

Episode 3.14

Two Far

The air was extremely awkward. Craig felt it the most since all but one were pointing their glances toward him.

Annika giggled, breaking the ice. "Oh I love it when he talks like that."

Damien looked back at her in disgust.

"Oh we're not cancelled yet?" Craig said, a little confused. "Good, what kind of idiot stops a series on a to be continued?"

"Craig this is no time for fourth wall jokes," Lena sighed.

Craig cleared his throat, hoping it would dispel the embarrassment. "Okay since this is the other cliffhanger, the hunt bit threw me off, I get to make the speech. Okay, here goes..."

"What makes you think you're important enough to make the hero speech? You're not even close. Out of the lot of us you're last," Harry asked angrily. Yasmin perked up. "Second last."

"Nuh uh, you've never been important in anything. The last time you were a main you had to share it, with me," Craig countered.

"Still more of a one than you!" Harry snapped. He and Craig started pushing and shoving each other.

Damien sighed impatiently. "Would you hurry up, I haven't got all day you know."

"We're not here to entertain you, you overcompensating prick. Your new army isn't going to be much use when you're blown out of the sky," Jessie said.

The awkwardness returned. This time Jessie and James had no idea why. Damien found it amusing though. "Oh to be a fly on that wall when you tell them," he sniggered.

"Why? You'll only get swatted," Lena grumbled.

Damien cackled, though most of the room could tell he was covering his nerves. "Toodleloo." The screen faded away.

"Tell us what?" James asked.

Harry and Craig abruptly stopped mid scrap, eyes widening. Quickly they stepped sideways a few times to get further away from him.

Damien walked to the centre of his bridge, placing his hands on his hips. He slowly turned his head toward the tactical station, hoping it would look dramatic or cool. "Fire when ready."

Annika giggled obnoxiously, "ready!"

Damien was momentarily put off. "It's recharged already?"

Annika didn't notice or care, her finger held down the fire command.

The Pegasus fired phasers toward the large circular shaped building at the centre of the city. At the last second shields sprang up to defend them.

Inside the entire room shook violently, a few consoles exploded.

"Our shields aren't built for this. Your weapons are too advanced," Turanga said.

Lena hurried over to him and his assistants. "Can I look at the shield frequencies? Maybe..."

"Sir, the ship seems to be building up power, most likely to fire that portal beam again. The weapons fire is slowing them down somewhat," Slax said.

James hurried down the steps to join them, "I brought their shields down. This should be easy. One hit should do the trick."

The rest of the awayteam, minus Jessie, all looked very uncomfortable again. Jessie noticed it first since she had a better view of them on the upper level. "Oh for god's sake, tell us what happened."

"I doubt Damien told you. Voyager and the Enterprise are gone," Tani reluctantly said.

"Gone? What do you mean by gone?" James asked.

The whole room shook again, more consoles exploded.

"Shields are down!" Hach shouted in panic.

Lena shook her head, "the so called portal closer opened the portal early. With no Game around it sucked anything in the air into it."

James and Jessie looked on blankly, unsure what to make of it all. James reacted first, muttering in anger as he turned and walked away from everyone.

Jessie tried to hold off her own for the moment. "Damien wanted the frequency for lost Games to finish it. In theory they'll have survived then, right?"

Lena's eyes glazed over as Jessie's information made her mind race.

"Doesn't matter anyway. We're dead if we don't stop the Pegasus," Harry said. "Turanga, if their shields are still down those weapons of yours..."

"We've tried. They barely made a dent," Turanga said. Hach nodded fearfully.

"They're no longer charging energy, they must be ready to fire the portal weapon," Slax said.

The Pegasus:

Damien glared at the ex drone gleefully tapping away at Tactical. "What are you doing?"

"Getting revenge on the people who wronged me... us," Annika replied as if it were obvious.

Damien quickly glanced at opps, something there flipped his panic button. He hurried over to her, "there's plenty of time for that you bimbo. I need that portal closed."

"Why? Wouldn't you want more of those cute little eggies to control?" Annika said.

Damien began to shake in anger, "they'll cotton on to it eventually. I don't want an onslaught of lost Games or Voyager and Enterprise coming back to spoil my fun!"

"Hmph! I joined you because you promised me that I could kill that wretched Lena for stealing my place. I don't want to let some stupid Soft do it for me," Annika grumbled.

"No!" Damien snarled as he ran over to her.

He didn't make it in time, Annika changed her tactics and armed the portal device while grumbling, "to hell with it."

"Incoming," Hach warned the room.

Almost everyone held onto something and or internally braced themselves, expecting the worst. Only they felt a much smaller tremor than the previous hits.

"We're still alive?" Craig shouted in surprise.

"Apparently we have been saved," Harry gasped, gesturing his hands into the air.

Lena stared at them both in utter contempt. She was too far away to do anything about it though. Jessie though, what with being on the higher level was able to reach down and give them both a slap.

"Enough with the copycat ReBoot lines!" she snapped at them.

"Yeah, I mean it doesn't work. We need the annoying hyperactive boy and the girl that fancies him," Yasmin said.

Right on cue Duncan and Kirsty came into the room. "Hi mum, hi dad!" Duncan giggled.

James and Jessie glanced at each other looking rather worried. "I don't know what to be more worried about. Them being here, or them coming in after Yasmin said that," Jessie said.

"Ooh lovebirds," Tani sniggered.

Duncan and Kirsty glanced at each other with rather disgusted looks on their faces. "Eew!" they both groaned.

"Duncan, what are you two doing here?" James asked.

"We sneaked down. Jones was doing a lecture on biology again and Kirsty's mum walked in and deactivated him so she could take over," Duncan replied.

Jessie's face turned deathly pale, "ohno."

"What? Dad told me to do it if it happened again, I didn't do anything wrong," Duncan pouted.

Jessie frowned and glanced towards James. "Again?" she stuttered fearfully.

He lightly shrugged, "It's okay, she barely got to the bees."

"Bees?" Craig said, confused. Realisation quickly hit him, "oh Danny. Teaching biology to toddlers. Scary thought."

"Erm, can I ask now? What stopped the beam?" Harry asked, looking rather annoyed as he rubbed his sore face.

Lena moved away from the station Hach and Turanga were at. "Jessie mentioned the lost Game frequency. Figured I'd boost the shields with that. I dunno if it'll help with the weapons fire, or hold for very long."

"They'll be able to recharge the portal opener in five minutes, give or take a few phaser shots," Slax said.

"Seems like we need to take the fight back to the Pegasus. We can't keep defending his attacks," James said.

"I dunno, when Jessie did that the last time it wasn't pretty," Harry said.

"And?" James asked with a straight face.

Jessie laughed a little awkwardly, "it's your turn anyway."

Lena sighed while walking over to her brother, her eye firmly fixed on him. "I'll go instead of her. Just in case." James merely shrugged. "Their shields are still down. Looks like Damien or the bimbo haven't noticed that yet. We can grab any craft and force the shuttlebay doors open."

"Right," James nodded.

They were about to leave when the klaxon alarm rang out from Slax's station. He looked nervous. "The portal's fluctuating, energy levels are rising."

Turanga quickly drove his chair over to him. "A Game's imminent. Though, with the Pegasus messing around with it, we still can't be fully sure."

"You mean the Game that Damien told us was always five, ten minutes away, is actually coming? A stopped clock can be right twice, I guess," Harry said. "We'd better hope it's just a side effect."

James smiled and nodded at Lena before walking back out of the command room. She frowned and hurried after him.

"Why? If they survived entry, Voyager and Enterprise may be able to ride it back into town," Jessie said.

"I saw the specs for Damien's weapon, it is really capable of closing the portal. That's probably what he's doing," Harry said.

"You happened to miss the opening part and damage causing elements," Jessie reminded him.

"Damien's not gonna want to cut off his supply of Softmicron though, he wouldn't. He's too power hungry for that," Craig said.

The Pegasus:

"Hehehehe, so long freaks! You'll never bully me again!" Annika laughed evilly.

"No, why won't you listen to me? If we don't close the portal now they'll come back and this will all be for nothing!" Damien snapped.

"Screw you Damien, I only joined to kill off my past crew mates," Annika grumbled.

She got ready to press the fire button but Damien jumped on her. They both started catfighting, slapping each others hands and pulling hair. Damien decided to cheat since he was losing, he elbowed her in the sore boob she fell on earlier and once she was stumbling away he tapped on the station.

"Ah ha, bye bye Barbie!" Damien laughed. He pressed one more button and Annika beamed away.

She rematerialised about thirty metres from the ground next to the skyscraper the Pegasus had sat on. "Damn you Damien!" Gravity finally kicked in and she fell. Annika landed on the pavement, leaving a huge Annika shaped hole there. She climbed out of it.

"*Warning Incoming Game! Warning Incoming Game!*" the computerised voice echoed from the skies.

Annika looked up, the Game Cube emerged directly above her. "Oh crap!" She climbed out of the hole as quickly as she could but she just fell back in. The Cube quickly began its descent out of the clouds.

Damien was a little annoyed since he lost his chance, but he told himself he'll do it on the next one. For now he could sit back and watch an injured Annika try badly to escape the Game's path. He got ready to sit down and eat some popcorn when he noticed something off about his ship's status. All colour drained from his face.

"What the... who did this!?" he roared at it, but he knew exactly who was responsible. He glowered at no one. "Slayer!" The camera zoomed in and knocked him straight out.

Meanwhile the Pegasus hovered only a few feet off the roof of the skyscraper. The cube continued to tumble down towards it. It barely scraped the rim of the saucer and the resulting explosion still sent the ship hurtling away towards the ground, doing somersaults as it did.

It eventually smashed into a large rundown building, fortunately with all of its lights off, which for some reason inspired most of the people nearby to cheer as it was reduced to fire and rubble.

One man though dropped to his knees and screamed, "nooooooooooooooo! The liWad 7 was due out tomorrow!"

He continued to sob as several people ran in to loot the still burning building. The deflector dish chose that moment to drop off the hull and squish the bricked sign that read *CR.Ap=ple Version 2S: we're back, samer and more expensive than ever!*

A short distance away Lena and James had witnessed the whole thing. Lena's face was frozen in the middle of a part cringe, part confused expression. James meanwhile shook his head, "of course, we've gone backwards. Any excuse for Apple jokes."

"Huh?" Lena could only say.

"Now we know what happens to a ship not on the ground during a Game landing," James said with the tiniest hint of a smirk.

"Yeah, at least that's one less problem to worry about," Lena said. Some movement ahead caught her eye, she looked ahead to see what it was. Worry spread across her face. "Er James," she said, running off without him.

James tried to see what she was talking about. It was only when the Game was three floors from the ground, and so its light had lit up the streets below it, he spotted two blonde toddlers heading straight into its path.

"You've got to be kidding me," he grumbled before running off after them.

Lena wasn't far away from the children when the girl tripped over her own feet and fell forward. She looked up to see how far the Game was, she figured the girl would miss it if she didn't get back up. "I'll get him, you grab Kirsty and get her outta its way!" Lena shouted back.

"No way I'm leaving you two in there with a bunch of Soft!" James shouted right back.

"No choice, no time!" Lena snapped, just as she was passing by Kirsty.

The little girl winced when she spotted her. "Uhoh. I'm in trouble." It wasn't long before James arrived and picked her up. Arming her cutest smile she looked up at him, "hiya Uncle James. Can I have a cookie? Was looking for them, swear."

"Cookies are for good kids," James answered plainly, his eyes drifted up to the very close Game Cube. Lena was right, there was barely enough time to get out of its way, let alone take her back to the centre and come back. He reluctantly did the former, all he could do was watch helplessly as his sister and son went deeper into its path. She grabbed him and turned just as it enveloped them.

Meanwhile Annika had finally managed to climb out of the hole she created, when the Game was a couple of feet above her head.

"Oh pooppy," she squeaked, deciding to crawl to freedom. She almost made it, with only her foot in the way as it landed. Purple sparks took over her whole body, she twitched viciously, hair stuck up on end until the cube finally got tired and spat her away.

As soon as the Game landed the area around Lena changed into a creepy graveyard, which of course had to be foggy too to complete the look.

"Ohno, this better not be another of those zombie games. Tani's not here," Lena muttered to herself.

"What's a zombie?" Duncan asked.

Lena sighed impatiently, "never mind that. Why did you run into the Game? Your dad's gonna be so damn pissed, god knows what he's doing right now."

"Please," Kirsty pouted.

"No," James said sternly.

Kirsty huffed, her lip wobbled, "I want it."

"I don't care," James said, cringing a little in disgust. He nudged the thing in front of him with his foot. "You don't know where its been."

"Help me," Annika groaned, still twitching.

Kirsty burst into tears, "you're mean. It'll burn in the fire."

"Yeah and that's a bad thing?" James said genuinely. "These things are cheaper than they look, trust me."

"Hey!" Annika objected.

"Come on, we should get back," James said. He turned to walk back towards the command centre, not without giving the flat metallic object on the ground a light kick. It slid across the ground for a short time before hitting something.

"Oooph!" Annika grunted immediately. "My bum," she cried.

Kirsty shrivelled up her nose, "now def don't want it."

"Thought you wouldn't," James said.

Lena shook her tricorder, hoping it would change the results. All it did was frustrate her further. "Yep, it's a zombie shooting game."

"We get to shoot zombies?" Duncan's face lit up.

Lena stared down at him in worry, "okay, I'm gonna assume being homicidal runs in the male side of the family."

"What?" Duncan pouted. "You said they were already dead, and not real."

"Hmm, real enough," Lena said, shuddering a little. "It's more than likely that we have to stop something from shooting zombies, and..." She checked her pockets and linings, she already knew that they were empty as soon as the Game landed but she was still disappointed. "And we're unarmed."

"So what do we do?" Duncan asked.

"I'll need to find a console or something to login," Lena replied. "Depending on the game, you should be invisible to the holograms if you don't."

Duncan looked all around him. The only objects he could see were gravestones and trees. "No computers here. Maybe we have to tap our commbadges and tell it we're here."

"By saying the magic word? Yeah I'm sure," Lena chuckled as she glanced once more at the tricorder.

"No, that's daft," Duncan said.

Lena nodded, "yup. Let's see. Yeah, to win the game the intruder needs to be defeated."

While she was mumbling Duncan started to repeatedly tap his commbadge and whisper words into it.

"If you wish to aid the intruder, the game drops weapons for every few kills. Oh great," Lena said with yet another cold shudder.

"Login?" Duncan tried. Seconds later his clothes had changed, his skin turned slimy and the white in his eyes took over completely. When he moved his arm back down it felt a little less fluid than it did before.

"There, if you wish to repel you have to look the part. To do so announce your allegiance to the game," Lena said, getting a little more frustrated with every word. "Yeah, how?" She briefly glanced at Duncan, then did a double take at his new appearance. "Hey?"

"This Game is daft," Duncan replied. His arm locked halfway down to his side, he had to force it down with his other. "And gross too. The magic word is login."

Lena sighed and rolled her eyes. "Why? You're gonna get shot at. You're just as bad as your dad, you know."

"Thanks," Duncan grinned.

"Trust me, it's not a compliment," Lena groaned. "Login?" Like Duncan, her outfit changed in a second. Hers though was a tight fitting black dress, she'd also grown vampire fangs. "Great, now I'm a vampire with bad dress sense."

"Mum will be glad she's not here," Duncan giggled.

"Yeah I am too," Lena said as she felt around for any pockets. The dress however was so skin tight Annika would've had it in her wardrobe. "Well that was pointless. Still no weapons. I ain't biting anything."

"What's the probs, you can beat the guy or girl up. I'll help," Duncan said.

Lena narrowed her eyes as she walked up to him, "oh, I need help do I?"

"No," Duncan answered without missing a beat, and smiling at her. "I want to have some fun too."

Lena shook her head at him. "It's like looking at a mini James. Come on." She gestured for him to go with her, then walked away.

Outside the game Damien and Riker hobbled along, both looking worse for wear with burns and cuts all over. It didn't bother Riker too much as he was busy munching on a steak like it was a sandwich. They followed the edge of the Game until they found what they were looking for.

"Owie, it hurts when I sit," Annika cried, she kept inhaling through her teeth every time she tried to roll onto her back.

"What a waste of a hot chick," Riker muttered.

"You only just noticed? She was a waste long before this," Damien said.

"Nah, I noticed when I first met her. She rejected me," Riker replied. He swallowed the last palm sized piece whole.

Damien rolled his eyes as some Softmicron in their cute form walked up behind him, all of them staring blankly ahead. "Bring her with us. Let's have some fun."

"What's the damn point of this thing?" Lena grunted as she shuffled along, constrained by the dress.

Little Duncan was far ahead and had to stop to let her catch up. She passed a rustling grave when a slobbering zombie leapt out from behind a tree.

"Eew, get away!" Lena complained. She tried to kick it but the dress stopped her.

"Uh Lena, they're on our si..." Duncan said nervously.

The zombie tried to grab her by the arms. "Gross no," Lena grunted. Her hand reached down to pinch the material, she swiped it across so the long dress tore in that direction. The long dress became short, and slightly jagged. Luckily the zombie attacking her was momentarily distracted by that, giving her time to swing and kick it in its face.

Little did she know a hand was poking out of the grave near her ankle.

Once the kicked zombie dropped, it vanished into thin air. Little colourful cubes dropped to the floor in its place.

"What kind of weapons are these?" Lena asked.

Duncan squinted at them, a little tempted to collect them. "Maybe little bombs, we throw them at things."

Lena picked them up before he could. Just then the hand brushed her now bare leg. Her screams were heard across the entire Game.

"What?" Duncan asked, instantly on edge.

Lena looked down, immediately spotting the hand. She stomped on it a few times, "dirty pervert, freak, yuck!" When she was done she noticed a figure walking towards them, mostly obscured by the fog. Duncan didn't see since his back was to it. When it raised something long and thin Lena shouted at the boy, "down!"

They both ducked to the ground in time, a gunshot struck the nearby tree. Duncan crawled over to Lena as more shots rang. She reached over to grab the child before taking cover behind one of the gravestones.

"He's too far. I can't kill him until I get close," Lena said.

"Why don't we throw those cube things," Duncan suggested.

"We dunno what they are. I'd rather not. It came from a dead zombie so it won't be weapons for us," Lena said. Realisation struck her once that thought was said aloud. "Oh, shooting game. This'll be ammo."

"What's that?" Duncan asked.

Lena quickly checked the tricorder still in her left hand. "There's a hut straight ahead housing a huge stash of the stuff. That's where it's going." She tried to put it away, forgetting that her new outfit had no pockets. "Here," she said, giving it to Duncan, "and stay down."

A few more shots slammed into the other side of the gravestone. Lena crawled over to another one and took cover, all while looking ahead. She kept on doing that until a large object could be seen through the fog. A wooden hut only a few yards away. Unfortunately the stone she was at was the last one. An open stretch of grass lay in between them.

"Oh, what if someone distracts him," Duncan suggested, his voice sounded closer than she expected. When Lena looked around she noticed the boy had followed her.

"I told you to..." she mumbled before giving up. "You're not doing anything of the sort, James the Second. Dad's not cool, he's an impulsive idiot, so please stop following in his footsteps."

Duncan pouted angrily, offended in more ways than one. "You can't die in here, you said, so why not? And dad is cool, he would've won by now if he were here."

Lena narrowed her eyes in his direction, he did the same back. Neither of them did it seriously, but it wouldn't have seemed so to anyone watching them. "The only advantage he would've had would be the Game not giving him this stupid dress. I'm much better."

"Why? I never seen you wear one either," Duncan asked.

Lena sighed while peering back around the gravestone. The figure seemed to be walking slowly, looking around for them. Her knee slipped deep into the soil, she felt it move. Duncan did too. They both glanced down to see another zombie trying to dig its way out.

"Not now," Lena groaned, grabbing it and throwing it to one side. A gunshot turned it into more of the cubes. "God," she said quickly collecting them, "if he's using ammo he'll run out eventually. Then I get him."

Duncan nodded, "how long will that be?"

"Beats me, that's all I know about guns," Lena replied.

For a few minutes it was quiet, too quiet. They could only hear footsteps fading away and back again, then what sounded like hand to hand. Lena had another look, hoping this was her chance. Then she saw the figure, now clearly a well built man in a tank top and studded leather trousers, walking by the tree she was first attacked at. He seemed to be attaching some sort of jagged blade onto a stump where his arm should be.

"Uh..." she could only say. That was until a motor revving sound came from it. "He's... he's got a bloody chainsaw strapped to his shoulder," she said in disbelief.

"A what?" Duncan wondered aloud.

"Where did he get that thing from? We picked up all the drops so far," Lena said.

Duncan cringed, "what about the guy you stamped on?"

"Oh shoot... forget it," Lena grumbled, looking towards the house. "Leg it," she said while picking him up. They took off for the hut, the man gave chase.

Lena quickly turned to barricade the door with a nearby bookshelf, which she held still. "Duncan look for more of those cubes and hide."

"Okay," Duncan said. He frantically looked around the room, all while Lena kept her hands firmly on the bookshelf despite the roars of the chainsaw getting closer. On the way to another one he tripped over the edge of a rug, bringing part of it up and uncovering a basement door. "Maybe it's here."

The noise of the saw had faded, there was no resistance that Lena could feel. She grew a little worried. "He's gone, but where to?"

The sounds came back on the other side of the hut, closer to where Duncan was. Only she saw the blade begin to pierce the wall, spraying wood splinters everywhere. Duncan dropped to his knees and covered his face with his arm.

"Hide now!" Lena screamed at him.

Duncan reached for the door on the ground, he barely touched it and it fell down into a dark abyss. He carefully peeped into it, it gave him the creeps so he crawled away from it instead. He barely had the time to get back onto his feet when the man finished making a new door and strolled inside.

"Groovy," he said in a gruff voice, his attention divided between the small child and the girl further away.

Duncan grimaced at him. Lena looked on with worry, short of charging for the man and maybe if she was quick getting a hit in before the chainsaw struck her, she couldn't think of any ideas. Since he was so close to Duncan, she decided to do it anyway.

"Eew, you look like Neelix after he had that shave, the giant dented chin looks like someone sat on it and left an imprint," Duncan complained, getting the man's full attention. "Did you get those clothes from Tryhards R Us, they look like what a toser would think tough guys wear."

"Duncan," Lena said sharply.

"Studs on your pants aren't gonna distract anyone from that butt ugly balding hair style either. You'd be better off putting them on inside out," Duncan continued.

The man growled and took a swing at him. Duncan was more than small enough to avoid it, not even having to bow his head much, and run past him. The man swung around to try again.

Lena ran forward to grab his chainsaw arm by the stub, pulling it back so far she heard and felt it snap from the joint. She kept a tight hold of it as she kicked him hard enough to push him away. He stumbled chainsaw-less toward the hole in the floor.

"Hmm," Lena smiled at her new weapon, noticing a little pull cord on the base. "Duncan, cover your eyes."

"Aaaaaw," Duncan complained but he did it anyway.

Lena pulled the cord and threw it at the man only just getting his bearings. It knocked him backwards when it hit. He was more than a little worse for wear when he fell into the hole.

She peered into the hole curiously. The darkness inside churned, consuming him as sinister laughter echoed from it. "Okay?"

Game Over!

Seconds later the pair were where they started before the Game. Duncan giggled, "that was cool, right? Snap, kick. He didn't see that coming."

"Yeah, about that. What you did..." Lena said.

"I know, I learned it from mum," Duncan grinned.

"I didn't need you to tell me that," Lena said.

Duncan nodded, "true."

Lena sighed and looked around. "I hope we didn't let anymore of them in. Don't see anything." She turned her attention back to her nephew to take his hand. "Never mind, let's get you back so you can get a bollocking."

Duncan smiled to hide his nerves. Both of his parents stared at him angrily, waiting for his explanation. Fortunately he knew what to do.

"You look lovely mummy," he said cutely.

Jessie's anger melted away, "aaaw, thank you." Duncan looked relieved, but he noticed his dad shaking his head, he had to think of something to use on him quickly. There was little time as Jessie's face hardened again in a snap, "you're still in big trouble."

"Oh damn," Duncan huffed.

"So that's it. You not only endangered yourself but you dragged Kirsty into it," James snapped.

Duncan flinched. He was expecting anger, but he heard disappointment in his dad's voice as well. "I..." it made him speechless.

"What were you thinking?" Jessie asked.

"I dunno," Duncan replied honestly. "I wanted to help."

"Games are no joke. Don't ever do that again," James said.

Duncan felt the disappointment again. He didn't like it one bit, it brought a few tears to his eyes and a lump in his throat. "I'm sorry dad, mum. I won't do it again."

"Good, that's all..." Jessie said.

James crouched down in front of their son, his anger completely gone and guilt in its place. He gently wiped the tears from the boy's cheek. "It's okay, don't worry about it. You're okay, that's all that matters."

Jessie sighed, not that she was surprised or anything. "James," she whispered, beckoning her fingers as a hint for him to stand back up. He frowned as he did so. "I get it, you don't want to be what upsets him, but please, we can't have him doing things like that again."

James nodded, "I know. Sorry."

Loud footsteps clanked into the command room, it got everyone's attention. It also made most of them laugh when they saw it was only Craig huffing while trying to balance too many alien weapons in his arms. "I'm ready, those Softmicron try anything and they'll get evil uh..." he wobbled, dropping a few. "Evil Security Chief."

"Yeah that gets funnier everytime I hear it," James said plainly.

"Craig, what are you doing?" Lena asked, her eyebrow almost reaching the ceiling.

"What do you mean, I've only just made up the joke. And at least I'm doing something about your sister and your kid. You're all talk," Craig said all blustered.

"Yeah, don't push your luck Craig," James said, shaking his head.

Someone pushed Craig aside, making him drop the rest. What amused everyone who saw it was that it was only little Kirsty. "Duncan!" She ran all the way up to Duncan and gave him a hug.

"Aaaw... ohhhh," Jessie sounded very conflicted. It amused James to no end.

"Wait, Duncan?" Craig said in confusion. He looked around, spotting Lena finally despite her speaking earlier. "Lena!" He ran over to her. She smiled slyly and then stepped to the side at the last minute so he'd bump straight into a wall instead. "Owww, why... why did you do that?"

Lena smiled cutely, "couldn't resist after that little rant."

Craig pouted as he rubbed his new bump on his head. "How mean. Could you at least kiss my forehead better?"

"Seriously, pushing your luck," James said through near gritted teeth.

"Wow, that's not creepy at all, she's not your mummy," Jessie said with a scrunched up face.

"It was a joke," Craig protested.

Lena leaned forward to apparently do what he asked. Craig promptly got his hopes up, most of the room averted their eyes. "Oh, I must be dreaming," he said quietly. At the last centimetre she pinched his arm and pulled back.

"Yep! As if I'd do that," Lena giggled.

"That wasn't necessary," Craig mumbled, still pouting.

"Yes it was. Now, what did I miss while Duncan and I were dodging zombies?" Lena asked.

Harry sighed in relief now that they were done. "The Pegasus is definitely a write off, but we're picking up a few Human lifesigns in the building it hit. We got reports of several Softmicron inside as well."

"Damien did manage to brainwash some before the crash, great," James groaned.

"Yes it seems so. Good news is the population of them didn't grow after the last Game, the number was reduced instead," Turanga said.

"What?" Jessie said in surprise. She wasn't the only one. "Does that mean...?"

"Damien's brainwashing weapon spooked them into leaving, hopefully. I doubt the ones evacuated had much time between the Pegasus's collision and the landing," Harry said.

Lena shook her head, she didn't look so sure. "No way. Why would they give up so easily? If they didn't take off, the Pegasus would've only been partly inside the Game, and the Softmicron could've made sure the Game lost to destroy them. They clearly didn't, the Game's player was a moron."

"Hmm, maybe they didn't. There's still plenty of them around the city, and we have no idea how many of them are under his control," James said. "Those that left could be heading home."

"You mean?" Craig asked, cringing slightly. James nodded, assuming they were on the same page. "Sheesh, Damien's lackeys in Softmicron headquarters. That's a scary thought."

James stared at him at first blankly, then with slightly widening eyes. "Or they're not under his control and are telling the rest of their army about him. Way to look on the bright side."

"I dunno, the Softmicron being pissed off that someone else is pulling the strings doesn't sound like the bright side to me," Jessie said.

"I'm not so sure I agree. They'll have no beef with us. Their concern will be with Damien since he also had a weapon that can mess around with their portals," Harry said. "If though Damien has any spies off world in their midst, we, as well as Voyager and Enterprise in the Games Matrix are in deep trouble. We really shouldn't underestimate him."

The Pegasus remained a smouldering, mangled mess in the middle of the supposed factory no one missed. Since some of the building was still intact Damien searched around on his own for the best room to make into his new lair.

While he was doing that Riker had to search the wreckage for various technology that Damien had sketched for him, so he wouldn't pick up the wrong things. Several Softmicron were ordered to do the same.

As soon as he clasped eyes on one of the labs, Damien christened it his new lair and promptly ordered the tiny Softmicron still lugging Annika's unconscious and frazzled body around to bring her to him.

Riker returned first with an armful of cakes and very sloppy sandwiches. Once a slice of tomato dropped on the device labelled The Sabotage Rival generator, that looked very much like a box of phone batteries with a sloppy Samsung label slapped on each one, and Riker was banished until he was done with the sandwiches.

It also gave his new minions time to hook the burned and still twitching Annika up to one of the contraptions. Her arms strapped up slightly above her head, legs bound so she was stuck upright but hovering off the ground.

"Mwahahahaha, this new plan is guaranteed to work," Damien laughed.

"What plan?" Riker asked with a mouthful of cake.

"Weren't you listening you fool!" Damien snapped.

"Nope," Riker replied.

"Good, cos I don't have one yet," Damien said.

"So what are we going to do to Annika? Torture her?" Riker asked.

"That would be too easy. All we'd have to do is blind her and hook her up with you," Damien replied.

"All right, another date," Riker drooled.

Damien rolled his eyes. "Just shut up, I have better ways to get revenge on Barbie here."

"Aaaw," Riker moaned.

"Anyway I finally have a way I can get rid of the remaining Voyager crew without destroying the command centre," Damien said.

"Really how, tell me how?" Riker said, muffled.

"Simple, after the next game we surprise the ones that were in the game, most likely the Slayers, with an attack from behind. Then others will have to do the next game, then after that one we do the same thing until none of them are left. I'm such a genius," Damien cackled.

"Or we could just blow up the city with these," Riker said, pointing to the batteries.

"When we can't actually leave the city until the ship's fixed or replaced. Why the hell did I recruit you!" Damien growled.

Riker gave him a chirpy grin, crumbs all over his beard, chocolate stains on his teeth. "Brains and beauty, sir."

Damien shuddered in disgust.

"Or... we let the natives take care of them," a man bellowed from behind them.

Damien swung around to see who it was and glare, only to groan in disappointment. "Weasley Crusher. So it takes six episodes for you to regenerate from flaying. I'll keep that in mind. Why are you here?"

Wesley smiled chirpily on approach. Now that he was closer the bruise around his eye was plain as day to Damien and Riker.

"Why else? To give you the solution to your problem. Some Softmicron have fled, they will want revenge for what you did to their kin. That means more Games, tougher and more reoccurring than before. The Slayers will be in their element. When only one punch happy bitch and a toddler can win in five minutes, you know I'm right. But when am I not?"

"Why would the natives turn on them? There, that's a when," Damien said.

"Hmph," Wesley pretended to scoff. "They've not seen what can happen when the Games lose. With your new recruits, you can make that happen."

"What a load of drivel. I've got a better idea," Damien grunted. He swirled around to address the Softmicron left in the lab. "Ladies and gentleeggs, surround the next Game that arrives. Do what you must to stop wannabe serial killer and Janeway Junior from getting into it. Don't kill them though. I want to enjoy their humiliation first."

"Yes sir," they all replied in monotone and waddled out of the room. Since they were not even a foot tall with tiny legs it took them a while.

Wesley watched them with a blank stare. "Um that's..." He looked back up at Damien. "That's what I was suggesting."

"Oh? Well you weren't all that clear. Next time cut out the melodrama, ok?" Damien smirked.

As soon as they stepped outside again they immediately noticed the change in the sky. The portal seemed to have moved from its earlier position. Anyone watching it for a lengthy amount of time would see it was still drifting to the east. The red began to churn almost mechanically, mixing with a blue that slowly turned the whole portal the same purple they were used to.

"It seems to be over the commercial district. Great, that's where the majority of the 'Micron are," Lena said.

"So they're either evacuating or they're trying to kill off Damien's recruits. Do we play to win or not?" James mused.

Lena glanced down at her tricorder briefly, then hurried over to the alien transport ship they were supplied. It looked more like a floating car with no wheels than a shuttlecraft.

"We're playing at least," James mumbled as he went to follow her.

Any concerns either of them had about flying it were erased when the controls were only a joystick and two buttons in a vertical line both labelled Speed Control. Since she was there first Lena sat in the pilot's chair and immediately pulled the joystick backwards. James had to grab something to avoid being tossed into a wall when the craft jerked forward at full speed.

"Lena, push the down button a few times!" he shouted at her.

"Okay okay, calm down or you'll pee your pants," Lena grumbled. She pressed the lowest button rapidly.

The sudden speed decrease threw James' balance in the opposite direction to before, the object he was holding onto then snapped off in his hands. "I hope that wasn't important," he said, tossing it aside. He sat in the other seat.

Lena kept her eye on the window in front of her while she navigated. James looked down at the circular screen in the middle of the dashboard. On it a top down view of the car-shuttle flying around a satellite view of the city. The entire thing started to flash red at the same time many other vehicles of various sizes penetrated the right side of the perimeter.

"We've got company," James warned her. He glanced out of the right window next to him. The entire sky an already light hazy purple as many dots emerged from the city skyline.

Lena thought she saw something similar straight ahead, coming up from a huge building. Like the ones on the right they quickly took shape and grew, all of them looked similar to what they were flying. She was too busy looking for anything that could be shields or weapons, she missed the warning from the sky about the Game.

The monitor in the centre showed fast moving white dots emerge from many of the approaching ships from ahead and the right. "Crap, we need to move..."

"I know!" Lena shouted while pushing the joystick all the way forward. Their craft did a nose dive towards the ground, she panicked and pulled the stick back slightly. The ship still plummeted, but had levelled off enough for them both to see straight ahead. She had to turn to the right quickly to avoid skimming the roof of a building.

They saw the multiple flashes of light before their ship trembled ferociously. The monitor sparked and went off, with smoke fizzling out of it. "Great, how far were we from the landing spot?" James asked.

"Close, but those assholes were coming from it," Lena replied.

"A trap then. We better ditch this and go the rest of the way, discreetly by foot," James suggested.

Lena shook her head while biting her lip nervously, sweat built up on her forehead. "No, I'm going back. Hopefully that cube will get rid of them, one way or another," she said.

"But..." James tried to protest but the sharp turn he felt meant her mind was made up, and there was no changing it.

Further flashes warned them of more incoming fire. The shuttle rocked them so much they were tossed to the right. James hit the window, cracking it, while Lena fell partially out of her seat. Another hit pulled them backwards, forcing Lena to the ground with a nasty thud.

"Lena?" James stuttered as he tried to look behind him. The force pulling them back was still in effect and for a while he could barely turn his head, only melt into his chair, or so it felt. He briefly looked out of the window ahead of him, only then noticing the impacts had left them flying on their side, tumbling down to the ground.

The cracked window beside him groaned. Finally the gravity eased only slightly, allowing him to look at it. He wished he hadn't, as all he could see was the ground and the people in the streets clearly, fleeing in the opposite direction.

Quickly he reached for the steering stick and pushed it sharply to the left and up. As he expected it tossed him that direction too.

Damien smirked as he sat on a powerless computer, watching the whole thing on a small screen sitting on his lap. He couldn't help but laugh when the car lookalike skimmed a road before coming to a hasty stop in a concreted area filled with similar vehicles parked in bays, smashing the unfortunate few that stopped it.

"I thought you didn't want to kill them," Wesley said.

Damien rolled his eyes, annoyed his buzz was killed. "These two are Voyager idiots, and not redshirts, they'll probably waltz out of it without a scratch."

"That's not how it works," Wesley muttered.

"Get a sense of humour, Crusher," Damien hissed, slapping the boy with the little TV he had been watching. "Stupid name by the way. Status on the Game?"

One Softmicron standing on top of a working computer turned around to respond. "Its landed two kilometres from the crash site."

"Excellent. If my theory is correct the people of this city will get their first taste of the Game Cube's power. And who will they blame?" Damien cackled.

Wesley sighed and rubbed his head. "After that attack the defender's shuttle stunt, the Softmicron still."

Damien stopped laughing suddenly. "Oh damn it! Why did I ever listen to your stupid plan, Wusser?" He delivered another TV slap.

"Oh now it's my plan," Wesley groaned. "Why don't you let me take care of this mess."

"How?" Damien hissed.

Wesley smiled sneakily, "its been a while since I used my Stu powers of *persuasion*. It's not like you forget how, like riding a perfect bike that can be whatever you need it to be."

"Can it be less annoying and leave?" Damien asked.

"Careful Damien. When you diss a Stu you summon vengeful powers beyond your control. Anyone pitted against him or her is eventually made to be wrong, you will eat your words and grovel later," Wesley said in a bad attempt at a dramatic voice.

"Mmm words," Riker drooled. He wandered off to get more food.

"Problem solved, I'll make Riker eat them. Go. I've got more fun things to do here," Damien snapped.

"They really didn't want us in that Game. We were sitting ducks and they still didn't go in for the kill. It makes no sense," Lena said, nursing the back of her head. Two alien medics tried to get around her hand to treat her.

Harry frowned at her intently, "no it doesn't. The Softmicron would very likely want you and James dead, it's more efficient than stopping you everytime. And Damien, win or lose the Game wouldn't really affect him. It's moved on from his position and it seems like the Softmicron are no longer bringing in troops."

"And he has made his wanting to kill me very clear, many times," James said.

Turanga looked on from afar thoughtfully. One of his assistants approached to hand him a clear glass PADD.

"I guess we'll have a better idea of the intent and who when the Cube leaves," Harry said reluctantly, while folding his arms tightly.

"It'll either drop off more of them, or will lose and destroy the commercial district," Jessie said.

Turanga took that as a cue to steer his wheelchair over to them. "With the invasion, many of the populace have stayed in their homes."

"There was still people in there though," Lena butted in quickly.

Turanga's chin lowered toward his chest, "yes. As per your Mr Kim's instruction, we evacuated as many as we could. Some though didn't make it, likely due to the enemy in the area."

Game Over! Everyone froze in their current spot and position, all in the know hoped they wouldn't hear anything else. A long five seconds later the computer continued with one of the words they all dreaded, *user wins.*

"Huh, they changed it to user," Tani said flippantly, hoping it would hide her nervousness. It failed, her voice shook.

"What happens now?" Turanga asked fearfully.

The Human visitors didn't know what to tell them. Lena and Tani especially, since unlike the others they had seen the results one too many times.

Various shuttle-cars carefully approached the smoke billowing ahead of them, obscuring their view even with their strongest lights on. When they pierced it all of the pilots were dismayed to find the large building, the home of their commercial district was now a deep gaping cube shaped hole in the ground, surrounded by rubble and fires.

They had a job to do and promptly shook it off. Each one looked around for a spot to land. They soon became aware of other cars airborne in the area, not one of them friendly. Every attempt to land was thwarted by aggressive driving, forcing the leader of the response team to open up a channel to everyone.

"This area has been deemed extremely hazardous. Emergency service personnel only. Vacate the district or you'll be taken into custody."

Her response was Damien's usual evil laughter, then their satellite screens taken over by his sneering face.

"Wrong. This district is now under my jurisdiction. Give my thanks to the Game Slayers for cleaning it up for me."

"The who?" the leader asked.

Little did she know he couldn't hear her. On Damien's side he was only talking to a live shot of their ships, smirking at all of the chatter coming from them. "It's your choice. Surrender to me and my cute

little friends will be lenient. Or you can run from these cubes until they crush you." He leaned forward, filling their whole screens, "your best chance of survival is stopping those pesky subhumans, abominations, mutations, whatever. Their arrival here triggered their fury. I'll let your actions determine what side you're on."

With that he was gone, his ships though stood their ground.

The Command Centre:

The awayteam as well as Turanga and his aides watched the same message on the big holoscreen. The leader of the emergency response team stood far back on the higher level, looking unsure of herself.

"Son of a bitch. He's blaming us?" Lena snapped.

"No, he's trying to turn the people against us," Harry replied grimly. "If things weren't bad enough."

"He's the one who pushed two ships into a dangerous portal, shot us down, *and* commands the invading army. Who'd believe him?" James said incredulously.

Harry briefly wavered, he tried to keep it together. "Yes, it's obvious to you that he's responsible. We're in the thick of it, we know. The people, they only judge from what they see."

"And what they've seen is two ships arrive and pick a fight with the ship they thought was trying to save them. The first Game loss. Damien's brainwashing of the troops has chased away some, and they've only been violent toward us," Craig said with a shaky voice.

"Exactly," Harry said with a firm nod.

Jessie shook her head impatiently. "Great. What now? We can't prove we're trying to help unless we can get into the next Cube and win it. We're probably never going to get the ships back until this ridiculous stream of Games stop either."

"If they're not sending in more troops, what are they doing? One more cube dropped on Damien's head would've done the trick, but instead they aimed it at a shopping centre. Why?" Tani wondered.

Lena exhaled intentionally louder than normal, and angrier than she intended. It did the job, it got everyone's attention. "One thing at a time. If Damien's entire takeover campaign is this, then our priority should be getting into the next Games. He can't brainwash anyone with his ship destroyed, only trick them. He can't trick them if we prove we're the ones actually trying to help."

"I'm not suggesting that's not important, it is, but him having a control of those shapeshifters is a huge problem. A one we shouldn't ignore," Harry said.

"Fine," Lena said abruptly to his surprise. "You bitched about being passed up for first officer, well now's your chance. If you're the best for the job, prove it."

Her words confused everyone, no one knew what to say to it. Harry stumbled vocally a bit before trying, "what's that got to do with anything?"

"James and I are the Chosens, so we'll figure out this Game problem," Lena started to explain. James looked at her with a raised eyebrow. "You figured out the manipulation thing, you're the Starfleet brat, you figure out Damien. Everyone else can help out in whatever side they like."

"Um, that made only half sense but all right, I'll work on it," Harry stuttered.

Jessie laughed quietly to herself. "Actually it does. Lena's a little too hotheaded to deal with manipulative Damien and his crew. You at least used to be level headed, you should be able to outsmart him somehow." Lena nodded and smiled in relief. "Dunno what the Starfleet brat has to do with anything though."

"Okeydoke," Lena said, while walking away to a quieter part of the room. "So what I was thinking is that we need to divert his attention elsewhere somehow, sneak in the Game behind his back."

James shrugged and followed her. "With what? We have no rabbits to spare."

"Haha," Lena said sarcastically.

"I know. Maybe we can try it a little differently. The last time all of his forces ganged up on us. Why don't we split up and divide his attention, so to speak," James said.

Lena thought about it, a smile slowly spread across her face. "How about a compromise?"

Harry meanwhile turned his attention to Turanga and his two assistants. "You should in theory be able to distinguish Softmicron lifesigns if you scan Damien's base of operations. Where are the Softmicron now?"

Hach looked down at his computer to check, it took him a while. "There's many still spread out throughout the city." Harry's spirits were quickly dashed. "However there's a vast concentration of them between the crater and the crashsite."

"The rest of the commercial building was flattened by its central foundation disappearing, they seemed to be using it to park their ships," the officer said.

"Hmm," Harry smiled.

"If you are thinking of attacking them I would suggest you spend your energies on another plan. The ships that attacked Lena and James's was 90% of our forces," Turanga said.

Harry shook his head, "hardly. Thanks to the Game, we evacuated most of the area anyway. I doubt many of your people are sticking around the crashsite. If we could contain them, then we'll not only be able to freely walk into future Cubes, we can concentrate on rescuing Voyager and Enterprise."

"We use emitters to power the shield that protects this facility. You will have seen them, they're five feet tall and numerous, scattered around the building. They'll see them being planted. Apart from that, there's nothing in our arsenal that would do the job," Turanga said.

Harry sighed, dejected once more. "Seems like Damien and his army needs to be distracted while we set them up. How long would it take to surround the area needed to be shielded?"

"Ten, maybe fifteen minutes if we use the less accurate drop as they fly method. We have one ship equipped for such a thing, but if its spotted they'll sabotage the emitters," Slax replied.

"Okay, that should be enough time to turn Damien's plan against him," Harry smirked.

Meanwhile:

Damien and Riker watched the tiny Softmicron grunt waddle over to Annika holding a needle hypospray hybrid. It wobbled a bit as it tried to lift it toward her foot. It was slightly out of its reach. Damien tutted, growing more impatient with every wobble.

"For badness sake, use dragon mode if you must. Do it!" Damien snapped at it.

It looked at him with an annoyed and yet almost bemused expression. For a moment he thought its brainwashing was about to crack. Finally it morphed into the dragon form he had only heard stories about. Unlike the one the Voyager crew had witnessed a year ago, this one was half the size since it figured twelve foot was a tad overkill to inject Annika with a needle. It did think a dragon was too, but it couldn't ignore its master's orders.

Once it had pierced Annika's neck with the serum, it morphed back to normal and waddled off.

Annika moaned as she stirred. "What, where am I?"

"You're in Damien Headquarters. Thanks to your tantrum I lost my ship and my advantage. You will never ever go against my orders again," Damien said.

"You'll never have full control of me," Annika said defiantly, but groggily.

"Oh yeah?" Damien sniggered. He pulled out a remote from his pocket and pressed a red button. "Now kiss Riker."

"No way!" Annika squealed. For some odd reason she was going over to Riker, she grabbed a hold of him and she kissed him on the lips. "How did you do that?" She started to splutter afterwards.

"Let's just say I had a fiddle with the Borg implants in your body. It thinks that I'm the Borg Queen, so you will obey my every order," Damien said.

"You're a queen," Riker sniggered.

"Smack Riker," Damien ordered. Annika did so, and Riker fell unconscious.

Harry stared in awe at the vessel standing in front of him. It looked more like a plane than a ship, with its long wings at the rear of the vessel and long thin frame. He wondered why the rest of this species' fleet looked like someone had slapped iddy wings onto Tom's holo-car collection.

"We use this as border defence. It's capable of firing a missile and reloading at a speed of twopersecond. Normally we'd install the shield emitters carefully into the ground by hand," Turanga explained. "You want speed, and this is it."

"It's impressive. Now we just need someone to fly it," Harry said.

"Yep," Craig said as he approached him, his hand raised slightly in the air.

Harry tried not to laugh in his face, instead he trembled as he bit his lip. "I don't think so."

"Right, lookie at Mr thinks he's entitled to everything. You want the leader gig, you got it. Let me do something, everyone else has a part in this mission," Craig said.

Harry's brow furrowed, he looked to Turanga for confirmation. He had already turned his chair around to keep out of this. "They do? Did Lena get everyone else?"

Craig slowly nodded his head, "attacking the Game on four fronts, one distraction. Even Yasmin's doing something."

Yasmin held up the object as high as she could. Lena didn't look impressed, she waved her hand rapidly. Her response was met with confusion for a couple of seconds, then Yasmin got it and shook it side to side.

"Will this really distract him?" Yasmin asked sheepishly.

"Of course," Lena said. Anyone else would have heard the obvious lying tone she was using, but Yasmin was young enough to buy it and so she improvised a bit, using one of her hands to wave as well. "Better. Keep practising. I'll be right back." She wandered off.

The others watched from afar while Lena walked up to them struggling not to laugh.

"What is that she's waving around?" Jessie asked.

"Oh," Lena said, looking back over her shoulder. "She wanted to be in the Game or help with the distraction. So I quickly scribbled up a sign that may get his attention, if he was looking a mile away from the game site anyway."

James looked over to try and read it, in between Yasmin's now jumping around. "Free rabbit babies need new home." Lena snickered some more. "Well, no need for the other distraction then."

Jessie smiled, "about that. I'm swapping with Tani."

Tani scowled at her, "yeah you'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Yeah," Jessie replied, smile growing.

"I've been in more Games than you. I'm going in and that's final, right Lena?" Tani said.

Lena glanced between the two, then at James who was tempted to slink off into the background. Her own narrowed her eyes told him if he did he'd regret it. "Normally I'd be on Jess's side since she can slap most people around," Lena said.

"Normally?" Jessie said with some annoyance.

"How long ago was it that you were in Sickbay, for that, you know," Lena said shiftily.

"What, labour is taboo now?" Tani asked.

Lena cringed and quickly whispered, "their baby's still on Enterprise."

"Oh, oops," Tani laughed awkwardly.

Jessie gave her a firm stare, "I'm going."

"Jess," James finally decided to chime in. She stared at him accusingly. "Lena's right. She's not saying you're weak or anything, neither am I..."

"Fine, I'm distract girl. You act like I don't know that I went through it, I know what I can handle," Jessie grumbled.

Tani smiled in relief, and a little smugly at the victory. "Someone's gotta play mummy with the kiddies anyway."

James and Lena both visibly winced at the same time. As they expected Jessie didn't take her comment well. Her cheeks flexed, fire burned in her eyes. Luckily for them only the klaxon rang out around the entire building.

"That must be the early cube warning, let's do this," Lena said.

Sure enough outside the portal fluctuated, the sky began to quickly turn purple.

The awayteam though weren't the only ones preparing. Damien marched outside to rally his troops filed in front of their ships. "God these things never stop coming do they," he muttered before turning to address them all. "You did an excellent job repelling the weirdos the last time but don't think for one minute this will be the same. These prats have plenty of experience with screwing over good plans.

"Don't disappoint me or I'll be ordering scrambled eggs for breakfast, dinner and tea." He rolled his eyes at the sound of drooling behind him. "And I won't give any to beardface here."

"So mean," Riker huffed.

"Go!" Damien shouted. The little creatures scampered off into their ships, each one needed at least two more of them to lift them in through the doors and shut them.

Once in the air the cube began its descent from the clouds. The front line of ships quickly detected four traces of Human lifesigns, all of them coming from different positions.

"Sir," the leader reported. "They've split up. Should we?"

"Really? Of course, I knew they'd do this!" Damien's voice barked at them.

"You didn't say anything like that," Riker's voice said. There was a splat for some reason. *"My Mississippi mud pie!"*

The leader gave the signal for the squadron to split into four, leaving them with only three ships per group. As they got closer they realised something very odd about each of the signals. It wasn't merely one lifesign in one spot, it looked to be four in each group. "What? It's not possible."

No matter how many times they checked, the results were the same. Sixteen people were going for the Game Cube from all sides, and no matter how low they flew they couldn't pick them out from the locals to confirm it.

"Imbeciles. It's clearly a trick. One of them is real, the others are fake. I'll find them," Damien said, studying the same lifesigns readouts they were. For a while there was no differences he could spot.

It was only when he tried to identify the lifesigns he realised something. The Game would land directly in between him and the Command Centre. He knew the direct path from it to the Cube would be too obvious. When his eye drifted to the lifesigns to the east he caught the energy signatures there spike. He smiled deviously. "There."

Little under a mile away from the shielded Command Centre, Jessie watched as the three ships flying overhead turned around and flew off over the top of the still falling Game.

Behind her, engines roared to life. She allowed a quick glance back over her shoulder before heading for the landing spot. The vessel Harry had been ogling earlier emerged from behind the centre, shields dropped to let it through and it shot off in the opposite direction the other ships did.

Tani grew more than a little worried that the three ships patrolling her part of the city didn't leave, and instead drew in more of them.

She quickly joined a nearby group of people hurrying away from them, all while lifting her hood over her head. A little flashing device dropped to the ground in front of her, something she took great satisfaction in crushing with her heel.

"They're gone," Damien said, eyes flashing with rage. The east side of the cube no longer showed any Human lifesigns. "Split up again, find them."

It was much too late though. Three people entered the Game's range in time for it to land on top of them.

The cityscape disappeared, in its place a gigantic room. Every object in it looked to be a hundred times the size they should be. Everyone felt like ants in this strange game.

"What's it say?" James asked Lena once he got to her.

Lena was busy reading, nose deep in a tricorder with a quizzical eyebrow raise. "We're in the final level of a racing game. The player needs first place to win," she replied plainly as if she was bored of it already.

James picked up on it immediately. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, frog in my throat," Lena replied with a look of indifference.

"This shouldn't be too hard. We're lucky, usually racing games allow people to qualify even if they're third," James said.

"Right," Lena mumbled. She noticed him trying to smile encouragingly, she felt a little bad for it. "Sorry, I can't get the lost one out of my head." It didn't ease her guilt pang, she knew why too. "You've been separated from your newborn kid and you're trying to cheer *me* up? So stupid."

James frowned, "this isn't a competition. We'll be fine, with your driving skills we got nothing to worry about."

"Is that sarcasm?" Lena asked, slightly squinting her eyes.

"You know, for once I'm not entirely sure," James chuckled.

"Mmmhmm," Lena didn't believe him. Still it made her smile so she let him off. "I just need to get my confidence back. No problem."

They heard many footsteps approach them. Then a familiar voice shouted at them, "there they are. Down with the mutations!"

James and Lena hurriedly turned around to confront whoever it was. Lena groaned when she recognised him and his black eye. "Wesley?" He wasn't alone, a dozen of the planet's natives followed him and begun jeering at them with similar lines. The pair noticed they were carrying hand crafted signs, all with different slogans with the same theme.

"It really is just weapons we're not allowed to bring in," Lena said in deadpan, then facepalming into her hand. "This isn't going to end well."

James stepped forward, and it did what he wanted, stopped the group from getting any closer and shut them up. A couple backed away fearfully. "What the hell is this?"

"Huh, you things are dumber than I thought," Wesley sniggered. He spoke over his shoulder. "See what I mean, these brutes aren't our saviours. They're vicious, a lover of death and destruction. Why else would they be in here?"

James looked around the gigantic room that he only just noticed looked like it belonged to a child's. He widened his eyes on purpose to look like he was freaked out, "yeah, it's a bloodbath in here."

"We won't let you destroy this city, right folks," Wesley said. The crowd began shouting at them again. Someone dared to throw one of their signs at the pair. James quickly grabbed it before it smacked him in the face, prompting gasps. "Unnatural heathen, a demon. We'll drive you out yet!" Wesley barked.

"Look, this is just ridiculous," Lena muttered, walking forward to stand at James's side. "We're not your enemy. Who fired that weapon into the sky, what happened after that?" The crowd started to whisper between themselves, Wesley began to sweat. "Who shot who down? We tried to get into the last one of these, but were stopped by his boss. Again, what happened afterwards?"

Wesley laughed nervously, "those wretched creatures. My boss is trying to get them in line, he needs time to do it."

The crowd weren't buying it, they glared at him. "They have no proof. All lies. Damien saved this planet from those two big ships. They..." he suddenly squealed so high pitched they at first thought it was a small child doing it. It was definitely him as there were no kids and he promptly ran off as fast as he could afterwards.

"What?" Lena said, confused.

James was too, "yeah, weird." He glanced at his sister but that wasn't who he saw first. Someone else stood in between them, smirking maliciously.

"A little jumpy isn't he?" Jessie asked. "I only flayed him. Big wuss."

"Jess?" both Lena and James said in surprise.

"So what are we playing? Barbie's Adventure Time?" Jessie questioned as she looked around.

Lena tried to shake off her shock at her appearing so suddenly, and at all. "Racing game. We should register."

James however wasn't able to. "Wasn't Tani our third, how...?" Jessie smiled at him innocently. "You swapped the lifesign generator with her."

"Well it was a bit daft that the lure was the one closest to Craig's takeoff point," Jessie said.

"Not really, he wasn't supposed to go until they realised they were duped and came after us," Lena pointed out.

Jessie shrugged, "what was the term, login?" Her outfit changed in an instant to a casual jeans and tank top with sunglasses. An open top jeep, red with a pink tint when the light hit it, appeared behind them.

"Ohno," Lena groaned. "I want that," she whispered to James.

"Oooh," Jessie was more than pleased with it. She hurried over to get into the driver's seat. They watched her get comfy, after adjusting her seat so she wasn't obscured by the steering wheel.

James and Lena looked at each other, nodding awkwardly. "Login," they said mostly in unison. Lena was relieved she wasn't stuck with something as stupid as the dress again, this time a black leather getup with a jacket. James wasn't too thrilled about being stuck with a light blue jumpsuit with his surname and a number on his back.

The vehicles behind them were a motorbike and a plastic looking racing car. The bike was closest to Lena, which she didn't look too thrilled about. "What is this?"

"Motorbike," James replied.

"What does it do?" Lena asked.

"I'll tell you what, I'll use it," James replied.

"You do know how to use one?" Lena said.

"Yep, I had one. My stepdad got me one as a bribe, so he said anyway," James replied.

Jessie honked the horn on her jeep. The pair looked at her expectantly. "What does neutral mean?"

"Thank god it's an auto," James commented, although Lena wasn't too sure what he meant. She assumed Jessie's car could drive itself and felt a little relieved. She hopped over to the other car as James hurried over to the jeep.

"Oh," Jessie laughed once he explained it. "Got it. Let's..." She pulled a lever, tapped the pedal and ended up going backwards. "Wrong one." A frown appeared on her face when she stopped it under a lamp shining on her, showing off the pink. "Eeew, it really is Barbie's Adventures."

Once all three were in the vehicles anyone who didn't login were transported off to the side. The ones taking part were lined up at the door. A countdown of five rang out. Lena tried to figure out which one was the one they had to beat, then figured she'd aim to win, it didn't matter.

The race begun and they sped away along a poorly marked track. The bedroom once quiet had become chaotic, like invisible children were playing with everything. The drivers had to dodge sticky spills taking up half of the tracks, balls ten times the size of them bouncing across, toys dropping into their path.

They reached a part of the track which crossed over a plastic train track. One car got through, a white sports car, but railroad crossing lights held up by string dropped from a overhanging computer chair seat nearby. A toy train chugged along, forcing them to stop.

Jessie shook her head. Instead of waiting she span the wheel to the right, and took off alongside the train track. A computer voice barked at her, "wrong way," over and over. Once she was clear of the slow moving train she crossed over the plastic tracks and back into the race, almost neck and neck with the white car.

"Well, if they're gonna cheat. Why not," Lena mumbled. She thought about doing the same, the train was almost by though. The lights changed and they were free to go.

They were worried about catching up, little did they know Jessie and the white car were forced to slow down quite a bit since they entered a field of Lego bricks. Jessie had to swerve harshly to the left to avoid a colourful wall of them, the car drifted into an almost complete spin. The white car was meanwhile hampered by being unable to drive over only one level of bricks, getting stuck halfway and leaving the wheels spinning against air, while Jessie's car had no trouble until the wall.

What looked like Playdoh dropped in front of Lena, James and a few other cars. They all tried to swerve to avoid getting stuck. A couple failed and were left behind.

It was nothing compared to the next obstacle; what looked like a horse, only an obscene yellow colour with glittery hair as a tail and mane, and much bigger. It was though alive and walking around, until they approached which spooked it into stomping its front hooves at anything that dared come closer.

"Great," Lena grunted, once more thinking about Jessie's drive off the tracks tactic. She turned the car to go off to the quieter right, since the left was a tight squeeze with toy houses and streets, and she swore she saw little dogs and cats occupying them and going about their business like they were people.

Lena barely moved off the track when a huge three pronged plug fell down from above and started swinging on its cord, she made sure to duck all while struggling to figure out which part of the lever she had to tug to get the car to go backwards and out of its way.

"This is ridiculous," James grunted, glancing to the side to check on Lena right as she figured out reverse. Once she was out of harm's way he turned his attention to the horse. A car in front had tried to squeeze by it only for it to lose its mind, and jump onto its hind legs. James saw his chance. He revved the bike, giving it full power and sped straight for it while it was still on its hind legs. Since it was so big he rode under it without breaking a sweat.

It wasn't long until he reached the Legofield. Jessie meanwhile ended up clearing her obstacle by driving into it impatiently, knocking it clean over, allowing her to continue on.

The white car had though only just cleared it and was on an open stretch.

At least with the bike, James was able to maneuver around the place much easier than any car. He managed to clear it as well and turn the corner into the open road seconds later. Only unlike the white car, as soon as he turned another car sped out from behind what looked like a shoebox and gunned

straight for him. He didn't have much time to really register it, it slammed into him and knocked him and the bike spinning off track.

Jessie saw it all. The car assumed she didn't and rode off at casual speed probably to find a new hiding spot. She recognised its driver's smug grin and bearded face. "Wesley." It gave her the push she needed to get out of the Lego nightmare.

Lena closed in on the field too. She slowed to find some way across it. She didn't have long to think, the car that allowed James to get by rolled towards her, ending up upside down. The colourful horse's neighs gave her a good idea what happened. It also gave her a plan. She aimed for the part of it resting against the ground and put her foot down. With the car's high speed it had no trouble gliding over it. Using it as a ramp, it hurtled her through the air and across almost all of the Lego. Her landing allowed her to get by the rest by pushing them aside.

The white car and Wesley's reached a glowing circle next to a chest of drawers with the top drawer open and overflowing. As soon as they drove over the light, they were elevated up to the top and onto one final bit of track. They followed it toward a desk sitting next to it, slightly lower in height than it. Jessie and then Lena were right behind them.

Once his car dropped onto the desk, Wesley span around and parked behind a giant laptop to hide him, facing the track.

Jessie looked behind her, catching sight of Lena speeding up. She changed her course at the last minute before the drop, opting to instead drive over a bunch of folded clothes in the drawer. Lena wasn't sure what happened, but she had to catch up with the white car.

Wesley lay in wait for either of them, foot on pedal, itching to go. He heard the sound of an engine approaching. He didn't know it wasn't Lena, but Jessie revving whilst in neutral.

She heard him accelerate and did the same. Her speed launched her over the tiny gap between the drawer and desk, directly towards him as he drove back onto the track from the side. She saw his eyes widened in terror when he spotted the much larger car coming straight for him, he whimpered when he saw who was behind the wheel.

He tried to turn to get away. Jessie made sure to give him a smile and wave before slamming into the side of his car, sending it rolling off to the back of the desk, then down the gap between it and the wall.

Lena meanwhile dropped at high speed from the drawers, landing far ahead of the carnage so she missed it all. The acceleration time difference between the two allowed her to quickly get by the white car moments before the finish line.

Game Over!

Jessie's first instinct once the city returned was to check on James after his crash, so she was the first to spot the horde of Softmicron, flanked by Damien and Riker standing there waiting for them.

"Well done, now time to die," Damien said. He clicked his fingers, the Softmicron changed into the dragon form.

"Oh hell..." Lena grumbled.

James quickly tried to get up despite the aches and pains the crash gave him. Halfway up he noticed Wesley trying to use the native people to get away unnoticed, crawling between their legs, leaving a bleeding trail behind him.

"Wait," James said loudly to get Damien's attention. "We can't take all the credit. If it were not for Wesley, we would've been in real trouble."

"What?" Wesley squeaked.

The people looked around at him, glaring once more, but worse of all exposing him to Damien. He narrowed his eyes toward him.

"It's true. We saw him distract something to help the male Slayer get by," one native said.

"No no, that wasn't me," Wesley stuttered.

"Yes and the ramp helped speed things along, but we're still not even Wes. Remember that," Jessie said dangerously, making him whimper.

"I see," Damien said coldly. "I'll deal with that in a minute. First, let me show you something cool. Annika!"

Annika pushed her way through the crowds, from the angry look on her face she wasn't keen about it. "No!"

"Pick your nose," Damien told her.

"No, I will not!" Annika screeched. She did pick her nose.

"Now, feed it to Riker," Damien said evilly.

"Don't be sick Damien. It isn't big enough to fill me," Riker said as he tried to bat her finger away.

Damien chuckled for a bit, then tried to look serious and evil again. "Okay enough playing around. Get the Weasel Annika, hand him over to my new pets."

Annika stumbled over to the group, everyone got out of her way. Wesley couldn't get away quick enough, his injuries left it too painful to even stand. She grabbed him and dragged him toward the dragons. Damien merely had to point behind him and the dragon closest to him understood, grabbing Wesley and flying off. His screams were heard for miles.

"Now. Until we're done here, stand still and punch yourself in the face," Damien ordered.

"What?" Annika barely had time to say before her fist flew into her cheek.

James shook his head in disgust. Though Lena was not so secretly enjoying it. "You'd do that to your own sis...ally." He looked confused and annoyed with himself, "why would I say that?"

"How dare you nearly say she was my sister!" Damien screamed, while pointing his finger at him.

Riker giggled. "He fiddled with her nanoprobes so she thinks he's the Borg Queen. Why don't you try it on your sister. Woah, she's hot..."

"Try anything and you're barbecue meat," Lena growled. Riker backed off.

"What's the endgame here Damien?" Jessie snapped.

The sound of a ship closing in got the team's attention. Lena's commbadge chirped, muffled by her pocket.

Damien laughed, "funny you should ask. Too bad I only share it with people who aren't brainless puppets with god complexes."

"Wait, so you don't know it either?" James said. Damien glared at him, his eyebrow twitched a few times. "It does feel like you're winging it and getting lucky. All of this so far, way too clever."

"The day I'll kill you will be a great one. I plan on making it a national holiday every year," Damien snarled.

Lena discreetly reached into her pocket to tap her commbadge.

"When will that be, I'd better mark it on my calendar," James asked.

"You dare make fun of me!" Damien snapped.

James actually looked confused, he glanced at Jessie who also was. "Yeah, that's our thing. Right?"

"No," Jessie answered innocently. "We humiliate him."

Lena lightly nodded. James then turned back to face Damien. "Yes, speaking of which. Step back a tad."

"What? Am I scaring you?" Damien sneered. He did it anyway, so did Riker and Annika.

"Now," Lena whispered.

The ship's engines were unmistakable now. Everyone looked up to see the ship from earlier speed over their heads, dropping two five foot tall poles which glowed red every second.

Seconds later a red shield sprang up from it, blocking Damien and his army from reaching them. He swung around to tell the Softmicron to fly over it. However he noticed the shield had veered off and was currently going over his head, locking him into his so called territory.

"Damn it!" he roared. His temper wasn't helped by Annika bursting into hysterical laughter, despite the constant punches to the face. "Get to your ships, ready all weapons!"

Riker tapped Damien on the shoulder, "uh Damien. How are we going to get through it?"

"That's easy. Annika jump onto one of the ship's bonnets and use your plot solving nanoprobe to punch a hole," Damien replied.

"No way on your stinking life..." Annika said but she still did it anyway. Her assimilation tubules punctured the shield.

The Command Centre:

"What's going on?" Lena asked as she ran inside. James and Jessie followed. All the alert lights and sirens were flashing.

"Damien's breaking into the shield already," Harry replied. "Craig can't have the only ship capable of firing. What else do we have?"

Turanga sighed, the nerves getting the better of him. "Only three in range. We can't possibly defend from an attack."

Harry studied the fluctuation in the shield. It looked to be getting bigger, then it stopped, forming a circular shape growing fainter and more transparent by the second.

"They're not getting in all at once. One at a time," he said, tapping his commbadge. "Kim to Anderson, don't come back just yet. We need you to join the attack force." Someone tapped him on the shoulder, he looked around to find Craig standing there. "God damn it, nothing goes right around here!" Harry complained.

Lena rolled her eyes. "Relax, phasers. You said our weapons are more advanced than your tech. Let's do this." Everyone's jaws dropped, Craig for different reasons, when she quickly drew her jacket open to reveal weapons in every orifice it and her t-shirt had. A few phasers were pulled from it and chucked at everyone in the team, but Yasmin.

"You never let me have any fun!" she screeched before storming out.

"Whatever," Lena groaned whilst fishing something from her back. They assumed it was another phaser, but were shocked once again to see her nestling a rifle in her arm.

"How the hell do you walk with that on your back?" Jessie asked.

"Practice, just don't try it with swords," Lena smiled. "Turanga man your ships, we'll join you outside."

The rest of the awayteam followed her out, expecting her to take the route to the main door, only instead she went up the stairs to get to the long stretch of window. One little tap with the rifle end poked a hole through the glass by a dividing panel, which she promptly stood behind.

"Really?" Harry said with a blank face.

"If you want to stand outside and get shot, be my guest," Lena said.

Harry grumbled and ran back the way he came. Tani looked a little unsure until the fluctuation in the shield was completely transparent and the first ships started to come through. She chose to follow Harry.

James walked partially back until he reached the window edge. A bump with his elbow did the same trick, he gestured at it while looking Jessie's way and rushing forward once more to find a similar spot to Lena.

Jessie rushed for it, leaving Craig a little lost as to what to do. The hole James had made was much bigger, not surprising since Lena's version was barely a poke compared to his. He ran over to join Jessie as the rest all aimed at the incoming ships.

"Wait for it," Lena said to everyone's shock.

"For what?" Jessie asked.

"Damien waltsing in with that smug *I won* look on his face," Lena muttered.

James shook his head, "that coward's not going to come through. Why else would he want to control the Softmicron and Annika?"

"Maybe he will, he's stupid enough," Lena said.

Jessie sighed impatiently, "no, soon there will be too many of them." By the time she said that three ships had leaked through the hole. "Screw it." She made the first few shots, which James and then finally Craig followed through with. Several came from the ground. The first two ships erupted into flames after a few hits, the third tried to evade while a fourth began to come through.

"Come on you stupid spiky haired rabbit smoocher, come and get us!" Lena screamed, still withholding her fire.

James looked at her desperately, "Lena! Not now, we'll sort him out later!"

"But... mum, dad, Kiara... my ship," Lena stuttered, her anger turning into grief. It didn't last, anger took back over. "Fine," she said through gritted teeth and joined in the fire fight.

The first few ships tumbled down to the ground, ships three and four also quickly dispatched. Still a fifth one came through.

Annika laughed maniacally, "yes keep going in, fire is so so pretty."

Damien glowered at his tablet screen, then up at the hole and its crazy maker. "What are you idiots waiting for, fire back, fire back!"

"Aaaw, that's what you get for using this species' ships and technology," Annika giggled, snorting a little. "They're getting blown out of the sky by measly hand phasers. Maybe you should have upgraded the IOS."

Damien growled. He threw the device down onto the floor, it cracked with little effort. "Close the hole, now!"

"Damn," Annika pouted, she recalled her tubules.

Unknown to them the last two ships to go through had turned around to retreat, one of them already a raging inferno, only to have their path close in their faces.

Damien looked up at his only two remaining ships, one of them being Annika's. Her face had turned bright red from all the laughing and she was struggling to breathe, it angered him further. "Right that's it, you asked for it. Go on a dinner date with Riker."

"What? Noooooooooooooo!" Annika screamed.

"All right, where do you want to go? McDonalds or maybe even Pizza Hut?" Riker asked. Despite walking along with him, she screamed hysterically as if she was being dragged off.

"Hmm, sometimes I wonder if I'm too evil," Damien said thoughtfully. "I mean Riker's been loyal and he's left a lot less crumbs in my lair. Annika, eugh!" he shuddered at the thought of the two making out, seeing that clip of Endgame was bad enough. "Yes, too evil." He shouted after them, "just dinner!"

"Aaaw," he heard Riker moan.

The Command Centre:

Everyone but Lena watched the last of the attacking ships hit the shield, exploding like the rest of them. Many were celebrating, but Lena's head fell. She walked away through one of the doors. Craig spotted her, he quickly followed.

Lena sat down on the nearest chair, she put her hand over her face. Craig quietly stepped over to her side. "Are you ok?" he asked.

Lena jumped slightly, she turned to him. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"No you're not, what's bothering you?" Craig asked.

"What's bothering me? Hmm, let me think. Number one, Voyager and the Enterprise are trapped in a dangerous alien realm. Number two, we're all stuck on a planet with Damien and constant visits from Game Cubes. Number three, I'm really angry that it's only properly hit me now. Ok," Lena snapped.

"Look now Damien's got little to no army he's not much of a threat. Now we can find a way to get the ships back," Craig said.

"What makes you think Voyager and the Enterprise will be able to survive in that realm? The Softmicron are the most advanced species in our galaxy," Lena asked.

"Both ships have managed to get out of tougher situations," Craig said.

"What about us then, we're stuck here and it's all my fault," Lena said angrily. She covered her face again.

"I don't get it, how is it your fault?" Craig stuttered.

"I didn't do anything, I knew he was up to no good, how could I be so stupid? Now for all I know the rest of my family are dead," Lena ranted.

Craig sat down beside her, he took a hold of one of Lena's hands. "Listen to me, you don't know if anyone's dead. Damien tricked us all, it's not your fault. We can still get out of this situation, there's less chance of that happening if one of us doesn't believe it."

"You're right. Thanks Craig," Lena said at the same time James walked in to find her. Craig obviously didn't notice, and he chose that moment to lean in. She angrily pushed him away with an angry gasp. "What are you doing!?"

Before Craig got a chance to answer James pulled him to his feet by the scruff of his shirt. "What the hell do you think you're doing with my sister?"

"Oh great," Craig could only groan.

James responded by tossing him around so they were facing each other, he kept a firm grip on him, one hand squeezing his arm, the other threatening to grab his throat any second. "If I ever catch you trying to touch her against her will again, I will kill you."

"James, I can take care of this myself," Lena said, hurrying to her feet.

Craig struggled to get out of his grip. "Look, this isn't any of your business. I love her and she's not a child."

"Yeah right you do. If you loved her you wouldn't have accused her of seeing me. She rightly dumped you, get over it," James scoffed.

"That's rich coming from you. Someone so much as winks at Jessie you'd probably rip their eyes out," Craig grumbled.

"Wow, I punched one misogynist guy planning to do exactly what you just tried to do," James said flatly. His tone changed to go along with the dangerous glint in his eye. "The difference is huge. I trust Jessie, I wouldn't flat out accuse her based on my insecurities."

"Oh I'm insecure?" Craig's voice rose to a shout.

Lena rolled her eyes, her patience very quickly wearing out.

"Finally, we're getting somewhere," James said with a faked smile.

"Get over yourself. She's not yours to protect, not that she needs it. You just like throwing your weight around because you can," Craig snapped. "Months ago she wasn't even on your sister radar, and now you're protective big bro. Give me a break."

"I'll give you something else if you'd prefer," James said.

"She's eighteen, butt out!" Craig yelled.

James' whole face hardened, eyes too. It was clear to anyone the grinding of his teeth was the only thing stopping him from throttling him. "That wasn't a nice sweet moment I overreacted to. You tried to force a kiss on her. She naturally wiggled out at it and you're not sorry, no I'm the bad guy."

"Did you hear that Lena?" Craig laughed, once more trying to break free. "Drunk kissing, the turbolift make out, the oh pretend we're a couple to fool Tani. Look up hypocrisy in the dictionary and James' picture is there as an example."

"Craig," Lena tried to warn him.

James threw him down onto the table, hard enough for it to break under the strain. "Don't project onto me. You'll always be the little creep who followed women around with a PADD, rating them on their date chances. You're lucky Lena befriended you at all."

Her fuse finally ran out. Lena pushed her hand out to keep him from going near Craig again, then pointed an angry stare down at Craig. "For god's sake, you're both impulsive idiots. Final. Now don't talk to me unless it's about the Game, Damien situation until you both grow the hell up!"

She stomped off towards the door, slamming it behind her. A few seconds later it creaked and fell to the floor with a loud thud. Still the two men heard the klaxon they figured was a Game alarm since it only went off when they showed up.

"Another Game, we're evacuating the area," Turanga reported.

"Good," Lena said but more to the first part. "I need something to vent on."

"What's going on?" Jessie asked her.

Lena waved her off on the way to the main doors. "Do you want to know or do you want to come beat things?"

"Bit of both," Jessie replied, hurrying after her. "Wait, James was injured during the last Game. Is that why you're leaving without him?"

"I honestly don't care. Bring him if you want, or don't," Lena huffed as the door shut behind her.

"Does everyone have the same theory on what happened in there?" Harry asked. Everyone but Turanga nodded their heads.

The Game Cube was about to land as James arrived on the scene. Lena folded her arms and turned away from him. The few seconds it took for the Game to finally land were silent and awkward. The trio's surroundings turned into a large circular arena, surrounded by large screens with different shadowed figures displayed on them.

"Good, a fighting game," Lena said as she pulled out her tricorder.

"What's so good about that?" Jessie asked.

"I told you, I get to beat things," Lena replied.

"Why, what happened?" Jessie asked.

"I don't think it's the time, Jess," James said.

Lena read the information the tricorder was supplying to her. "Well this is good, the player has to fight and defeat three opponents to win. It's a knockout stage, so if it loses the game's over."

"Simple enough, right?" Jessie mumbled.

Music began to blare over the whole arena. One of the screens lit up around the edge, prompting a select style sound. It faded away just as quickly and moved on to its neighbour. That kept going until it landed on the one with the largest shadow. A confirmation sound triggered the screen to reveal all of its details. Tall, extremely built, claws coming out of its right knuckles, actual fire streaming out of its back. Its eyes were fiery as well, with no mouth and nose, and large curved horns sticking out its head.

"Oh my god... what...?" James stuttered.

"What is that thing exactly?" Jessie did too.

"It's history, that's what it is," Lena replied bitterly, she didn't want to admit to the same nerves they were feeling.

The beast stepped out of the screen to take its place at the centre of the arena.

"Choose first opponent," a deep computer voice said.

The lit up screens sequence began again. Jessie watched them with a touch of panic coursing through her. "Er, how the hell do we take part in this? Login?" Nothing happened.

Lena walked over to the closer one, "maybe we have to tell it which one we want."

"There's eight screens and three chances to win. We can't pick them at random, or we may never get a chance to even play," James said. He tried to walk into the battle arena, an invisible wall blocked him.

Jessie hurried over to the currently lit screen. "It's been on this one longer, login." It worked, she disappeared in a transporter beam and quickly took the place of the four armed shadowed figure in the screen. Typically as soon as she did the light moved back on itself to the one on her left. She couldn't really see this though, only James and Lena could.

"Maybe..." Lena said hesitantly, the confirmation sound played over the top of her. The one on Jessie's left was revealed and quickly took its place in the arena. "Okay, this isn't good."

"Hey!" Jessie complained as she tapped on the glass blocking her from leaving. She then noticed her two extra arms, freaking her out. "What am I meant to be?"

James looked on, very worried at this point. "We get little more than a few seconds to pick the chosen character. We don't even know if we can login once it's picked."

"We won't know until we try. Going in too soon like Jess did could cost us," Lena said.

"I can hear you," Jessie groaned.

"Begin Round One."

The large fiery creature faced off against what looked like an angel barely half its size. The first round lasted little under a minute, what with the angel's only attack against it was a pitiful light beam shot out of its hand that the fire beast shrugged off. Once it closed the gap it was over.

"This game is extremely out of balance. The player picked the easy mode character, no doubt there," James said.

"Begin Round Two."

Lena nodded, the nerves started to get the better of her, she was determined not to show it. "The theme is gods versus demons versus mortals. I think that's the point."

"If we're right, the player's not gonna pick any other demons. That narrows down..." James said.

"One or two out of seven, six if we discount Jessie," Lena muttered. "I'm not second guessing this thing. I'm going to follow the select light and try logging in during the confirm noise."

Angel meanwhile had been tossed to the ground from halfway across the arena. The fiery beast stomped over to finish it off, crouching down in front of it. Its hand reached out to grasp its head.

"Ugh, no yuck!" Lena groaned, instinctively turning her head away. The cracking sounds alone told her more than enough.

"So, that's its finishing move," James said through a hoarse voice. "We'd better be ready for it."

"Speak for yourself, I'm gonna clobber the thing. This is what we're made for, it's why we're here," Lena grumbled while the computer announced the victory.

"And here I thought one too many drinks was the reason I'm here," James commented.

Lena scowled, "oh I forgot. You're here to make stupid jokes and be an overprotective hothead. My mistake." The characterselect lights began again so she hurried off to follow them.

"Oh, now I get it," Jessie said, having overheard the whole thing.

James sighed, "yeah."

Finally the select lights landed on one screen. Lena waited in front of it for the sound cue. When it came she quickly said the word. Instead of dematerialising and appearing in the screen, the shadow shot out of it and overwhelmed her. Like the other games, it changed her outfit into a knight's armour, armed with a sword and shield.

"Oh lame," Lena grumbled. She walked into the arena without anything to block her, every step she made was loud what with the metal clinking together. "I can barely move in this thing."

"Begin Round One."

The armour allowed for very little fluidity, everytime she tried to dodge the beast's attacks she only moved half the distance she needed, and it usually got a hit in because of it. The fifth hit lost her balance, leaving her on the ground. It was a struggle to get up, once again thanks to the armour.

The sounds signalling a round being over rang out. "God damn it. That's it," Lena said when she finally got up. Before the next round could start bits of armour began to be flung off, leaving her with a chain mail. There was little she could do with the bottom half.

"Begin Round Two."

Before the beast could get to her this time Lena flung the shield with an angry grunt. It slammed straight into its face, making him this time wobble and fall over. Lena looked around confused when the music played again. "What? I wasn't finished getting rid of this junk."

"Begin Round Three."

Finally ready to fight, Lena raised her sword, waiting for it to make the first move. The beast responded by beckoning her over. "Hmph. Come on Lena, you can do this. You're a Slayer, a machine..." she said, only then noticing she was reading from a piece of paper that had dropped out of the helmet. "What is this crap, god!" One over shoulder gesture and it was airborne.

Despite being blocked out, the paper drifted over to land by James' feet. He looked at it in disgust once he noticed one detail on it. "Dear god, these are meant to be my lines."

Thanks to stripping 75% of her armour, Lena was able to put up more of a fight than the last two times. The bonk on the head though had annoyed the fire demon so it was going all out too.

The battle came down to the beast's claws and her sword clashing. Lena had enough of the stalemate and swung a kick to its chest. It grabbed her leg on impact, then flung her upwards. She lost her weapon as she tumbled down to hard stone ground, landing first on her back.

"Son of a..." James said, instinctively lurching forward. Once more the wall blocked him.

Her back chose then to *kindly* remind her of the shuttle crash and how she never reported it to the medics for treatment. It felt like nothing at the time. It definitely wasn't now, the pain was throbbing so much she couldn't barely roll over, let alone get up.

The demon approached, its hand ready to deliver the finishing move.

Unlike the others it only got as far as hovering its hand over her face, then a purple transporter beam took her off the field.

James tried to contain his building temper, opting to clench his fists and jaw, so he could focus on the character select screens. He was too engrossed in that to notice the lights dimmed to almost off, giving the arena a creepy feel. The demon's fiery body not helping much with that.

The select light landed on Jessie's screen and lingered for a while. Jessie only knew she was being considered since James was hovering nearby, gesturing his head to his right. Finally it switched to the screen he wanted to login to.

Equipped in nothing more than a cheesy looking ninja outfit, James entered the arena for the final fight. The demon looked far more intimidating up close, but it barely even registered. The image of what it did to Lena still burned into his head, replaying over and over.

Meanwhile in the bowls of the ruined Pegasus, Annika had been left chained inside one of the turbolifts. The door to it half open so she could see outside, not that there was much to look at but debris.

"Oooh, do the rudebox, shake my rudebox," Annika sang to herself, as well as wiggling her bum. "He's so nasty," she did in a deep voice, it brought her to tears. "So right," she said sadly.

A clatter straight ahead of her startled her. The first thought of what it could be that popped into her head was Riker coming back with the fifty inch pizza he promised. "Oh, I hope he puts nutritional supplement six on it. I might get a slice then."

"You kidding?" a man's voice echoed down the corridor. Annika straightened up, fully on guard for whatever torture Damien had in mind this time. Then Wesley stepped out of the shadows. "You could drop it into a septic tank and he'd still eat it,"

Annika's guard dropped, she smiled in relief, "Wesley." That quickly turned into anger, "where have you been? I'm getting a cramp!"

"Well there was this whole bit with being hung upside down over a lava river. God knows where that came from. Then two idiots arguing over a button. I don't want to go into it," Wesley replied. He walked over to uncuff her. "There, better?"

"No," Annika pouted. She massaged her bum for a while. Wesley looked away, disgusted. "Now I am."

"Right. Now I've jailbroke you, I want my payment," Wesley said.

Annika giggled, "all in good time, my cute little friend."

The first round ended relatively quickly. The ninja character had boosted James' speed, or the demon's was slowed. Several blows to its torso and head downed it, all fueled by his anger.

Jessie watched, growing increasingly worried. A bad feeling surged in her chest. There was little she could do where she was, not that she knew what to or what was causing it.

Round two the what started to become pretty clear, at least to her. James was going in all offensively, he did little to avoid receiving any hits himself. One in particular to his ribs stopped him mid attack, it winded him enough to stumble back. The demon backhanded him to the ground to finish that round.

"The bike crash," Jessie whispered as a guess. She never got the chance to find out how and where he was hurt, and there was no question about it being an if, Wesley's car hit him at quite a speed and he was going fast as well. Now she had her answer. Fear and a little anger washed over her, anger since he would've known already and still egged the player on to pick him over her.

Round three began. James did seem to be calming down, it looked to her, this time staying back to let the beast make the first move. His left arm crossed against his torso. It took a swing at him which he caught with his right. He swung around to throw it over his shoulders.

"Don't, why," Jessie found herself mumbling since it only brought him more pain. He had almost doubled over from the move.

The beast got back up, enraged that the much smaller than him mere mortal threw him around like nothing. It extended its claws behind its back on approach. James barely had the time to straighten back up when it swung its clawed arm up towards his face, slicing into his upper cheek and then through his eye.

"No!" Jessie screamed, all fists slammed against the glass.

The demon, not convinced it was over, raised its arm to finish him. James barely saw it coming through his uninjured other eye. He couldn't dodge, and instead grabbed the claws before they could hit again, breaking them in two.

It made little difference, it knocked him to the ground with its other arm.

Jessie looked on helplessly, before it crouched down she squinted her eyes, hoping to block it out. Then she realised there was something she could do. Her hand reached for the commbadge still on her chest.

The Command Centre:

"Game Over!"

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh thank god," Craig said.

"Keep an eye on Damien's territory. You never know, he may try something," Harry said toward Hach and Slax. They nodded.

"User wins."

The whole room fell silent, they watched as the Cube on the big screen lifted into the sky. No one knew what to say.

Harry looked towards Yasmin, expecting her to be the first to say something. She seemed as sombre as everyone else. "Okay, um..."

Craig tensed as soon as he heard the words, shoulders raised all the way up to his ears. A lone tear streaked down his face. "No," was the only one warning everyone got before he started screaming the same word.

Meanwhile:

"Mwahahahahahahaha, aahhahahahahahaaaack..." Damien laughed but he started choking on his yoghurt. Riker patted him on the back and hard.

TO BE CONTINUED