



## Episode 8-17 – Jurisprudence

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"Face it, Katie, it's over," the gray-haired, bearded Admiral Patterson said as he stood, pained, facing his former student, Captain Kathryn Janeway, commanding officer of the Starship Voyager.

"There's nothing you can do. Nothing \*we\* can do."

"I can't accept that," Janeway said stoically, her voice catching in her throat as she spoke the words. She stared, determined, across the desk at Patterson, then to Admiral Owen Paris, who was seated in front of him and across from Janeway. Her eyes challenged them to oppose her. The elder Paris was more weathered, and looked... \*older\* than Janeway remembered him, from their last meeting before Voyager left for the Badlands. It seemed to have been a lifetime ago.

"He's right, Kathryn," Paris added, folding his hands and leaning forward on his elbows to lean across the desk toward her. "There's more than enough evidence against you to bring several dozen convictions. Half of the

admirals in Starfleet want your head because of what's happened with the Borg. Your actions may have been justified given your situation, but no one in the right places will listen to you." He sent a momentary, uncharacteristically uncomfortable glance to his feet, then continued, "Anyone who sides with you could end up in the same position. We... we can't risk that."

The pit of Janeway's stomach suddenly felt extremely hollow. "You," she began, shocked, shifting in her chair in discomfort. "You can't be serious. You're not saying what I think--"

"I'm sorry, Kathryn," Paris said, plaintively holding up a hand, his eyebrows rising in remorse for what he felt he had to do. "It's too dangerous for us to stick our necks out for you like we've done in the past."

"Damn you," Janeway spat angrily, the words almost a growl in her throat. "Damn both of you. You went to the academy with my father. You trained me, helped me get command of Voyager, and now you're just going to abandon me?" As much as she didn't want to admit it, it felt good, snapping at them like that. They deserved it. They were abandoning her.

"It's not that cut-and-dried, Katie," Patterson began. "Hear us out--"

"Why should I?" Janeway retorted. "You aren't going to change \*your\* minds."

"Things could be worse," Paris shot back. "In the twentieth century, some of the charges against you carried the \*death\* penalty, back when there was such a thing. At worst, you'll only get life in prison."

"Some thanks for saving the Federation," Janeway muttered darkly, her gaze going to her hands, which were folded on the table in front of her.

"I'm sure everything will turn out fine in the end, Kathryn," came the voice of Chakotay from behind her. She spun, and saw her first officer standing behind her, his hand resting gently on the back of her chair.

"Chakotay!" Janeway breathed. As she looked up at him, her features suddenly softened, and her posture sagged almost imperceptibly in relief. "I'm glad \*someone's\* here to back me up. I always could count on you." Janeway took a longer look at her first officer, and noticed was that he was in uniform. And not his old uniform like on Voyager, but the new, darker Starfleet uniforms. And then she noticed his collar. "\*Captain\* Chakotay?" she asked in surprise.

"Starfleet offered to reinstate my commission," Chakotay said self-consciously, a touch of what sounded to Janeway like remorse evident in his voice, something that only added to her confusion. "I'm here to say goodbye. Voyager's being decommissioned, and I've been offered command of the next ship to bear the name when she rolls off the assembly line in a few months."

"No," Janeway said, her eyes widening in horror. She straightened up in her chair, her heart pounding in her chest. Another important person in her life was abandoning her when she was at her lowest and she needed all the help she could get. "Not you, too."

With a start, she bolted upright in bed, her eyes vainly searching the darkness of her room. She put a hand to her chest, feeling her pounding heartbeat within and a light sheen of moist sweat on her skin. She let herself fall back into her bed in her quarters at the Starfleet Academy campus, her sweat-dampened hair tangling upon itself on her pillow.

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Harry Kim took aim and fired. A burst of orange phaser fire shot forth, striking a small disk as it arched through the air, deflecting it onto a new trajectory. A moment later, another orange beam lanced out from the opposite side of the room and struck the object, deflecting it back to its previous direction.

"Nice shot, Seven," Kim said, firing again. The disk ricocheted away from the blast, picking up speed. Seven of Nine took aim as it sped toward her, and hit the disk nearly dead on, causing it to return almost precisely on the trajectory it had just come from.

With the disk hurtling straight for his face, Kim dropped to one knee with a grunt and fired. The shot was off, however, and the disk arched to the sideline of the court as it ricocheted away from him. Seven aimed, fired, and the disk sped up again as it headed back toward Kim.

He fired, but missed the swiftly-moving object. He threw himself to the floor as it passed through the air near where his head had been.

"Damn," Kim muttered, picking himself up from the court. "I shouldn't have missed that shot."

"You have won sixty-seven percent of our Velocity matches in the past month, lieutenant," Seven countered.

"I was captain of the team at the academy," Kim protested. "I used to make shots like that all the time." He shook his head, then continued, "Still, I can get up to speeds with you that I never could

with anyone but a hologram before." He sighed, then continued again, "I guess I'm just distracted lately."

"Considering recent events," Seven said as they collected their belongings and made their way out of the enclosed court and into the spacious gymnasium at Starfleet Academy, "that is not surprising."

"Have you heard anything about the captain's trial?" Kim asked, wiping the sweat from his face with his towel.

"Only that which was on the news," Seven replied. "My impression is that Starfleet is seeking a... 'scapegoat,' as I believe Lieutenant Paris described it, for the recent changes in the behavior of the Borg, and the captain is a convenient target for their vitriol, given her extensive contacts and engagements with the Collective."

"That's the same impression I'm getting," Kim said glumly, then sighed once more and decided it might be better to change the subject. "I wish things had gone a little better for the Equinox crew."

"The sentence they received," Seven said, "was relatively light, considering the charges brought against them."

"I guess so," Kim admitted. "I never really thought about how we'd all get split up when we got home. Sam can't see Naomi until this is all over. Hell, they even took Miral away from Tom and B'Elanna!"

"I had not heard that," Seven said, turning her gaze toward Kim in surprise at the revelation.

"Tom's parents took her in," Kim said as he and Seven stopped in front of the doors to the locker rooms. "He and B'Elanna really took it hard when they found out that Starfleet wouldn't let them keep her here until everything settles down. The Cardassians haven't let up on their demands about the Maquis, either."

"The Dominion forces lost the war against the Federation," Seven said, puzzled. "Why would their demands carry any weight?"

"I don't know if they're being taken seriously or just being humored," Kim replied. "The Cardassians have been getting a lot of sympathy since the end of the war; they lost a lot of their people when they rebelled against the Dominion."

"They are weak," Seven spat, her eyes suddenly narrowing, her face twisting into a snarl. "They deserve no mercy."

Kim's eyes widened in shock. "Seven," he began, concerned, "what's gotten over you? That doesn't sound like you at all."

"Perhaps I am beginning to come to terms with the reality of life," Seven retorted, her tone vehement.

"Look," Kim replied, uneasy with her sudden change in demeanor, "I've got to get ready for my debriefing. I'll catch you later." With that, he turned and walked through the nearby doorway and into the locker room.

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The world was barren. Desolate. Where once was a fertile grassland, only dust and dry dirt remained, without so much as a molecule of water to be found. All because, several weeks earlier, a Sernaix fleet carrying a weapon of mass destruction was destroyed in orbit of this world, their weapon detonated above its uninhabited surface. All the nucleogenic particles in the planet's once-lush atmosphere were broken down, and all the water that already existed on the surface was vaporized in a massive secondary explosion from the destabilizing Sernaix weapon. And without the nucleogenics, what little water vapor that still remained in the atmosphere was unable to condense to the point where it could fall back to the ground as rain.

A speck of light glinted in the sky, eventually growing larger and revealing itself to be a Starfleet runabout. It began easing its way across the devastated surface of the planet before settling down into a soft landing, the dirt crunching under the pads on the bottoms of the small vessel's warp nacelles and flat belly. Within moments, the door on the side of the ship opened, and the people within began to make their way into the open air outside.

"Welcome to Sector 19658," said the balding Commander Sean Hamilton as he stepped out of the runabout Colorado and onto the desolate surface of a barren planet. As he put a battered, floppy cap on his head to protect his sensitive scalp from the beating sun, several other Starfleet crewmen and junior officers exited the vessel behind him.

"Look," one of the crewmen called out, pointing toward a nearby ridge. "It's over there!"

"Of course it is, crewman," said the cocksure Lieutenant Kevin Smallen, who stood behind Hamilton in the Colorado's open hatch. "That's why I landed here."

"Yes, sir," the young man said, chastened.

"Come on, people," Hamilton said, grinning. "Grab your gear and let's get to work." He took hold of an antigrav platform laden down with gear and supplies and began pushing it toward the nearby ridge.

"Sir?" one of the young men, Ensign David Russel, asked.

"Yes, ensign?" Hamilton replied.

"What exactly are we looking for, sir?" Russel asked, squinting against the blazing sunlight.

"I have no idea," Hamilton said. "There's a lot about this stuff we still don't understand. We're just here to collect whatever we can and let the scientists figure it all out. They should be arriving this afternoon." He looked over to the younger man. "I hear we've even got an expert from Voyager due here as soon as he's finished with his debriefing on Earth."

"You mean Harry Kim, sir?" Russel asked. Hamilton looked at him in surprise, and Russel quickly added, "I heard about him on the news, sir. He and Voyager's Borg crewman were the only ones to ever set foot on a Sernaix ship."

Several meters behind them, Smallen listened intently as he helped unload equipment from the runabout.

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Janeway pondered her reflection in the mirror, something she'd been doing a lot since Voyager's return home. She wasn't looking at her face, or her hair, or any other part of herself, having

already determined her appearance to be as good as it was going to get, but was hoping instead to reach some sort of epiphany. The other day, she had even caught herself hoping that Q would appear, and this would all turn out to be one of his twisted games.

She shook her head, trying to will away such thoughts. It wouldn't help to bury herself in self-pity, a lesson she had already learned the hard way. She straightened her dress uniform, still unaccustomed to the white garment, then turned and made her way to the door. As it parted, she saw her ever-present guard, Lieutenant Dave Evans, standing alertly next to the entrance.

"Good morning, captain," the young man said flatly.

"Good morning, lieutenant," she replied, forcing herself to smile. "Let's go, shall we?"

"Whatever you say, ma'am," he replied with little more emotion than a Vulcan. He led the way to the unremarkable hover-car that was waiting outside for them, then held the door as she took her seat inside. As Janeway settled into her chair at the rear of the vehicle, Evans stepped in and sealed the door. He nodded to the driver, and they were quickly on their way.

"I'm not looking forward to having to deal with the press this morning," Janeway muttered, partly to break the silence once the vehicle had started moving.

"I wouldn't worry about them, ma'am," Evans replied, but from his tone, Janeway could tell he wasn't offering reassurance, just stating the facts as he saw them.

"I'm not," Janeway said. "The last few weeks have just been a lot to take in." She looked out the window, the remainder of the short trip across San Francisco passing in silence.

Evans stepped out of the vehicle after it came to a stop, holding the door open for Janeway. He stepped off ahead of her, clearing a path through the crowd of reporters. Their cameras and lights blazed, poked and intruded into her face, obscuring her view and frustrating her more than she'd been frustrated by anyone short of Q himself.

"Captain Janeway!" she heard from dozens of voices in the throng around her. Questions. Always so many questions. "Can you tell us how your trial is going?" Microphones and video cameras poked at her face. "Is it true that you were assimilated by the Borg?" She tried to ignore them. "Do you think you could have prevented the death of Lieutenant Carey?" Her ears burned with shame and rage at both the memory and the question. "Was there really a Cardassian aboard your ship?" Almost to the door. "Did you make any effort to take Captain Ransom alive?" Ignore them. "Is it true that Temporal Investigations--" The question was cut off as the door shut behind her. She sighed in relief, then followed Evans toward the court room.

The pair practically marched down the nearly deserted hallway, their boots clicking in step on the glossy, immaculately waxed and polished marble floors. They passed massive oak doors and huge marble pillars, all centuries old, until they finally reached their destination. Evans held one of the huge wooden doors open for the captain, and Janeway nodded gratefully to the younger man as she stepped past him and into the courtroom.

Once inside, Janeway found her attorney, the Vulcan Commander T'Sai, waiting for her at the defense table, studiously reading a PADD. As expected, Janeway saw the younger woman's face was simultaneously serene, serious, and devoid of outward displays of emotion.

"Commander," Janeway said as she took her seat at the defense table. The table, like the rest of the courthouse and the majority of its furnishings, was yet another relic from the days when the

United States stretched from one side of the North American continent to the other. What modern technology there was in the building was expertly concealed, to preserve the historical appearance of the building as a monument to humanity's forebears as well as to satisfy the large number of Federation citizens who felt strongly about maintaining the unique artifacts of member worlds for the enjoyment of generations yet unborn.

"Captain," T'Sai said, acknowledging Janeway with a brief glance up from her PADD.

The doors opened, and the prosecutor, Commander Shelrak, walked into the room, the relatively unobtrusive metal circles of an atmospheric converter attached to the corners of his mouth. A methane-breathing species, the device was a necessity for the reptilian Axanar to join the many oxygen-breathing races of the Federation in their native environments. He took his seat silently, save for a light sucking sound every time he inhaled deeply of his native atmosphere.

Several minutes passed in silence before a lieutenant stepped from the doorway leading to the chambers of the presiding judge, Admiral Phillipa Louvois. A moment before he opened his mouth to speak, Janeway noted that it was a different man than had served in the capacity of bailiff for the past few days.

"All rise," the lieutenant stated brusquely before stepping aside. "Admiral Phillipa Louvois, presiding." With that, the admiral stepped into the court room.

"Be seated," Louvois said as she took her seat. "Let the record show that the court-martial of Captain Kathryn Janeway has reconvened at zero-eight-hundred hours on Stardate 55831.3 The court will now come to order," she said, then tapped her gavel against the bell set out on the bench before her. She looked up, nodded to the prosecutor, and said, "Commander Shelrak, it's your show."

Shelrak rose from his seat. "The prosecution calls Admiral Alynna Nechayev," he said through his respirator. A moment later, the doors opened and Nechayev was led into the courtroom.

"Do you swear to tell the truth," the bailiff began, stepping up before her as she stood in front of the seat in the witness box next to Louvois' raised desk, "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

"I do," Nechayev replied, looking sternly at the bailiff as though he'd just accused her of being a pathological liar.

"You may be seated, admiral," Louvois said. As she took her seat, the lieutenant turned and made his way back to his desk in the corner of the courtroom, while Shelrak stepped forward.

"Admiral," he began, "you're Starfleet's senior expert and tactician in matters pertaining to the Borg, correct?"

"That's correct," Nechayev said, then added snidely, "For whatever it's worth anymore."

"In your view," Shelrak continued, apparently ignoring her comment, "how would you describe Captain Janeway's interaction with the Borg?"

"Captain Janeway has shown a reckless disregard for the safety of her ship and crew in her dealings with the Borg," Nechayev said harshly.

"Objection, your honor" T'Sai interrupted, rising from her seat beside Janeway. "The totality of the captain's record clearly shows her dedication to the safety of her crew, as well as her determination to get Voyager home from both the Delta Quadrant and the bubble universe."

"Your honor," Shelrak said, turning to face Louvois, "if the witness could be allowed to explain her interpretation of the captain's actions?"

"Very well," Louvois said after a moment's pause. "Objection overruled. You may proceed, admiral."

"Thank you, your honor," Nechayev said, then continued, "On Stardate 50984, Voyager came upon Borg-controlled space. Rather than take the ship around Borg territory in an attempt to avoid contact, or settle on an uninhabited planet as her first officer suggested, Captain Janeway ordered that the ship travel directly through their territory."

"Objection," T'Sai repeated, rising from her seat once more. "Sensors showed that area to be devoid of a Borg presence."

"Save it for cross-examination, commander," Louvois warned. "Objection overruled."

"Understood," T'Sai said, returning to her seat.

"Please continue, admiral," Louvois said.

"When Voyager entered Borg space," Nechayev said, "they encountered a race known only as Species 8472. This race posed a serious threat to the Borg and could have made for a powerful ally, had Janeway not decided instead to negotiate an alliance with the Borg. She offered to give one of the Federation's gravest enemies the means to annihilate the only species we know of that's capable of defeating them, just so she could satisfy her convenience."

"Admiral," Shelrak said, "that was only the captain's \*first\* encounter with the Borg, correct?"

"That's correct," Nechayev confirmed.

"Could you give the court," Shelrak continued, "your interpretation of those later events, as well?"

"Suffice it to say," Nechayev said, "that Captain Janeway's tactical blunders not only risked her ship and crew, but her actions have jeopardized the lives of every being in the galaxy."

"How so?" Shelrak asked.

"Advanced technology," Nechayev replied, "was nearly lost to the Borg on numerous occasions. Janeway herself and key members of her senior staff -- each with vital tactical data on both the ship and the Federation -- were even assimilated by the Borg. Intentionally. But perhaps most serious were the captain's actions immediately prior to Voyager's initial return to the Alpha Quadrant. As a direct result, the now-destabilized Borg pose an even greater threat to the Federation, and the galaxy at large, than ever before."

It took every ounce of will Janeway could muster not to let her head drop at the admiral's accusation. She looked to the jury, who were listening intently to the admiral and taking furious notes, and silently hoped that her attorney could muster a defense good enough to sway them.

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"Incredible," Captain Bruce Maddox said as he examined the mobile emitter attached to the Doctor's upper arm. "I'd heard this emitter was small, but I didn't expect it to be so... \*tiny.\*"

"Excuse me, Captain Maddox," the Doctor said, "but I thought you were here to debrief me."

"Since when does somebody debrief a computer program?" Maddox snorted, paging through a report on a PADD in his right hand as he made his way around the bare table at the center of the small, spartan room the two shared. "The only reason I haven't decompiled your program yet is because the bureaucrats are worried you might really be sentient." He paused, twisting his face as he read. "Just what the hell have you been doing to your program? Opera? Dating? \*Intimate\* relationships?"

"I'm more than just a Mark I EMH," the Doctor replied indignantly. "I've expanded well beyond my original programming."

"More isn't necessarily better," Maddox grunted, his attention focused more intently on the PADD he held than on the Doctor.

"You don't believe that I'm sentient, do you?" the Doctor asked bitterly, his expression pained.

"Not really," Maddox replied, his attention remaining fixed on the PADD.

"What about Data?" the Doctor asked. "Do you think \*he's\* sentient?"

"I'm still not sure," Maddox said, looking at the Doctor for the first time since the "debriefing" began. "As I've gotten to know him over the last few years, I'm starting to think so."

"You haven't taken the opportunity to get to know me," the Doctor retorted, "and you've already convinced yourself that I'm not."

"Look," Maddox snarled, dropping the PADD forcefully onto the tabletop, "ever since Data was first declared alive when he applied to the academy, people have been coming out of the woodwork claiming that their replicator was alive, or that their computer held conversations with them... The occasions where we actually have found a machine that might qualify as sentient are so rare that we've got a hard time taking them seriously."

"That sounds like a personal problem," the Doctor said dryly.

"Holograms are programmed to seem like real people," Maddox said. "That makes it a little more difficult to determine sentience than with something like nanites or the Exocomps."

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"Sir," Ensign Russel began, his gaze fixed solidly on his tricorder as he spoke, "I'm getting indications of a Starfleet signature." He and Commander Hamilton stood in the midst of what was quickly becoming the survey team's field headquarters. All around them, crewmen and officers were busy erecting the standard issue, prefabricated structures common among Starfleet's temporary bases. Several people from one of the science teams had already ventured out into the debris field nearby.



"Ignore it," Hamilton said. "I was told to expect this, and to give it a wide berth until further notice."

"Why, sir?" Russel asked. "Who would give an order like that?"

"Temporal Investigations is in on this one, ensign," Hamilton said. "I've learned not to ask questions when they're involved."

"Aye, sir," Russel said.

"Is there something on your mind, ensign?" Hamilton asked when the young man stayed at his side, uncomfortably quiet.

"Ah, yes, sir," Russel replied. "I'm still trying to figure out what to make of all this." He waved his arm at the debris field several meters in front of them. "From what I've read, these... Sernaix had a massive fleet, ready to do to Earth what they did to this planet."

"And Voyager saved the day before anyone even realized they'd made it back home," Hamilton concluded.

"Yes, sir," Russel said. "Captain Janeway's a hero, sir. Why would Starfleet court-martial her?"

"There's obviously a lot of things that happened on Voyager that haven't been made public," Hamilton said. "Things we may never know. We just have to trust that our superiors know what they're doing, and follow our orders when they come."

"Yes, sir," Russel said.

"I wouldn't worry too much about Voyager right now, Mr. Russel," Hamilton said. The ensign nodded, then turned and made his way back to the excavation site. Hamilton watched the young man for a moment, then turned and headed back to the camp.

"How are the science labs coming, Mr. Smallen?" Hamilton asked as he approached the pilot, who was working on a building with several other officers and crewmen.

"Not as quickly as I'd like, sir," Smallen replied. "We're still having trouble resolving the power flow issue."

Hamilton nodded. They'd had a recurring problem for the past several hours with the power conduits. They'd brought along a generator capable of providing enough energy to run a small city, but for some unexplained reason, the power transfer conduits weren't handling the load being put on them.

"I'll speak with the engineers again," Hamilton said. "Other than that, how's it going?"

"Once we finish off this one," Smallen replied, pointing to the building in question, "we've just got one more to go. We should have them all up by nightfall."

"Good job," Hamilton said. "With any luck, the engineers will have solved the power problem by then. Carry on," he said, then left to speak with the project's engineering staff.

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"Admiral," T'Sai began, approaching the witness stand, "you have read the entire report on the events surrounding the operation that Captain Janeway and Commander Chakotay code-named 'Scorpion, correct?"

"Yes," Nechayev said warily.

"Then you're aware," T'Sai said, "that Voyager's sensors showed the area nicknamed the 'Northwest Passage' to be completely devoid of any Borg presence. Is that also correct?"

"Yes," Nechayev replied, shifting in her seat.

"Did that report," T'Sai continued, "not also include an explanation that Kes, an Ocampan native to the Delta Quadrant, had made telepathic contact with Species 8472 once they had entered the region, and that she quoted them as saying, 'The weak shall perish?'"

"I believe so," Nechayev admitted.

"Then based on the information at hand," T'Sai said raising her head slightly, "would it not have been foolish for the captain to risk exposing her crew to even more danger than they were already facing by approaching Species 8472?"

"She shouldn't have gotten involved at all," Nechayev replied harshly, "if for no other reason than that the Prime Directive prohibits involvement in conflicts that do not pose a direct threat to Federation interests."

"The possible annihilation of the Borg," T'Sai countered, raising an eyebrow, "by an even more aggressive and perhaps more dangerous species of xenophobes that apparently destroyed all other life forms in their home dimension does not qualify as a threat to the Federation?"

"They were attacking the Borg, not us," Nechayev said, her eyes narrowing. "She could have used that distraction to simply pass through Borg space while they were too busy to notice a single, relatively insignificant starship."

"Admiral," T'Sai began, "are you familiar with Starfleet General Order Thirty?"

"I don't recall the exact wording," Nechayev said carefully, "but I am familiar with it, yes."

"Allow me to refresh your memory," T'Sai said, picking up a PADD from the defense table. "Starfleet Command recognizes the right of each ship commander to interpret the specifications of the Prime Directive as he or she sees fit, consistent with the conditions of other existing general orders in effect, and based upon circumstances that may arise in dealing with newly discovered sentient races. "Would it not follow, then, that the captain's actions regarding both the Borg and Species 8472 were legal?"

"Perhaps, but--"

"And in regard to your comments on the captain's actions against the Borg last year," T'Sai continued, interrupting the admiral, "didn't you give standing orders that any and all advantages that could be found over the Borg should be exploited?"

"That was intended," Nechayev replied, "for instances such as when Captain Picard released the Borg known as Hugh back to the Collective

unharmd when he could have used the opportunity to infect the Borg with a computer virus that would bring them to their knees."

"In what way does that differ from infecting the Collective with a biological virus?" T'Sai asked. Nechayev opened her mouth, then shut it again without speaking. "No further questions, your honor," T'Sai said, returning to her seat.

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Kim sat at a small table in Starfleet Headquarters. The room was sparsely decorated, the dull gray walls unadorned. A light shone brightly over the table at which the young lieutenant sat, his thoughts wandering as he waited for his debriefing to begin. He tugged at the collar of the new uniform he'd been issued in anticipation, the golden fabric stretching slightly against his fingers. It had been a few weeks, but he was finally getting used to the new design's fit. The fabric was a bit heavier than he'd grown accustomed to, but otherwise, it actually was pretty comfortable.

Despite the time that had passed since Voyager's last, eventful meeting with the Sernaix, the dreams that Kim had experienced haunted him still. After his mind meld with Commander Tuvok, he could remember nearly everything about them, and the image of Earth being sterilized and destroyed, even though it wasn't real, still never failed to terrify him.

Kim's thoughts were interrupted when another young man walked through the doorway. Looking first to the man's collar, Kim saw that he was dealing with a lieutenant-commander, then he moved his gaze upward to see the face of his superior officer. He drew in a sharp breath, then tried to compose himself.

"Dan?" Kim asked, shocked. "Dan Byrd?"

"It's damn good to see you again, Harry," a broadly grinning Byrd replied, taking a seat opposite Kim and casually dropping a PADD on the table between them.

"I thought you went into engineering," Kim said.

"For a few years," Byrd said. "I transferred to logistics during the last year of the Dominion War." He leaned forward over the table, propping himself up by his elbows, his arms crossed in front of him.

"So how did \*you\* get to be the one to debrief me?" Kim asked in disbelief.

"Two days risking harassment charges from my commanding officer," Byrd said, half-seriously. "I wasn't her first choice for the assignment, but I finally convinced her. Told her that my time with you at the academy could be an asset during a debriefing." Byrd grinned broadly.

"So what have you been up to for the last eight years?" Kim asked.

"Hey," Byrd interrupted playfully, "I thought I was the one who's supposed to be asking the questions here!"

"Well, then," Kim said, grinning and leaning back in his seat, far more at ease with the situation than he'd been a few moments earlier. "Ask away, \*Commander\* Byrd."

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"The prosecution calls Mr. Peter Tanner," Shelrak said as he stood behind his seat. The doors to the courtroom opened to admit the witness -- a trim, older man with chiseled features and graying hair. He carried himself with a confidence that bordered on arrogance.

"Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" the bailiff asked as Tanner stood in the witness box with his right hand raised.

"I do," Tanner said, his voice rough and throaty.

"You may be seated, Mr. Tanner," Louvois said as the lieutenant stepped away.

"Mr. Tanner," Shelrak said as he approached the witness a moment later, "could you tell the court what you do for a living?"

Tanner nodded. "I'm the director of the Department of Temporal Investigations," he said.

"What exactly does that mean?" Shelrak asked.

"I'm in charge of the administration of the department," Tanner said.

"What does the department do?" Shelrak asked, sucking in another lungful of methane.

"We've been tasked with overseeing time travel," Tanner explained, "and policing the timeline."

"Policing the timeline?" Shelrak asked inclining his head toward the witness box.

"There are occasions," Tanner said, "where individuals have been able to visit the past. We're here to make sure their presence has as little impact on the timeline as possible, and that events unfold as history originally recorded."

"So," Shelrak said, "that would make you an expert on the Temporal Prime Directive, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," Tanner replied.

"You're aware, then," Shelrak continued, "of Captain Janeway's encounters with time travel?"

"Quite," Tanner grimaced, turning his head slightly to the side.

"Could you describe them for the court?" Shelrak asked, folding his hands behind his back.

"Where do I start?" Tanner muttered sardonically. "Janeway's becoming as infamous in the department as James Kirk."

"From the beginning would suffice," Shelrak replied.

Tanner laughed. "Beginning," he chuckled. "End. This is time travel we're talking about. What's the difference?" He chuckled again, then continued, "Let's see... The 'first' incident DTI has on record relative to the crew's subjective perception of the flow of time occurred just a few weeks after Voyager was stranded in the Delta Quadrant."

Janeway leaned over to T'Sai. "I don't remember anything with time travel happening that early," she whispered.

"Objection, your honor," T'Sai said immediately, rising from her seat. "Captain Janeway has no recollection of any occurrences of time travel during the time period specified by the witness, nor is there any indication of such an event in the ship's logs."

"Director Tanner," Louvois said in confusion, turning to the witness box, "I assume there's an explanation for that?"

"Yes, your honor," Tanner said. "I was just about to get to that."

"Very well, then," Louvois said. "Objection overruled. Continue, director."

"Thank you, your honor," Tanner said graciously. "In what was later determined to be a predestination paradox, Voyager detected a massive explosion on an M-Class planet they were passing at the time. Janeway ordered the ship change course to investigate, and both she and Lieutenant Paris were inadvertently transported to that planet on the day before the explosion. Eventually, they discovered that they were in fact responsible for causing that explosion. They did, however, manage to alter the outcome of those events, preventing the explosion and effectively 'resetting' the timeline to its state immediately prior to their detection of the event, which is why the captain has no memory of it."

"Objection," T'Sai said, rising from her seat with a barely-detectable trace of exasperation in her voice, an incredible show of frustration by Vulcan standards. "By the witness' own admission, that timeline never happened because of the actions of an alternate reality version of the defendant. By definition, that was not the same woman who sits before you today, and therefore she cannot be charged for any transgressions committed by her counterpart. I move that the director's comments on that event be stricken from the record, and any charges filed for this incident be dismissed."

"Sustained," Louvois agreed. "Director," she added, looking toward Tanner, "you will refrain from commenting on events from other timelines, and your previous comments will be removed from the record. Furthermore, any charges related to that incident are hereby dropped. Proceed, Commander Shelrak."

"Thank you, your honor," Shelrak said. "Director, what relevant instances of time travel are on the captain's record?"

"The first began on Stardate 50312.5," Tanner began. "An individual claiming to be a representative of the twenty-ninth century equivalent of DTI appeared in Voyager's path and tried to destroy the ship without attempting to follow any alternative courses of action, resulting in an apparent predestination paradox that, ostensibly, caused him to come to the twenty-fourth century Delta Quadrant in an attempt to destroy Voyager in the hope of preventing that paradox. Voyager found itself in Earth orbit in 1996, and the other individual, who called himself Captain Braxton, was determined to have spent three decades on the surface of the planet by that point."

"You have your doubts as to the validity of his story?" Shelrak asked.

"We haven't been able to corroborate it," Tanner admitted, "not to mention that he apparently ignored several existing protocols, but there could be a number of reasons for that."

"I see," Shelrak said. "And could you describe Captain Janeway's transgressions during this incident?"

"Certainly," Tanner said. "Most notably, she allowed the ship to be observed by twentieth-century natives, those under her command engaged in phaserfights in broad daylight in the heavily-populated Los Angeles area, and she destroyed the timeship occupied by the man widely acknowledged to have played a major role in the development of early computers, killing him. Furthermore, she knowingly contaminated the timeline by maintaining possession of technology from the future."

"Specifically, director," Shelrak asked, "what technology would that be?"

"The portable holo-emitter," Tanner said.

"You said that was the first incident," Shelrak said, holding his hands behind his back. "Would you tell the court about the second?"

"That occurred over several time periods," Tanner said. "On Stardate 52861, Captain Janeway became involved in another temporal incident with the man calling himself Captain Braxton. She was transported to what he said was the twenty-ninth century, along with Seven of Nine, who had been taken from what was at that point a possible future version of Voyager moments before it was destroyed. When Seven of Nine was aboard Voyager in the past, long before the ship ever entered Borg space, the captain forced her to reveal details about the future, as well as making comments that illustrate her disregard for the integrity of space-time."

"Objection," T'Sai said, rising once more from her seat. "Captain Janeway has informed me that she has no memory of those events, either. I move that the director's comments be stricken from the record and any charges related to that incident be dropped."

"Director," Louvois said, turning to Tanner in annoyance, "is that another timeline that was later invalidated?"

"Ah, yes," Tanner admitted uncomfortably. "However, your honor, it illustrates --"

"Objection sustained," Louvois said, then turned to address the jury. "Mr. Tanner's last comments are to be disregarded, and any related charges for that incident are hereby dropped. Director," Louvois turned again to face Tanner, "one more time and I'll hold you in contempt of court. I won't warn you again."

"Are there any other \*relevant\* events?" Shelrak asked, visibly frustrated.

"Yes," Tanner said. "One more."

"Enlighten the court, please," Shelrak said.

"It occurred just prior to Voyager's initial return to the Alpha Quadrant," Tanner said. "She was contacted by a future version of herself, and not only allowed her to come aboard, but was given advanced technology by her future self."

Janeway sighed. The Admiral. She knew it was only a matter of time before that came up.

"And this was a violation of the Temporal Prime Directive?" Shelrak asked.

"Most definitely," Tanner said.

"Objection," T'Sai said. "The captain's future counterpart is liable for this incident, not my client. It also should be mentioned that this future counterpart's timeline no longer exists."

"Your honor," Shelrak said, "the witness was just about to explain how, in these circumstances, both parties are liable for the violation in question."

"Objection overruled," Louvois said.

"Thank you, your honor," Shelrak said. "Director, would you please explain for the court how the captain is liable for the violation instigated by her future counterpart?"

"Of course," Tanner said. "Because Captain Janeway is as much bound by the Temporal Prime Directive as her future counterpart no doubt also was, she was obligated to avoid all contact with 'the Admiral,' as Captain Janeway referred to her counterpart in her logs. She was even more stringently prohibited from accepting any technology from individuals known to have originated from the future."

"And Captain Janeway did neither?" Shelrak asked.

"That's correct," Tanner said.

"And what future technology," Shelrak asked, "was involved in this incident?"

"Advanced shielding systems," Tanner said, "as well as transphasic torpedoes."

Shelrak nodded, his hands clasped behind his back as he stood in front of the witness box. "No further questions, your honor," he said. As he returned to the prosecution's table across the aisle from the defense, he nodded to T'Sai and said, "Your witness, commander."

"Director Tanner," T'Sai said, rising gracefully from her seat, "you have only mentioned two relevant instances where the captain allegedly violated the Temporal Prime Directive."

"She did," Tanner shot back.

"That is for the court to decide," T'Sai said evenly. "In the first instance, when Voyager was transported to the past," she continued, "did Captain Janeway and her landing party beam down to Los Angeles in their uniforms?"

"No," Tanner replied.

"What were they wearing?" T'Sai asked.

"Civilian attire of the time period," Tanner replied.

"Did they beam down in view of the natives of the time period?" T'Sai asked.

"No," Tanner replied.

T'Sai arched an eyebrow. "I see," she said. "Did she intentionally take any actions that indicated that she came from the future?"

"No," Tanner admitted softly.

"I don't believe the jurors could hear you," T'Sai said. "Would you please repeat yourself, louder this time?"

"No," Tanner repeated clearly.

"Thank you," T'Sai said, pausing for a moment before continuing her questioning on a new topic. "You mentioned the crew's inadvertent acquisition of the portable holographic emitter while on Earth in the year 1996. Tell me, do you know whether current holographic technology is capable of producing a portable holographic emission system?"

"That's not my specialty," Tanner replied.

"If it pleases the court," T'Sai said, picking up one of the PADDs from the defense table, "the defense would like to introduce the following scientific paper regarding holographic emission technology from Stardate 50485 into evidence." She handed the PADD to Louvois, who glanced at the screen.

"So entered," Louvois said, handing the PADD back to T'Sai.

"Director Tanner," T'Sai said, handing the PADD to Tanner, "would you please read for the court the highlighted selection?"

Tanner looked at the PADD, then read, "It is therefore within the realm of possibility that portable holographic emitters small enough to fit within the palm of the hand can be constructed within ten years."

"It stands repeating," T'Sai said, taking the PADD back from Tanner, "that this was published nearly a year before contact was first reestablished with Voyager. The emitter obtained by their holographic doctor was still unknown to the Federation."

"Objection," Shelrak interrupted, rising from his seat. "I fail to hear the question in my colleague's last statement."

"I was just getting to that, your honor," T'Sai countered.

"Don't take too long, commander," Louvois said. "Objection overruled."

"Director," T'Sai continued, "given this evidence, wouldn't you say the damage to the timeline in this circumstance is minimal, if not nonexistent?"

"I disagree," Tanner said. "There's a big difference from a scientist saying something's possible ten \*years\* from now and a scientist saying something's possible ten \*days\* from now."

"Even then," T'Sai argued, "is it also not plausible to consider that the acquisition by Voyager's crew of the holographic emitter in question is in itself a predestination paradox? After all, director, your own counterpart from the future certainly has had, or will have had, ample opportunity to travel back in time to Voyager shortly after its return to the Delta Quadrant after that incident and simply take the emitter away from them."

Tanner sighed. "That is a possibility," he admitted.



T'Sai raised an eyebrow, as if in triumph, then began a new line of questioning. "You have said," she began, "that you believe Captain Janeway to be responsible for the events initiated by her counterpart from a possible future, is that true?"

"Partly," Tanner said.

"Please," T'Sai said, "elaborate."

"From the moment contact was made with the Admiral's shuttle," Tanner began, "Captain Janeway knew that her counterpart was from the future. She was under no obligation whatsoever to take any orders from her. And yet, she did. She allowed the Admiral to board Voyager, and then accepted technology from the future, an action which has already had major repercussions on the timeline."

"Did the Admiral's presence in itself not invalidate her timeline of origin?" T'Sai asked.

"We believe so," Tanner admitted.

"And wouldn't any action undertaken by Captain Janeway to approach the transwarp hub have also invalidated that same timeline?" T'Sai continued.

"Yes," Tanner said.

"Captain Janeway had acquired several other technologies," T'Sai began, "from hospitable races Voyager encountered during its time in the Delta Quadrant. If that were the case with the shield technology and the transphasic torpedoes, as the general populace currently believes, would we be holding this discussion?"

"Not at all," Tanner said.

"By your own admission," T'Sai said, "the Admiral's timeline had already been invalidated by her very presence. How, then, could any actions taken by the captain have had any impact on a timeline that you've already admitted ceased to exist before the captain had taken any action one way or the other?"

Tanner sat, blinking, as he tried to explain the charges against Janeway.

"Director Tanner?" T'Sai asked, prompting him to answer.

"It's safe to say that scientific advancement," Tanner began cautiously, "would have continued at a similar rate as in the timeline from which the Admiral originated. Any changes to that timeline, be it tampering by the Admiral or Voyager returning by its own means, would alter that balance."

"But that is only one \*possible\* timeline," T'Sai said.

"Yes," Tanner acknowledged.

"What's to say the future of that timeline is any more valid than the future of the 'new' timeline we're on now?" T'Sai asked.

"That's not part of my job description," Tanner replied.

"In other words," T'Sai said, raising an eyebrow once more, "you're not qualified to answer that."

Tanner pursed his lips. His head dropped and he gazed at his hands in his lap, then shook his head and looked up at T'Sai. "I don't know if anyone is," he replied.

T'Sai looked up to Louvois. "No further questions, your honor," she said. As T'Sai took her seat next to Janeway at the defense table, one of her adjutants, a young Andorian ensign, came up from behind her and began to whisper into her ear. T'Sai's eyebrow began to arch as he spoke to her.

"Your honor," T'Sai said, rising from her seat once the adjutant had stepped away. "The defense requests a short recess so that I may confer with my client."

Louvois looked to Commander Shelrak, who had been organizing his notes on a PADD while T'Sai's adjutant was delivering his message. "Any objections from the prosecution?" Louvois asked.

"No, your honor," Shelrak replied, looking up from his PADD as he spoke to the admiral.

"Very well, then," Louvois said. "This court will recess for twenty minutes." She tapped her gavel against the bell before her, then rose and left the courtroom.

\*\*\*

"Machine life forms aren't unheard of," the Doctor said sharply. "Even a century ago, their existence was proven by the discovery of V'Ger."

"You're hardly V'Ger," Maddox replied.

"Neither is Data," the Doctor protested. "He was created by a genius, and so was I."

"I have to admit," Maddox said, "Doctor Zimmerman *is* a genius in his field, but there is still a difference."

"That being?" the Doctor asked.

"Data and his... siblings," Maddox said, "were constructed with the sole goal being to create an artificial life form."

"So," the Doctor replied acidly, "life doesn't just *happen*?"

"You were designed to be a piece of equipment," Maddox said.

"So were the Exocomps," the Doctor replied quickly.

"You're a hologram," Maddox replied.

"And that just explains everything away?" the Doctor asked incredulously. "What about Moriarty? Or Vic Fontaine?"

"How do you know about them?" Maddox asked sharply.

"Lieutenant Barclay told me about them," the Doctor said, folding his arms across his chest.

"The jury's still out on them," Maddox replied sullenly.

"What does it take to convince you people?" the Doctor asked. "Why don't you believe I'm alive like everyone else on Voyager does?"

"Their objectivity is questionable," Maddox replied.

"And so is yours," the Doctor spat. "I've read about you. You were the only person to object to Data's entry into Starfleet, and later, you even tried to disassemble him, all the while saying he wasn't alive. Well, he is, and so am I!"

\*\*\*

"Wait a minute," Byrd interrupted. "You mean Lyndsay's still alive?"

"Sort of," Kim explained. "Her body was reanimated and genetically altered. She's still the same person, more or less."

"It must have been tough," Byrd said, "losing her a second time."

"Yeah," Kim replied. "It was. But at least I know that she's still alive out there. Sort of."

"Okay," Byrd said, looking at the list of required questions on his PADD, trying to bring the debriefing back to business. "The Hirogen takeover of the ship. What else happened?"

"What do you mean?" Kim asked.

"I've read the report," Byrd said. "What did you leave out?"

"Everything that happened," Kim said evenly, "went into my report."

"That's not what I meant," Byrd replied. "It didn't tell me what was going on in your head."

"I felt helpless," Kim said, "when the Hirogen took over and had me keep the ship together while they ripped my friends to pieces on the holodecks. I remember working maintenance outside the door to Holodeck Two one night... I still have nightmares from the screams I heard, sometimes. I didn't see most of what happened to the crew, thankfully, although sometimes I wonder if what I'd imagined from the noises I heard through the bulkheads was worse or not. I tried to avoid Sickbay if I could. I just fixed whatever new problems cropped up from the addition of all those holoemitters in the ship, and tried to come up with a plan to retake the ship."

"The, uh," Byrd began uncertainly a moment later, taken aback by his old friend's reply, "the Quantum Slipstream drive. Tell me about it."

"It's something we've \*got\* to get working properly," Kim said. "If we'd had one of those, we would've been home within months of getting stuck in the Delta Quadrant in the first place. Seven said once that the theory behind it is similar to Borg transwarp methods."

"Hmm," Byrd said, writing a note into his PADD. "Oh, geez. Okay, you're going to hate me for this one, but tell me about the Varro."

Kim rolled his eyes, resigned to having that incident come up to haunt him for the rest of his life. "What do you want to know?" he asked.

"How about their propulsion systems," Byrd suggested. "Are they similar to our own?"

Kim sighed, glad that his friend was avoiding the embarrassing personal questions he'd expected. "Yeah," he replied. "They're pretty similar. Where we've typically got nacelles, their warp thrust assembly was integrated into the main drive section of their ship, before it was destroyed. The power conduits ran throughout the structure, though, probably powering systems throughout the collected vessel."

"What kind of contingency plans did they have," Byrd asked, "in case of warp drive failure?"

"As far as I could tell," Kim replied, "the entire section could be jettisoned in an emergency. The warp core and the engines themselves were all in a self-contained unit."

"So," Byrd continued, pausing a moment to look into his old friend's eyes, a sly grin on his face, "was she cute?"

"Huh?" Kim asked, the question catching him off-guard.

"Was she cute?" Byrd repeated.

"Yeah," Kim admitted sheepishly.

Byrd grinned again for a moment, then continued, "Okay. Borg drones."

"Excuse me?" Kim asked defensively.

"Whoa, Harry," Byrd chuckled, raising his hands in mock surrender. "Shields down! I just want to know what new information you've got for the record on Borg drones."

"Sorry," Kim replied. "I didn't mean to... it's just... you know."

"I'm not sure I do," Byrd said.

"She's my friend," Kim said. "We've been through a lot together. Everyone on Voyager has."

"She's a Borg," Byrd said acidly. "Or have you forgotten what they did at Wolf 359?"

"She wasn't there," Kim said. "And she was forced by the Collective to do things like that. All the drones are."

"My cousin died at Wolf 359," Byrd said. "I know all I need to know about the Borg. But Starfleet wants to know what \*you\* know."

"The Doctor would be a better choice," Kim replied cautiously. "He knows more about Seven than anyone else. Maybe even more than her."

"Just tell me what you know," Byrd said.

"Okay," Kim began with a sigh, disheartened by his old friend's expression of hate toward all Borg, current and former. "Borg drones. Everyone knows about the drones, or at least they think they do. Their bodies are filled with implants, nanoprobes, and transceivers of all types. The hive mind on each ship is maintained by a device called a viniculum; it suppresses the drones' individuality and enforces conformance with directives from the Collective. From there, the ships are organized into unimatrices, the largest and highest in the Borg hierarchy is Unimatrix Zero-One, which is at the center of their territory and is home to the Borg Queen." Kim stopped, then looked at his friend. "I don't know how much help this will be," he said. "Not with everything that's happened to the Borg lately."

"Just keep talking," Byrd said. "Who knows? maybe there's still pockets of the Collective out there that we haven't seen, who are trying to reconsolidate the Borg."

"Right," Kim nodded, then continued, "I don't think the Borg ever truly 'adapted' to anything in the past. I think they've only accessed the collected memories of the drones in the network, and searched for data that met the criteria of the situation that had been assimilated from some other poor person."

"You really think so?" Byrd asked, interested.

"Yeah," Kim said. "I mean, think about it. The Borg don't do anything of their own accord except assimilate the bodies and knowledge of other species. I don't think the Collective has the \*ability\* to think on its own to devise new strategies and tactics."

"These new Borg can," Byrd said.

"I know," Kim said. "That could make them even more dangerous than ever."

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"What have we got?" Commander Hamilton asked the towheaded Lieutenant Darren Goode as he approached the younger engineer inside the structure that would house the research facility during the excavation of the Sernaix debris. The building was a standard-issue Starfleet temporary shelter, and was still being assembled by Lieutenant Smallen and several crewmen.

"Sir," Goode replied, "it appears to be part of the refrigeration units employed throughout the Sernaix ships. They're used to collect, store and super-cool photons for use as hull material via a Bose-Einstein condensate. I believe they also generate force fields of some sort to help regulate temperatures within the vessel itself."

"Interesting," Hamilton said.

"Those likely are going to be the most common finds, sir," Goode said, "considering how many must be required to safely maintain a Sernaix vessel, and the number of vessels that were reportedly involved in this crash."

"Of course," Hamilton replied, looking at the assortment of objects strewn on the tables at the center of the spartan room. "Have you found anything else yet?"

"Yes, sir," Goode replied. "We've located hundreds – thousands – of desiccated Sernaix bodies. Those are being examined by the xenobiology team in the next building, but the devices on their bodies are on this table over here."

He led Hamilton over to the table in question, which was covered in various small devices, grouped by type. "According to our data," Goode continued, picking up one of the items, "this is an interlink node. It functions similarly to our communicators, allowing an individual Sernaix to link to the Realm."

"The Realm?" Hamilton asked, confused.

"It's a little difficult to explain, sir," Goode said. "It's a simulated reality where uploaded Sernaix continue to exist after physical death, while the other, living, Sernaix can enter at will to communicate. Distances are mitigated, and, theoretically, a Sernaix on one side of the galaxy can communicate instantaneously with their leadership on the other."

"And this?" Hamilton asked, picking up another device from a small pile of identical items.

"We believe," Goode replied, "that's some kind of weapon."

"Sir!" a voice called from the outside of the prefabricated structure. Hamilton's head snapped up, and he turned and briskly made his way outside.

"Commander," a young, Bolian crewman huffed excitedly, running up to Hamilton from the excavation site. "You've gotta see this!"

The Bolian led Hamilton through the scattered debris that marked the gravesite of a once-great Sernaix warship. Desiccated bodies were scattered throughout the area. Ahead of them loomed a massive metal structure, half-buried in the dirt of the impact crater.

"Is that what I think that is?" Hamilton asked to no one in particular.

"It looks like what's left of the Quantum Slipstream drive," the Bolian said, grinning broadly. "It's almost completely intact."

"Let's get it out of there," Hamilton said, a grin spreading across his face as well.

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Janeway sat in a small room elsewhere in the courthouse, staring across the old wooden table at her attorney and two of the few allies she seemed to have left among Starfleet's top brass.

"This is it, Katie," said Admiral Patterson. "This is what it boils down to."

"I am not pleading guilty," Janeway said adamantly, her jaw firmly set.

"It's only to a lesser charge," argued Admiral Paris. "You won't even have to serve time in prison."

"Katie," Patterson began, then amended after a glance at Janeway's angry, determined face, "Kathryn. I can get you a position on my staff at the headquarters of the Starfleet Science Division. You're a good scientist; it'll be a perfect job for you."

"I'll never have another command again," Janeway retorted.

"You will still have your freedom," T'Sai argued.

"The trial's going a lot better now," Janeway argued. "You haven't even had a chance to present my side of the story yet!"

"Despite my best efforts," T'Sai replied, "I cannot guarantee a better outcome from the jury when this trial concludes. They may have... particular difficulty in ignoring the comments made by Director Tanner earlier today, despite their exclusion from the official record."

"I didn't do anything wrong," Janeway retorted. "Let's see any of them do better, stuck on the other side of the galaxy with no way home in sight."

"Guilty or no," Paris said, "Shelrak has had a lot of time to practice being one of the toughest lawyers around -- at three hundred years old, he can remember Captain Archer making first contact with his people. It's not easy trying to fight that kind of experience."

"Then try," Janeway spat. "I refuse to plead guilty."

"This may be your last chance," Paris said. "I've pulled in just about every favor I've got left to arrange this for you. Warhol still has a lot of allies left, but not so many that I couldn't get Shelrak's superiors to see things my way." Janeway sighed, then leaned back in her chair thoughtfully. After a moment, she looked back across the table.

"What was the deal, again?" she asked.

"Finally coming around, I see," Paris said, raising his chin slightly and crossing his arms in front of his chest.

"Just weighing my options," Janeway replied. Even when she wasn't on the bridge, she still had to make decisions that she didn't like. She inhaled sharply, then let out a long, heavy sigh.

"I'll do it," she said, her voice practically a whisper.

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"What makes you alive?" Maddox asked. "Why should I believe your story, and not the one about the toaster on Rigel VII?"

"Cogito ergo sum," the Doctor replied.

"What?" Maddox asked.

"It's Latin," the Doctor said. "It means, 'I think, therefore I am.'"

"I know what it means," Maddox said. "Why should that sway me?"

"It's the truth," the Doctor said.

"Sure," Maddox replied sarcastically. "Why wouldn't it be?"

"I'm self aware," the Doctor added. "I've known my entire existence that I'm a hologram."

"Of course," Maddox said. "You were programmed with that knowledge. Could you imagine the chaos during an emergency situation if the holographic doctor thought he was equal, or even superior, to the organic one?"

"I don't know if I should feel patronized or insulted," the Doctor commented.

"Look at this from my perspective," Maddox said.

"I should see things *\*your\** way?" the Doctor asked sardonically. "What about my way? I've been in love; normal computer programs can't feel love."

"What makes you think *\*you\** have?" Maddox asked.

"You could ask yourself the same question," the Doctor replied.

"I'm not going to get into some semantic argument about love with some soulless computer program," Maddox said icily.

"Soulless?" the Doctor asked. "How do you know if I have a soul or not?"

"How could you?" Maddox replied. "You're a machine."

"What *\*is\** a soul?" the Doctor asked. "Is it the Vulcan katra? That can be passed along and stored in the Hall of Memory like I can back up my program on another computer's database. What limits souls to occupying only biological bodies? Maybe *\*my\** soul decided to inhabit a holographic one."

"I never thought I'd see the day," Maddox said, almost laughing.

"Captain?" the Doctor asked.

"Arguing the nature of the soul," Maddox explained, "with a computer program."

"There's a first time for everything," the Doctor said.

"Right," Maddox said, looking into the Doctor's eyes for the first time. "I'm not the last word on determining if you're sentient or not. I'm... kind of a litmus test."

"I don't understand," the Doctor said.

"It took more than twenty-five years," Maddox explained, "for me to even consider that Data might be alive. The others at the Daystrom Institute figured that if you could get me to question even for a second if you are or not, then there's a chance you might really be sentient."

"Finally," the Doctor began wistfully, "recognition of my basic rights as an individual. A new era--"

"I said," Maddox interrupted, "that I'm not the last word here. But if what I've seen so far is any indication, I think you've got a chance."

"Do you really think so?" the Doctor asked.

"Anything is possible," Maddox said, then suddenly laughed. "Even sentient holograms."



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"Gently!" Hamilton called. Dozens of crewmen were at the base of the crater, digging furiously in an attempt to free the relatively undamaged Sernaix Quantum Slipstream drive core from the ground. The air above the object shimmered and glowed a bright blue from the tractor beams of the three shuttlecraft hovering above.

With a groan, the massive object came free, clods of dirt falling onto the heads of the people below. They stood their ground as it lifted above them, looking up as the dry, sandy dirt showered onto their faces. Some cheered, some began to dance, others remained silent. Most smiled broadly.

"Set it down near the research facilities," Hamilton said, the channel on his combadge still open.

"Acknowledged," Smallen's voice replied over the metal pin's diminutive speaker, and the Runabout Colorado turned, guiding the other shuttles toward the nearby encampment. Within minutes, the drive core was safely resting on the ground, ten meters from the still-incomplete prefabricated buildings.

The scientists rushed toward the encampment and converged around the battered, hulking slipstream core. The air was thick with the hum of tricorders and excited whispers as Hamilton approached the crowd.

"Would you look at this?" someone asked.

"This is incredible," another said. "I'd never have thought of that!"

"Excuse me," Hamilton said as he stopped behind one of the scientists. "What have we got?"

"It's a Sernaix slipstream core, of course," said the scientist, an older man wearing civilian clothing with a head of unruly silver hair.

"I know that," Hamilton replied. "I mean, what kind of shape is it in? Is it worth the effort we just put in to dig it up?"

"Definitely," the scientist said. "It's too early to be completely certain, but I'd say this computer here," he patted the metal casing next to him gently, almost reverently, then continued, "that controls the drive core is completely intact. And the rest of the core is at least salvageable enough to learn how to build another one on our own."

"Excellent," Hamilton said. "I'll let you get back to work, then." He turned and made his way toward the area where the shuttles had landed. He needed to speak with Lieutenant Smallen to determine the strain the day's maneuvers had placed on the vehicles, and how much time and resources would be needed to get them back into top shape for the next big discovery the dig was more than likely to make.

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"Your honor," T'Sai said to Admiral Louvois from her seat in the judge's chambers, "the defense has reached a settlement agreement with the prosecution."

Louvois eyed T'Sai for a moment, then glanced over at Shelrak. "Let's hear it," she said, returning her gaze to T'Sai. Janeway tensed as T'Sai began. "All charges shall be dropped, save

conduct unbecoming a commanding officer. The prosecution has also agreed to seek a lesser sentence for the remaining charge."

Louvois shot Shelrak a surprised look. "This is unexpected, commander," she said.

"The prosecution has... come to believe," Shelrak replied, "that the separation of the past eight years and the loss of starship command may be punishment enough for the defendant. She is an accomplished scientist, and it would be in Starfleet's best interest to retain her in that capacity."

"Captain Janeway," Louvois said, turning her attention to the captain, "has your attorney advised you that a guilty plea to this charge, even with such a drastically reduced sentence, will prevent you from commanding a starship again?"

"She has, your honor," Janeway replied.

"Very well, then," Louvois said. "We'll reconvene in court to make it official in fifteen minutes."

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As San Franciscans turned on their vidscreens to the evening news, the lead story was, as had been the case for some time now, the court-martial of Captain Kathryn Janeway. The anchor for the broadcast, the popular Suellen Bartlett, looked into the camera.

"Good evening," she said. "Today marked an unexpected turn of events in the court-martial of the Starship Voyager's Captain Kathryn Janeway. The Starfleet prosecutor agreed to drop all charges save one. According to inside reports, the guilty plea to the remaining charge, which has not been disclosed, means that Janeway will likely never command a starship again.

"In related news," she said, turning in her chair to face a different camera, "the Cardassian government has reiterated its desire that the former Maquis crewmembers from Voyager be brought to justice for their role in the events leading up to the Dominion War. No official word has been given yet on what will become of them."

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Seven of Nine crawled through the ventilation duct, dropping into the dusty, unused room. She waited, cautiously, listening carefully before activating the computer terminal.

Glancing nervously around the room, as if expecting someone to leap from the shadows at any moment, she activated the communications relay, making sure the transmission was scrambled before opening a channel. The face of a man she had never before seen came onto the screen.

"I am Seven of Nine," she said. "I have information for you."

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