was and he picked it up gleefully. "I wonder if that'll work if I...?" He tried to hit himself with it but Tom snatched it off him in a blind panic.

The Watcher grumbled to himself. "Is this it? I was careful to not choose pairs who'd hesitate, so why are you? Your whole ship is counting on you to win this battle. Practise, go all out, or you will lose."

"Grumpy little snot, isn't he?" Kathryn chuckled.

Jessie sighed, "so if we must do this, some ground rules. No hair pulling..."

"Oh please, I only do that to chumps," Kathryn cut in, scoffing.

*"Chakotay to Janeway."*

Kathryn looked down at her chest, puzzled since the voice wasn't coming from her. She was quickly reminded of still being barefoot and in nightwear.

Close by Morgan tapped her commbadge, "I guess that's me. What's up dad?"

*"It looks like we have company."*

The Watcher's attention darted toward Morgan with wide eyes, hers did the same. He hurried back over to her.

"You said their hideout was safe, abandoned and..." she said accusingly.

"It was. Come on, we must hurry," the Watcher said urgently. "Bring your friend and anyone else you think will be useful." He ran off before Morgan could object.

Morgan glanced across at James. She also spotted Emma not far behind him, trying to wake Annika up with slaps. Each time she grimaced and wiped the hand on her trousers.

The strange red and blue tunnels all looked alike. Everytime the Watcher lead the three down a split path without hesitation, it put James and Emma off a little. After five seemingly random turns, James stopped at the junction to check the battered tricorder he got from Tom.

Typically that turn lead the Watcher, Morgan and Emma to a large open area with charred remains of buildings dotted all over. What caught Morgan's eye was the mostly intact alien vessel, part buried in the energy floor looking like it was about to sink at any moment.

Watcher gestured quietly to the figures climbing up the rear of the hull, safely away from the sinking point. He shook his head, "how did they find them so quickly? We must hurry."

Morgan glanced between them, the ship and him twice, quickly. "You hid my crew here, in that thing?"

"Yes," the Watcher replied proudly for no reason Morgan could see, "I found it during my search for a game back to headquarters. Fascinating, isn't it?"

Morgan shuddered in anger. "You might as well have left them standing out in the open with flashing lights and holding a banner." She ran off towards the stricken ship. Emma followed eagerly.

Despite his earlier tone, Watcher took his time doing the same until he glanced behind him and noticed one of the team was missing. He stopped to look around for him.

Neither Emma or Morgan noticed either of these things. They climbed over the hull at a different, higher section. Doing so allowed them both to see the other side of the ship, most of which was imbedded in the weird walls. The only gap, the figures they saw earlier jumped down into. Morgan noticed the large gash in the hull before any of them went through it.

"I wonder if they have any weapons in there," Emma said.

Morgan sighed, "I hope so. We need a plan first though..." A figure emerged from the hole in the hull, dragging out with them a struggling, screaming kid. "What the... Kiara?" Morgan stammered.

"So er, a plan. Maybe we..." Emma started to say but Morgan was already jumping her way down to confront them. Emma smiled and shrugged. Before she could move, someone else was dragged out by one of the figures. "Oh my god, they got Harry," Emma growled. She ran down after Morgan.

Morgan got to the bottom as the Watcher reached the highest point of the ship. He watched, worried as Morgan threw herself at two of the people outside. The one holding Kiara backed away behind two others.

One last figure emerged, trying badly to drag B'Elanna out. He suffered another black eye before he was helped out by another of his teammates. B'Elanna though was far more annoyed at the fight happening in front of her.

"Oh sure, drag out B'Elanna so Tom can run in and get hilarious hurt. So transparent," she hissed bitterly.

Watcher meanwhile felt a presence approaching. He was surprised at how close he had gotten to him before he noticed. His head darted up to find James standing directly beside him. "You? Where have you been?"

James didn't hear him or didn't care to answer, he stared firmly and unblinking at the scene below him.

"See that. You can't let your insecurity, your fear win..." the Watcher started to ramble, oblivious to James jumping down into the *pit*. "...Let you anger in, overcome it..."

The two holding B'Elanna pushed her into the hull and hard, dazing her. One held her back, while the other raised their fist, pointing it toward her stomach. That was grabbed a second later. A horrific crunch echoed around the corridor as one slight tug snapped the arm into an unnatural bend. They only screamed for a moment, before they were punched unconscious.

The one holding B'Elanna panicked and tried to get away, leaving her behind. It was grabbed by the throat and tossed harshly onto the ground, head first.

"Holy moly, that was so cool," Emma laughed, having seen it all.

Morgan though, her jaw dropped in shock. The remaining figures who were conscious fled as fast as they could, leaving behind their attempt at hostages.

Harry was about to say something but was squeezed to near death by a relieved Emma. "Hey, um... why am I always around when this happens?" he wheezed.

"Emma," Morgan said a little meekly. Emma took the hint anyway and let him go. Harry quickly went to check on Kiara and B'Elanna. He tried to give James a wide berth as he lead the way back into the alien ship.

"How interesting," the Watcher said on approach.

Morgan rolled her eyes. "Yes, that's the word I'd use." James walked over to the others while stretching one of his arms and flexing his neck side to side. She looked at him with a slight frown, he gave her a confused one back. "What the hell was that?"

"It's what I've been trying to tell you, Morgan," Watcher answered instead. "Anger is the most powerful emotion, and the most useful tool at a Slayer's disposal."

"He didn't look mad, it looked effortless," Emma pointed out, but sounded confused. "And why would he be pissed?"

Morgan winced, "maybe you can check to see if everything's okay in there."

Emma shrugged, "yeah, whatever." She hurried off into the ship.

"Look, they had my sister. Of course I was mad, that's why I recklessly ran in. I thought you'd berate me for that, not praise him for..." Morgan whispered to the Watcher.

The Watcher chuckled to her annoyance, "It was no contest, so I wouldn't call it reckless." His eyes pointed toward James. He didn't notice, he was too busy deeply breathing to calm himself down.

"You didn't see what they were going to do," James said, getting Morgan's full attention. "They were going to beat B'Elanna, you know..." he said knowingly, hinting with his eyes.

Morgan understood and lightly nodded, but she was even more worried than before. "I see."

"I don't," the Watcher said lightly with a smile. "Perhaps you two should return to your training. Someone should keep an eye on the others. I in the meantime will relocate the crew to our training area. I must though speak to your Captain and Commander once we arrive."

Kathryn blinked furiously, everyone worried she was about to explode at any moment. "I'm sorry, want to repeat that again without the bull?"

Bemused, the Watcher glanced over her shoulder briefly at his trainees spread out behind her, and back again. "I assumed you would have noticed, Captain Janeway. Morgan and James have the same unique talent that must be utilised; their potential is astounding."

"Meaning?" Chakotay questioned impatiently.

"As I noted before, Game Cubes are easier to defeat with Slayers playing them. Hunt types especially. They both show an immense amount of strength, not normally seen in humanoids," Watcher replied.

"What, James as well?" Craig complained.

Kathryn and Chakotay looked over their shoulders to find him lurking to their right, they each gave him the same annoyed *go away* stare. He merely stepped further back.

"I'm honestly amazed you didn't notice this," Watcher stammered.

Kathryn sighed, fidgeting slightly with her arms folded. "We're not fools, of course we did. I tried to tell myself that it is because she was Borg, but... I knew I was fooling no one."

"And James? It's astonishing he hasn't been discovered yet," Watcher said.

Chakotay clicked his tongue and shook his head. "That's not true." Kathryn lightly nodded, Watcher's eyes widened slightly. "We've known about him for a while, that's why we were in denial about Morgan, or else we wouldn't have known to worry. It's not something that should be public knowledge for one, and two, for a while he kept out of the spotlight, calmed down. Nobody noticed him."

"Until recently," Kathryn chimed in sadly.

"What we don't understand is how Morgan has this condition, but Kiara doesn't," Chakotay said.

The Watcher was confused as well. He nodded thoughtfully. "That is an interesting phenomenon, something that'd be interesting to study. Slayers are picked for their natural talents, personality traits. Both in theory should've been picked, but perhaps the split has changed them both somewhat so Kiara no longer fits the specifications." Kathryn scowled at him, which he laughed at. "I'm not saying she's weak or anything, she simply has her own strengths that differ from Morgan."

Kathryn rapidly shook her head, face tightening. "If you think you're taking them away to do some private training sessions, you'll get a couple fists in the face."

"Oh I wouldn't dream of it," the Watcher laughed good naturedly, despite the threat. "For now I will train everyone for this Game alone. My suggestion for after that is Morgan can train James..."

Chakotay scoffed, "but we told you that..."

"You did, and I could tell already. I sensed it in him when we first met," the Watcher sighed as if annoyed. "Morgan has been trained in the world of the Games, while James will have his own unknown to me experience, if any. They'd be very useful to each other. No wonder they've already bonded as such..."

"Meaning?" Kathryn asked as worry started to show on both Chakotay's and her face.

"It's nothing to worry about Captain. The bond I mentioned is only in friendship," the Watcher grinned.

"Why him, he always seems to get all the breaks. I thought she liked me," Craig muttered.

"Oh Craig, get a cold shower and piss off back to the others!" Kathryn snapped.

Craig spluttered partly in shock, but mostly offended, "you said no one should be alone here."

"I'll walk him back," Chakotay said.

"We haven't got much time left, so if you'll excuse me," the Watcher said, resisting a smirk. He walked away back to the others, hinting Kathryn should follow him.

"It's not fair, I hate that guy," Craig moaned. Chakotay made a throat clear sound to remind him to go with him. Craig reluctantly followed.

The Watcher approached the first pairing. He nodded approvingly. "Excellent work, good form but you may want to give your partner a turn as the attacker."

"Why?" both Emma and a bloodied, swollen faced Sid asked innocently.

"Please," the Watcher said sternly.

"Aaaw," Emma moaned, lowering her fist. The Watcher nodded and moved on.

Sid pouted, "maybe one more kick for the road?"

Emma looked torn, mischievous but confused. "Is there anything left there?" Sid jiggled his whole body on the spot, making her cringe. "Scratch that, I don't care." She kneed him in between the legs. Sid laughed and fell to the ground.

The Watcher meanwhile stopped at the next pair where one was unconscious and bleeding from the head. He looked at the unlikely winner. "You?"

Tom's nervous eyes darted in Emma's direction and back. "Yes, I'm a badass."

"Why me?" Annika slurred in her *sleep*.

The Watcher opted not to say anything, he merely pointed back at Emma and Sid. Tom meekly walked back to them. To his relief Emma was more than happy to return to her original partner.

"That guy's real gross," she said to the Watcher.

He sighed and moved on to the next lot, passing judgement on every couple as he paced. His pace quickened once he was approaching Morgan and James standing around, talking.

"This is disappointing. I want to see some fighting from you," the Watcher scolded.

Morgan stuck out her bottom lip as she glanced at him. "I tried; said he should redo what he did earlier but he's refusing."

"Have you tried attacking him instead?" the Watcher asked.

"Well no," Morgan mumbled, "that's not really fair."

Watcher's resulting laugh was patronising and a little high pitched. "What else isn't fair? Hunts. Twice as many, all of them programmed to kill with no hesitation. I thought out of everyone here you'd understand that."

"But..." Morgan protested.

The Watcher's mood changed from amused to furious in a blink of an eye. "Do it!"

Morgan wasn't surprised by it, but her shoulders did hunch up slightly. James wasn't sure what to make of either of their reactions, and stared with narrowing eyes at the Watcher.

"I don't want to," Morgan complained. "I'm trained for these Games, so no, I won't."

"And here I thought you had what it takes to be a great Slayer, Morgan," the Watcher sounded disappointed. "If you can't overcome your compassion for your enemy, you will lose this Game."

Morgan twisted her face before smirking, "that's not the same. He's not my enemy, and the AI aren't my friends."

"Fine, your training is over. I must have been mistaken about you," the Watcher harshly said.

Morgan once more stuck out her bottom lip and pointed her head away from him. The Watcher took a few steps to the side to face James more directly. "What about you? Your crew is at stake here. I've seen what you are capable of, but I have a feeling from the reaction you got, that it wasn't expected."

"Don't bother. I know how to kill without play fighting a teenager," James said plainly.

"See," Morgan huffed.

The Watcher glanced between them in over the top horror. "I am incredibly disappointed in you both." He shook it off a little too well. "Though you are correct. My energies should be on the others. Do what you please." He walked away towards the last few couples.

"Was he always like this?" James asked.

Morgan nodded, "yeah, only he used to insist I practise with Tani."

James scoffed, briefly glancing over his shoulder at the odd Watcher yelling at the two pathetically slapping each other's hands. "Did you?"

"I did, all the time," Morgan said, glancing at her feet. "He thought my fighting the others would give me an edge since they hated me, and Tani was someone I cared about."

"Yeah, what's up with this compassion thing? Is there something about these Hunts that requires players not to discriminate. He doesn't make any sense," James asked.

Morgan still kept her head down. "Actually, it does. I jumped down without a plan because of Kiara. You too with your kid. It could've easily gone wrong."

"True, and I speak from experience," James mumbled hesitantly. "But all the training in the universe isn't going to make you not care anymore, and would you even want that?"

"You don't understand. I figured you wouldn't," Morgan mumbled. She raised her head back up, "think of it like this. You have no one even close to your power to train with, nothing to use to get better, and you get into Games and lose badly because of it. What if the only way to learn and be better was to practice with the people that are around. Hold back, but not too much or you skimp yourself."

James shook his head, "Morgan, I know what you mean. It's not..."

"No you don't. We didn't have holodecks, nothing ever really happened on board to test me. Barely," Morgan said with a growing lump in her throat. "Fighting my bullies would've given me the anger advantage as well, and I could've badly hurt them, or worse." She noticed James flinch and look away, she assumed he got it. Still she went on, "you need to care about your opponent so you're not

mindlessly fighting, you gotta think about every move you make. That's how you gain control of it, that's important. So, what if your only choice was Jessie?"

"I'm sure I'd find a wall I was pretty neutral about somewhere," James replied.

Morgan tried not to laugh unsuccessfully. "A wall's not going to fight back."

"I get it, I think, but it doesn't explain your refusal to train with me," James said.

"Well what's yours?" Morgan snapped a little too defensively.

James smiled, chuckling slightly. "I know better than to mess with a Janeway."

"Yeah right," Morgan groaned, but her eyes were amused. "Tani and I pretended to fight all the time. I had to hold back, plan my moves and yet still, sometimes I hurt her. I'd apologise, she was fine with it. She must've been, we were best friends. I know you'd be able to defend against me better than her, but I felt bad about thinking about doing it. Why?"

James' smile fell and was replaced by a light frown. "Maybe because you don't need to anymore?"

"I guess so," Morgan mumbled.

Elsewhere the Watcher had finished tearing his hair out over the cat fighters, and moved on to the last pair of trainees sitting on the ground. He was already annoyed before he noticed he didn't recognise one of them.

"Jessie, wasn't it?" the Watcher sighed.

Jessie barely flickered her eyes up at him for a second. "I'm waiting for Janeway to come back."

Her answer calmed the Watcher down somewhat. "Ah yes, I wonder..." He looked around and quickly spotted Kathryn dragging Tom away from the crew waiting further down the tunnel. "Then perhaps you'd like to train with me."

Jessie smirked, "perhaps you wouldn't." Before Watcher could respond, she turned her attention back to the unfamiliar to him man she was sitting with. "It's complicated okay, especially after last time."

"I think we both know that's not true," Andrew said with a pleasant smile.

"I sense you're a little distracted," Watcher said a little too cheerfully.

Jessie glowered up at him, "well I'm trying to be, but you're not helping any."

Watcher was confused. Andrew though found it funny and laughed discreetly with his chin down. "I'm not here," Andrew said, "when Janeway comes back, I'm gone. Just give us a minute."

"Fine," Watcher said but remained where he was. Jessie and Andrew stared at him expectantly. "If it helps you to concentrate on the Game, I can help."

"I'm not sure some strange watcher guy would be any use," Jessie said with a touch of ice.

Andrew laughed this time nervously, "it's okay, I can advise with a crowd. I think the problem here is you don't have the space..."

Jessie scoffed and eyed Watcher, "no kidding."

"You need that and time in order to heal," Andrew continued without missing a beat. "Then it won't seem like such a mammoth task to..." His eyes flickered up at the nosey Watcher. "Move away from the problem at hand," he badly improvised.

"Maybe I don't want to... *move away*, because my earlier doing that is creating another problem," Jessie said.

Andrew frowned, "and what's that?" Jessie tried to gesture using her head toward Morgan and James without the Watcher catching on. It didn't work, he looked in that general direction. "Forget it. In another unrelated topic, don't you hate it when something you're attached to stops working, so you decide you *must* get a younger model?"

"Huh?" Andrew looked baffled.

Jessie groaned and shook her head, "oh forget it." She noticed the Watcher turn his head back toward her with a curious glint in his eye. It gave her the creeps, which she tried not to show. Andrew tried to follow her earlier glance again.

"You're not talking about going clothes shopping again, are you?" Andrew whined.

"No, what?" Jessie stuttered impatiently. "I said forget it!"

"Hmm," Watcher said with the slightest of smug smiles. "It's time. The Game is being compiled close by. Come everyone!" he barked toward the rest of the trainees.

They followed him back towards the Voyager crew, all while tapping on a little device with a screen in the palm of his hand. Morgan watched him with a suspicious eye.

"You're not coming with us are you?" she asked.

Watcher smiled without looking up from his device. "I must return, and I'm afraid where you're going is the wrong direction."

Kathryn scanned around the open area they all stood in, looking for any signs of change. "So now what?"

"Just wait Captain," the Watcher said, gesturing his thumb over his head. Many looked, expecting more of the same blues and red energy swirls. Instead the colours had seemingly merged, creating a bright purple.

Morgan looked up as well, tensing slightly. "Any last advice?" she asked.

The Watcher gave her a warm smile. "Don't die."

"Wow, I think you've won the Game for us," Morgan muttered.

Several crewmembers noticed the ceiling above them was churning, moving rapidly down toward them.

"Don't!" Tani quickly shouted to the antsy crowd. "This is the way out."

The Watcher stepped backwards. Moments later a purple wall slammed down in between him and the crew. He nodded as if he expected it.

For the Voyager crew, the purple flash of light that brought them there enveloped them. They once more found they were in a large, baron room, a little different to the earlier one. A computer was already loaded at the far edge, with what looked like a rectangular transporter pad beside it.

*"Game loaded. The Hunt; 10 on 20 match, no time limit. One side must totally eliminate the other team to win. Players participating, report to the Games Console to get access to the arena and the weaponry."*

Morgan headed over to the computer first, James followed before everyone else from the training did. "Okeydoke," Morgan sighed while looking over the only working panel. It brought up ten boxes with images. "Easy, select your weapon and step onto the platform."

She was about to press one of the boxes when James spoke up, "wait. It said ten. We need to figure out who's going in."

"Well, me for one," Morgan shrugged and tapped the option anyway. "See you on the inside."

"Morgan," Kathryn stalled her before she could walk away, "be careful."

"I will," Morgan smiled at her. She stepped onto the platform. A light flickered over her, then she was transported away.

James looked over the choice of weapons with a not so impressed look on his face. Kathryn walked up to stand next to him, but facing the opposite way towards the team. "We need eight. I won't order anyone. I will however..." she said.

Annika groaned, "I see where this is going. I'll go in after the serial killer picks the *best* weapon."

"Oh I was going to only make suggestions based on what I know of you all, but thanks Annika, what a sport," Kathryn snickered.

Annika growled in response. She hovered far too closely around James. The proximity made him shudder and pick whatever was closest to his finger. Off he went to the platform. Annika selected her choice and followed after he transported.

James materialised beside Morgan, sat on a tree stump with an axe across her lap. He had a quick look around at the grassy field filled with trees nearby. To his right were a few hills behind the trees, one that looked more like a mountain. A dilapidated building stood at the edge of the field they were in.

Morgan smirked at him, "couldn't decide?"

"Yeah well, all the good ones I thought the others should have," James sighed, disappointed.

Morgan pulled a face, "ugh, you didn't pick the itty knife did you?"

James answered by raising the curved knife with teeth he'd picked. "You say that like I grabbed a butter knife or something." Morgan's eyes lit up at the sight of it.

Annika arrived next. Quickly following her was Emma, Sid and Lee.

"Well, at least we have the distraction fodder," Morgan said in Annika, then Sid's direction. The latter grinned, Annika of course scowled at her. "That's six. Four more."

Tani appeared to Morgan's surprise and relief. "Oh good, what did you pick?" she asked.

Tani shimmied the long weapon behind her back and turned to avoid eye contact with her. Morgan flinched and bit her bottom lip.

Two unknowns appeared next. Annika was relieved at that, hoping that because the nameless ones usually die first, she could be spared. They meanwhile were thinking the same thing, fancying their chances with her there.

The last to appear was Jessie, who didn't look happy to be lumbered with what looked like a bow with a quiver of arrows. "I take it we can't swap?" she asked in Morgan's direction.

Morgan looked down at her axe and up again, "no, sorry."

*"AI entering the battlefield,"* a female computer voice boomed all around them. A few of the team spotted figures rematerialising like they did at the opposite end of the field. *"The Hunt will commence in one Earth minute."*

An extra eager Sid scuttled forward, only to bump into nothing. He was about to do it again when James grabbed his arm to stop him.

"That's the ticket," Sid laughed it off. James let go as if he had accidentally touched Annika's dirty catsuit.

"Oh..." Morgan slowly groaned as she pressed her hand against what felt like glass, "this is new."

Most but Tani looked at her, she grimaced. "Er, what is? You said it was a hunt," Lee said.

Morgan pulled more than a few unsure faces. "Yeah, where you hunt things. The clue's in the name. They usually split us up at random, not chuck is in the same spot to brawl to the death." The computer started to countdown.

James glanced across at the woods, then around at the others. "We can still split up. I'll cover."

Morgan nodded, "me too."

Jessie frowned. "I'm not so sure. When has splitting up ever worked?"

*"Three."*

Emma giggled, "many times, at least for me." The couple of unknowns widened their eyes.

*"Two."*

"Okay, get ready to run," Morgan said.

*"One."*

As soon as a loud buzzer went off Sid took off first, straight ahead at full sprint. James and Morgan groaned and followed. The rest of the group spread out and darted for either the woods or towards the hills. The twenty AI did the same, only the ones remaining behind were of a much greater number. Morgan detoured slightly to follow the ones going into the woods.

James meanwhile caught up to Sid, more than a bit too late, to find him impaled through an AI's spear with a grin on his face. The AI holding it looked extremely wiggled out. They spotted James and ran off without it. The weapon fizzled away into nothing, while their hands shimmered at the same time. He had no time to wonder about it.

*"Player defeated. Nine remain."*

The voice almost drowned out the sound of an incoming whistling sound. James ducked an arrow hurtling toward him, though he had no idea what it was until he spotted the shooter about to reload.

A loud bang echoing through the trees startled Morgan into skidding to a halt. She looked up as a couple more rang out.

*"Player defeated. Eight remain."*

Some rustling in the trees and a shadow blurring from one branch to the next got her moving again. Another bang rang out, this one much louder, and the ground seemed to blow up in front of her. She abruptly turned to avoid the debris of dry soil, rocks and branches, only to be set upon by an AI jumping out from behind one of the trees.

*"AI defeated. Nineteen remain."*

Morgan grabbed the knife heading for her shoulder, managing to twist it so far around they had to let go of it. At the same time she clobbered her attacker in the knee. Once he or she was down, her axe soon followed.

*"AI defeated. Eighteen remain."*

The same knife materialised in her axe hand, seemingly replacing it. "Oh I see. No, rather have the axe," she mumbled. As if her words were a command, the axe reappeared in the knife's place. She ran off before the person in the trees attacked again.

Elsewhere in the woods, six of the AI surrounded three members of Voyager's team, one of which was a nameless red shirt. It looked to be bleak until one of the AI closest to one of the players made the mistake of getting too close. Next thing they knew, they were being chased through the trees by a laughing Emma brandishing what looked like a regular knife.

Some of the AI were a little confused as to what happened. Lee took advantage of that and swung the slim, long sword he picked at his nearest, knocking their spear to the ground.

The unknown whimpered with the sight of four remaining AI and a no Annika around to get attacked first. There were two far enough away for her to shoot with her crossbow before they got to her. She fired, missing them completely and ran off into the bushes.

Lee meanwhile managed to stab the spear wielder. He didn't look pleased when some blood splattered across his shirt. "Oh, that was my favourite."

*"AI defeated. Seventeen remain."*

He heard a horrible scream and so he whirled around. There was no sign of the unknown or Emma, but he could hear the latter laughing. Then he noticed one of the AI pointing an old fashioned phaser at him. There was a loud bang before he fell to the ground.

*"Player defeated. Seven remain."*

Emma heard it even from how far away she was, she looked around concerned.

*"AI defeated. Sixteen remain."*

"Aaaw," she moaned. She got up making a huffing sound, then kicked the body at her feet. They made a little ow grunt, so quiet it could've easily been missed. Her eyes widened, a smile slowly spread again. "Oh you little faker. I thought that was you."

"No," the AI whimpered.

Emma pressed a button on the handle of the knife. Another blade shot out the opposite side. "Yes." She dropped down to continue what she had been doing before she was rudely interrupted.

*"AI defeated. Fifteen remain."*

Trees rustling, approaching footsteps and haggard breathing got her attention. Emma headed in that direction. When the sound was almost on top of her, she ducked behind a tree.

Another AI that didn't seem to be armed at first glance, ran by her. They stopped for a moment to catch their breath. "No way am I fighting that," he wheezed.

They continued on towards another tree a few metres away, Emma assumed to hide until someone else came along. She peered around hers to have a good, sneaky look at him. He seemed to be doing the same, not in her direction. His hand rested on the tree, stretched and calling to her. She smiled and tossed the two sided knife towards it.

His screams were heard at the other side of the arena.

*"AI defeated. Fourteen remain."*

James reached the base of one of the hills when he heard that. He noticed a cave entrance nearby, so decided to step out of sight of it, all while smiling a little. "Looks like Emma and Morgan's been busy."

"Pfft, Morgan's good but she's not an ass kicking killer," a voice above him bellowed. Even though the voice was familiar, James still was on his guard. He checked to see if anyone was lurking behind him, before sidestepping closer to the hill side. Then he could see her, perched on a ledge with her legs curled beneath her. "Not like you, my Slayer hiding in plain sight," Tani said, surprisingly cold and with no expression on her face.

James sighed, annoyed as he did another scan around to make sure they were safe. "Well if you want to check out the very obvious cave, go ahead."

Tani laughed a little bitterly. "Oh you know that's not what I meant." His frown told her otherwise, so she rolled her eyes. "I knew there was something special about you. Suddenly it all makes sense."

A slight scraping sound caught James' attention, he looked around behind him. "Speak for yourself," he quietly said, turning the rest of him to walk over.

"Hmph, I thought you would've killed more by now. Looks like we both went the wrong way," Tani sighed.

James noticed some movement much further up than her. The knife he originally had phased away, replaced by a bow which he quickly pointed. The figure up above noticed and dove out of the way before the arrow got there, cracking the rock face that had been behind him or her. James sighed irritably as he reloaded the weapon. "These things, too slow," he muttered, running off.

Tani's interest was sparked, she scrambled up to try and follow him. "When did you get the bow?" she asked.

James looked around, following the foot of the hill, for a not exposed spot that would allow any shot he made to reach the AI climbing and jumping between ledges. The closest he could find he'd have to climb a few metres. With a few under the breath mutters, the bow was swapped for the knife so he could put it out of harms way.

*"AI defeated. Thirteen remain."*

Once he got to the spot he wanted, he re-aimed the summoned bow at the AI trying to power walk up a steep, muddy slope.

*"End of Round One."*

Both Tani and James were startled by the louder, booming male voice. Unfortunately that cost James another shot. The mud at the AI's feet turned into a mini avalanche, bringing them down a few feet with it. James though ground his teeth while swapping the bow out for good, opting to instead climb after the AI. With his back turned, he missed the holographic scoreboard materialise in the sky.

Tani noticed it as names and their score started to fill it. The first name she was familiar with made her do a double take. "Third, Annika, fifteen points? Is this ranking the deaths count?" She laughed, then shook it off since Annika would win that, no trouble. Then she saw Emma in fourth, she nodded.

It put her off a lot as more and more names she didn't recognise filled the board, until one she did appeared on it, joint ninth with two AI. "James, seven points. I don't ge..." She stopped when she heard small stones rolling down the slope near her.

*"AI defeated. Twelve remain."*

Tani cringed, then glanced up to retrace its path. As she thought, someone was in the same spot James fired at the first time, crouching behind a rock having a good look around. Tani quickly stepped backwards into the hill face so she wouldn't be seen. "This is gonna be easy," she giggled. "Though if Annika can score kills, it's gotta be."

A loud popping sound put Jessie off from trying to escape the overgrowth, and into what looked like daylight.

*"Player defeated. Six remain."*

She kept going with a worried look on her face, until she reached a different clearing covered in flowers. "Oh," she said with disinterest.

Jessie headed back, leaving Annika behind with a new bullet wound in the forehead in amongst the thorny roses. Even the wasp like creatures and flies were giving her a wide berth.

"Hmm, I wonder who the four dead are," Tani mumbled as she struggled to climb up the rocky steep path with a spear in tow. Occasionally she glanced up to check if her target was still in their hiding spot.

"Probably the pain loving weirdo and those other two..." Her voice turned a little bitter, "it won't be Morgan." She shook it off, "it better not be anyway." She reached the ledge she was aiming for, a one with a perfect side shot of the AI behind their rock.

"I'll show you," Tani sneered, aiming the spear. She was about to throw when her eye fell on the bow in the AI's arms. That made her hesitate. If she missed, she'd likely be spotted.

A male voice yelled from far above. Tani and the bow-woman looked around and up the cliff face, missing a man falling over the side to his death. Tani did notice the blur in her peripheral and heard his brief yelp, her head darted down to check it wasn't one of her own.

*"AI defeated. Eleven remain."*

Tani sighed in relief and turned quickly before the other AI spotted her. They seemingly hadn't, the AI had aimed their bow up at the cliff side. Tani panicked and tossed her spear in their direction. At the same time the AI noticed her and quickly re-aimed. The spear smashed into the already fragile, cracked hillside before the AI released their finger. Next thing they knew they were hurtling themselves over the ledge to get away from the boulders about to land on their head.

"Huh, good enough," Tani said with a shrug. The spear rematerialised in her hand. She then waited for the confirmation, watching for any signs of life. The computer didn't say anything. Just in case she started to climb down on the safer side.

The noise near the bottom from the rocks smashing into the ground made her ears ring. She dropped down at the cave entrance, unaware she was being watched from inside.

Tani gingerly approached the landslide with her spear ready to throw. The cave dweller charged out of the cave, brandishing a knife.

She only noticed when their shadow cast over her. The computer's muffled voice called out, *"AI defeated. Ten remain,"* as she turned to face her attacker.

Three quarters of the way up the hill, James had quickened his downward pace, opting to jump down some of the ledges. He knew there was no way he could get to them in time, so stopped and reluctantly aimed the bow. Tani was already down by the time he was ready to fire.

*"Player defeated. Five remain."*

The AI seemed to hear or sense him. They bolted towards the woods. James changed his aim and fired. The arrow struck him or her in the leg, slowing them down significantly. He continued his rush down the hill to go after them.

The same announcement echoed around the dilapidated maze like halls. Morgan huffed, regretting following a terrified AI armed only with knuckle dusters into the supposed tiny looking cottage. She silently wondered who was left as she tried one of the many doors.

To her relief that one lead into a room with stairs. It didn't last. Something sharp and metallic flew toward her. She ducked down, then heard a crunch of metal going through wood.

Quickly she armed herself with the knife, and threw it in the same direction. There was a scream, then a few thuds as a woman rolled down the stairs.

Morgan's knife reappeared in her hand while she frowned up at the stairs, the top coated in darkness.

*"AI defeated. Nine remain."*

"Half way there," Morgan mumbled as she headed upstairs.

Unknown to Morgan, she wasn't the only player who'd fallen for the small cottage ruse. Jessie hurried inside in the middle of a sneezing fit, her nose beet red and her eyes watering.

"Does it have to be that realistic?" she growled while swiping off some pollen from her shoulder.

At first the house looked normal. It was just a small room that greeted her. She cautiously headed for the door to the right and immediately ended up in the maze without realising. At least not until she'd walked down a ten metre long corridor.

She turned back and went through the same door she entered, only she didn't end up where she started.

"What the..." Jessie grumbled as she peered around the small corner room with some narrow stairs. She turned around to go back.

The door she came through swung open, forcing her to stumble back to avoid getting smashed in the face. She continued to back off when she noticed what, or who had opened the door; two AI, one armed with a dual knife like Emma's and a deadly looking axe.

"Oh sho..." Jessie stammered, stepping backwards onto the stairs, all while reaching for the quiver bag on her back. One charged for her, so she quickly fired in his general direction. He fell, temporarily getting in the other's way.

*"AI defeated. Eight remain."*

Jessie took the opportunity to leg it up the stairs. Almost at the top, the remaining AI tossed the knife up at her. She turned to go around into a corridor almost in time, instead it swiped by her arm.

The first door she came to she nearly ran into, thought better of it and ran to go through the next one. She ended up in a large, dreary room filled with sheet covered furniture. One door on each side of her,

both identical. It seemed obvious that the one on her right would lead her back where she came, if the cottage was normal anyway. Since it clearly wasn't, she ran for it.

Carefully she opened the door, only for a hand to emerge from behind a covered bookshelf beside her, and grab her by the chin, covering her mouth tightly. The figure emerged, bringing a curved, slender sword up to her neck and chest.

Loud hurried footsteps and many loud clatters briefly got the AI's attention. He then pushed her into the room she was going toward anyway, then to the side behind the wall separating them.

*"AI defeated. Seven remain."*

Jessie heard another door creak open. Her hostage taker tightened his grip.

"If your team mate tries anything, I'll kill you," the AI hissed.

Jessie rolled her eyes and tried to shake her head, instead she had to settle for imagining it.

A many number of footsteps hurried into the neighbouring room. The pair heard nervous whispering, as well as the door closing gently. The AI she was stuck with smiled deviously before charging out, dragging her with him. The sword once again pushed against her neck and shoulders.

"Stop or she dies!" he roared in someone's face. They instinctively stepped back, then aimed a spear back at him.

"Um," someone pressed against the door sniggered nervously.

The two laughed it off, the spear was lowered. "Phew, I thought we were in huge trouble there," she said.

"There's three of you, why are you all in such a state? It's only a rank seven." the hostage taker asked them, his tone sounded accusing when he noticed the third person in the room. The same AI that had killed Tani, sporting a smug expression while juggling between his trio of weapons. "Your eleven should be able to squash it."

The guy at the door made a brief, disbelieving, "ha," sound whilst widening his eyes.

"Try adding three to that," the spear user said. The hostage taker scowled, he seemed a little offended.

"There's four of us now. That should also overwhelm the odds," the smug AI said while gesturing their dual knife in Jessie's direction. Despite their words they trembled long before Jessie stared coldly at them.

The hostage taker sneered toward her. "They're right. Maybe I won't need you after a..."

A loud thud and a frightened yelp cut him off. His attention bolted toward the first door, which had been torn off his hinges, taking some of the frame and wall with it. The door itself fallen on top of the guy previously holding it closed. The other two scrambled to the far opposite side of the room. The woman didn't stop there, she kept going past Jessie and into the room behind them.

James stepped inside, slowly, right onto the fallen door. A timid and muffled ow immediately leaked out from under it. Jessie had to laugh as James frowned down near his feet.

The hostage taker fumbled a bit before re-threatening. Jessie noticed he was trembling, allowing her to shimmy a bit out of his grip, not enough for him to notice. "St... stop dies or she... I mean..." He looked mad at his last remaining teammate. "What are you waiting for rank eleven?"

The smug aura started to lift, blown away by a gust of fear. They limped backwards, grimacing. The first AI noticed the stab wound in his leg. "Mmm well, he already has the weapons I do so... no benefit for me, and..." He turned and tried to flee through the last remaining closed door.

He'd barely grasped the handle when the wall beside it seemed to explode inwardly, sending a wave of dust and bricks toward everyone else. James side stepped a smidgen while covering his face. The hostage taker backed off a bit with Jessie, she meanwhile closed her eyes and summoned an axe from behind her back.

Morgan stumbled through the haze, coughing. She tried to look around, then back at the hole, her face growing slightly more irritated. "Aaw man, it even happens through the walls."

Jessie elbowed the confused and worried AI in the ribs, which loosened his grip and allowed her to swing around to push a fist up into his chin. Down he went.

"Okay," James said lightly with a smile and a shrug. He quickly leapt down to confront the only one he assumed was left, since Morgan was too busy patting her dusty arms down and coughing.

Tani's killer meanwhile lunged for Morgan with no hesitation but she started to walk forward so he missed entirely. Instead he stumbled almost into James, who only then recognised him.

The AI on the ground crawled out painfully to get to the only open door that wasn't on the floor. They had to divert around Jessie and the AI crossing weapons while he was on the ground. Doing so caught Morgan's attention.

"Oh, those are some nice punching thingies," she said as if she were reading a menu.

The AI glanced down at their metal claws on their fists, whimpered, and continued at a faster pace into the room.

"Hey, two for one!" Morgan sounded ecstatic as soon as she disappeared out of sight of the others.

*"AI defeated. Six remain."*

Tani's killer ended up with a knife to the gut, then tossed aside like a rag doll. "Hmm, fair's fair," James said, swapping the knife for a crossbow. He didn't like the look of it and instantly thought about summoning the first bow he got.

*"AI defeated. Five remain."*

*"End of Round Two."*

The loud voice startled Jessie for a brief moment. The AI kicked her aside. On a nearby intact wall the holographic scoreboard reappeared. Jessie quickly changed her weapon to the bow.

"Oh no fair!" Morgan cried from the other room. "No, stay still! I'm not losing to James."

*"AI defeated. Four remain."*

Jessie quickly aimed while trying not to laugh. She released the arrow as the AI scrambled to their feet. It shot straight through his stomach. Only a second later another arrow punctured his chest from a different direction.

*"AI defeated. Three remain."*

Jessie sighed in relief, then smiled. "Was that mine or yours?" She noticed a hand extend out for her.

"Yours," James replied.

It was instinct to reach for his hand, but Jessie thought to stop part way. She shook her head, "I'm okay," then she stood up on her own.

Morgan stomped into the room, breaking any awkwardness in the air. "Why the hell am I still third?"

"Does it matter?" Jessie groaned.

"Well, maybe?" Morgan snapped defensively, "there's a score and it makes no sense. Come on, let's go find the last chumps. This game is far too easy." She walked back the way she came, through the hole in the wall.

"Easy? I nearly had my throat cut," Jessie muttered.

"Oh come on, three more and we've won!" Morgan yelled from the next room. Jessie and James had no choice but to follow her.

Even though she was faced by three of them, Emma still had a smile on her face. They converged slowly to intimidate her but it did the opposite, she started dipping between them. The one she landed on assumed a guard stance.

"No, guns are lame. Do you have a flamethrower, chainsaw?" Emma asked. She didn't give him time to answer before she was dipping between the other two.

The gun toting AI glanced at the one armed with a massive sword that needed to be held with two hands, both were confused. The third grew impatient and ran to confront her, swinging a similar sword.

"Hey, I wasn't done!" Emma scolded him. Then she smiled and shrugged, "but okay, I like swords." She extended her blade and ducked the first clunky attack.

Morgan, James and Jessie heard the commotion after they left the so called cottage. Morgan took off first, back into the woods to Jessie's relief. She had to suffer one last sneeze on the way after her.

They arrived at a small stream as a gun shot rang out. James stalled for a second, looking more than a little shocked. Jessie stopped and glanced back to check on him.

*"Player defeated. Four remain."*

"It's probably an unknown. Who else could be left? Tani?" Jessie said with a wavering voice.

James shook his head, "it's not her."

The pair continued on, following the stream to a small lake. It didn't take them long to re-find Morgan, charging toward the three AI.

"So what do you think, was the death lame enough for her?" the sword user AI sneered. The other two laughed with him until he grunted and inadvertently spat blood in their faces. As soon as he dropped they saw an axe shimmer out of his back and appear back into the approaching Morgan's hands.

*"AI defeated. Two remain."*

They brandished their weapons, ready to attack her until they noticed James and Jessie enter the scene as well. Both tensed while eyeing up their last opponents. They each lingered on Jessie the longest at different times.

Unaware of that Morgan switched to her newest sword, only she didn't need to use both hands to wield it. "Which one of you wants to die next?"

"Her," the third AI armed with the same, eyeing Jessie.

"Oh sure, pick on the poor sod stuck in unlucky seventh," she tutted.

James scoffed, "oh I see, is that how it goes?" The same AI scowled at him. "Well you're going to have to fight us eventually if you want to win. Why put us off till last?"

Morgan passed him a brief frown. "Bored," she groaned immediately before swinging her sword at the one with the gun. They tried to shoot her, all they got instead was their weapon smashed to pixelated bits and a broken arm.

The last AI switched to a spear in a flash, they started twirling it around effortlessly on approach. Jessie brought out the bow and stepped back, while James remained armed with a knife. The AI finally stopped messing around and thrust the spear forward, only for it to be grabbed by the tip. "What?" he grunted.

James' other hand grabbed the centre and tightened his grip. The spear broke apart like the gun did.

This AI was quicker on his feet than his teammate and instantly summoned a gun. That arm veered off to point toward Jessie. She already had an arrow loaded, following him, so she fired. The arrow flew straight through his gun arm.

Morgan tossed hers to the ground, back first. Her sword soon followed, impaling her opponent in the soil.

While the computer voice announced, *"AI defeated. One remains,"* James back handed the final one hard enough to make a bone crunching sound. They hit the ground seconds later.

*"Game Over."*

Morgan noticed something light up in the corner of her eye. She turned around just in time to see the final scoreboard. "Yes!" The purple light engulfed them all before anyone else saw it.

Everyone appeared where they were originally on Voyager before anything happened.

"In..." Morgan snickered while twirling back around to point at James, "your face." James only smirked in response.

"That was so cool, can we do it again some time?" Emma giggled.

"No way," everyone on the Bridge said in unison.

Morgan approached the helm and leaned on the back of the seat there, still with a grin on her face. "Hey Tani, you okay?"

Tani didn't even flicker her eyes up at her. She got up and sharply headed for the turbolift, leaving Morgan with a slack jaw.

"So um, four of us were left. I saw Emma, Lee and Tani lose," Lilly mused aloud. "Annika and Sid will have popped it, obviously. So, who was the fourth to survive?"

Everyone heard a cough from the back of the bridge, so they looked to see a very meek, nervous crewman shuffle into a different turbolift.

"No way," Craig stammered.

**THE END**