(Ship of the Line) Forever After Earth

by EphemeralNight

Summary

YAHF. To get Willow to wear a more daring costume, Buffy and Xander agree to go in the same costume Willow does. Buffy picks a set of matching costumes that are something called FAE... When the spell wears off, Buffy, Xander, and Willow are left with new bodies, life-changing memories, and a city-sized starship. Hijinks Ensue.

Notes

(In response to Zaion's "Ship of the Line" Challenge on Twisting the Hellmouth.)
"Oh no you don't, Wills," Buffy said.

Willow jumped, dropping the ghost costume she'd just pulled off the rack. "Don't what, Buffy? I wasn't gonna do anything to make you all with the don'ts," Willow protested weakly.

"Willow," Buffy whined.

"Okay fine," Willow sighed, picking up the ghost costume and putting it back on the rack.

"Come on, Wills, Halloween is all about being able to get away with wearing something that you'd never dare go out in on a normal night," Buffy reiterated. "This is your chance to put on something sexy that'll make Xander sit up and take notice, right?"

Willow suddenly looked around frantically, but Xander was clear on the other side of the costume shop and she calmed down, blushing. Willow nodded.

"Hey, I know," Buffy said. "Why don't we go as a matching pair? That way you won't be the only one wearing whatever you end up wearing."

"Um..." Willow dithered.

"Ooh, or even a matching trio, if we can find the right costumes... Hey, Xander!" Buffy called.

Xander looked up and ambled over, seconds before he would have found a certain toy rifle. "What's the what, gal-pals?"

"Um, Buffy thinks we should go in matching costumes," Willow said to her shoes.

"All three of us?" Xander asked, to which Willow nodded. "Really? Well sure, that could be fun, but most of these costumes are kinda flopping into the gender divide. Did you have something in mind?"

That was what Buffy was looking around for, and finally her gaze settled on a rack in the corner. There were two versions of what looked like some sort of wood-nymph costume, with a version for men and a version for woman.

"What about those?" Buffy said, heading towards them.

The costumes consisted of a form-fitting body-stocking the color of a very deep tan, with leafy vines woven into in strategically placed ornaments. According to the picture, each costume also came with a pretty golden anklet, bracelets, and a small bottle of spray-on tan in the same shade as the body-stocking, meant for the face. The male and female versions had different faint shading in the otherwise-uniformly-colored body-stocking, to emphasize a masculine or feminine physique without the need for padding. The cardboard tag read, The Earth's Children.

"B-b-buffy!" Willow stammered. "I can't wear that!"

"Sure you can, Wills," Buffy said. "Right, Xander?"
Xander looked between the costumes, Buffy, and Willow. He swallowed. "I dunno, Buffster. They're kinda a lot with the flower-power-y-ness."

"But they're cheap, and Willow would look so great in these, don't you think?" Buffy hinted.

"Um," Xander said. "What do you say Willow? Time to hang up the bedsheets of Willow the Friendly Ghost?"

"Ah, okay," Willow sighed in defeat at her own predicament, while holding in naughty excitement at getting to see Xander in something just as revealing. The similar image of Buffy that popped into her head was in no way indicative of anything, at all, nope no sirree.

Three costumes were bought and paid for. A chaos mage dispensed shopkeeper pleasantries, and an ascended being named Janus tapped his metaphorical fingers together and cackled in delight.

Eelesia Rin blinked in surprise when she suddenly found herself standing on a coarse, hard surface, surrounded by patches of something that looked like grass only smaller and blade-shaped, and little wooden buildings in light colors. Little creatures ran around her, growling at each other, looking to her like a bunch of outliers who'd disabled the safety limiters on their morph settings and then randomized them all.

Eelesia turned her attention inwards to her Dreamlink, seeking the small corner of her mind that always contained an accurate notion of where she was, only to get no response. Somehow, the Overlink was missing, which mean something very strange was going on.

"Hey, little odd ones," Eelesia called. "Where are we? Do you know what's going on?"

The little creatures ignored her, and one actually leaped at her and bit her on the thigh with surprising jaw strength. "Hey! Ow," Eelesia complained as the little creature's teeth kneaded her unbreakable skin.

"Somebody talk to me, or sign at me, or something, or I'm going to start retaliating," Eelesia warned.

The little creatures ignored her, and the one attached to her thigh by the teeth continued to savage her futilely. Eelesia made a face and sent streamers of her aura into the little creatures head, and let off a small electrical discharge. The little creature fell from her thigh and lay twitching on the ground. Eelesia stretched her aura into a larger arc, and made a loud crackle-snap of electric arcing that seemed to effectively scare the rest of the little creatures away.

"Leezee!" A familiar and yet unfamiliar voice called.

Eelesia turned and saw a normal-looking blonde woman - for a Fae, which meant unnaturally perfect bronze skin with a complete lack of body hair, a sexually-idealized and impossibly perfect figure, and no clothing beyond a few ornaments - running towards her. Eelesia's Dreamlink immediately identified the blonde as her close friend, Lyn Rea-Val.

Lyn sprinted up to her and slammed into Eelesia. Eelesia embraced her, and they shared a quick but searing kiss. Lyn pulled back and idly fondled one of Eelesia's breasts. The two looked at each other consideringly.

"What's with the new look?" they both asked at the same time.

"Huh?" they both responded.
Eelesia made her aura form an optical sensor, and looked at herself. Sure enough, her morph settings had been changed drastically. Her hair was red and wavy, her face was a little longer and shaped completely different, and like Lyn her skin tone had been reset to the default bronze.

"What the luck?" Lyn exclaimed, obviously looking at herself the same way.

"We must be missing some time," Eelesia said. "Changing our morph settings this much would take days. Do you have any idea how we got here, or where here is?"

Just then, a noisy wheeled vehicle rumbled passed, producing a vaguely musical rhythmic thumping.

"Was that an internal combustion engine?" Lyn wondered, shaking her head. "If it wasn't for the weird little creatures running around, and the fact that I have no idea how I got here, and that we're both apparently missing a day 'cause like you said we look different, then I'd say we were standing in someone's history project."

"Well done, Lyn. Your counterfactual deduction skills continue to impress," Eelesia snarked, pouring on the sarcasm and swatting Lyn on the butt.

Lyn rolled her eyes. "Well we might as well look around. Somebody around here has to know where we are. Come on, let's get our bearings from the air..." Lyn trailed off as she frowned and hopped in place a few times. "Or not."

Eelesia, having also spun out a few loops of force from her skeletal magnetics, realized what the problem was. "There's no superconductor lace! How? That's innate in even the most basic patterns."

Eye's going wide, Lyn suddenly looked up at the sky, suspicious. "Leezee? I don't think we're under a projection. That looks like real sky. I think we're on a planet."

Eelesia slowly nodded, and sighed. "Which brings us right back to, how the luck did we get here?"

That was when they heard the scream. For a moment, neither Fae woman understood what they were hearing. The kind of frantic, panicked terror embodied in that scream was simply too alien. Fright, surprise, pain, these they would recognize, but it was seldom that a Fae feared for their life in the hearing of others.

The scream came again, and Eelesia finally recognized the sound as coming from a person. She shared a wide-eyed look with Lyn and together they ran towards the sound.

Cordelia Chase screamed as the smelly pirate guy yanked her up by her hair, his sword leaving a line of burning pain on her hip as it slashed through her catsuit.

And then suddenly she was free, her vision filled with rippling muscles and bronze skin... and leaves? What the hell?

Cordelia's jaw fell open as she saw a mostly naked man with a body like a greek god - he was wearing a couple of leafy things and metal things on one leg and one arm, but that was it - completely destroy the pirate guy with a liquid grace like nothing she'd ever seen before.

The man stood back, and seemed to stare at his bloody knuckles in shock. He turned around, and Cordelia almost started drooling. She had to force herself not to stare at the work of art that was the impressive phallus jutting up from his hairless crotch.

Then she looked at his face, and her brain skipped like a broken CD player. Harris? How could that
be Harris? Had she been perving on Harris?

Cordelia shook it off, because no matter how much she suddenly wanted to, no way was she giving Harris rescue sex. She clambered to her feet and dusted herself off.

"What the hell, Xander?" Cordelia snapped. "Where the hell are your clothes?"

Zach Reon was still reeling.

He'd gotten a bizarre satisfaction out of beating up the guy in the pirate costume. The problem was, Zach had actually hurt him. He hadn't seen blood in centuries, since the accident that ended his human life and left him in cryonic suspension.

Thoughts were coming back to him from that time. Things he hadn't bothered to remember for years and years. Because the guy he'd just beaten bloody, and the girl he'd saved, they were human, which was impossible. None of the Giaas would sit back and leave a sapient in a frail, flawed, natural body.

His mind went blank trying to figure out how he'd gotten there, but it was obvious that he was very far from home.

The girl stood up and yelled something, and his brain stuttered when he realized she was speaking English. Zach hadn't spoken English since his rebirth.

"What the helzander? Where the hell are your clothes?"

"I've not clothes for long lifetime, Miss," Zach said. "What's a helzander?"

"Hello? Zander? Did you lose your brains along with your cloths? Or did you trade them for those muscles?"

Zach stared. He didn't know where to begin to respond to that. The sound of running feet made him turn, and he saw a pair of girls that his Dreamlink identified as Eelesia and Lyn vault a chainlink fence, hit the ground in a roll, and come to their feet.

"Oh god, Buffy and Willow?" the human girl groaned. "You're kidding me right? This better be some weird hellmouthy thing... I cannot deal with you losers joining a nudist society on top of everything else! And using magic to make yourself hotter is cheating!"

"Oh, you too, Zach?" Eelesia asked as she greeted him with a kiss. "Looks like all our morph settings were changed when we found ourselves here."

"Gals, there are humans here," Zach said thickly. "Look at that girl, she's bleeding. And look at... what I did... that guy on the ground. Unaugmented, natural, mortal, humans. It's almost as if we were on pre-singularity Earth."

"Hey! What are you perverts talking about?" the girl demanded. "Since when do you speak... whatever the hell that is? What the hell is going on tonight?"

Lyn suddenly perked up. "Hey, my translate request just went through. The Overlink's back! Stars, this girl is rude," she said as she went over what the human girl had said so far.

"Hey relax human girl, we're trying to figure out what's going on too," Lyn said in English.

Zach suddenly realized something. "Hey, miss, do we look like people you know?"
"Duh!" the girl said, pointing to each of them in turn. "Xander. Willow. Buffy."

Zach shook his head apologetically. "We're not them. We don't normally look anything like this, but right now we do for some reason. My name's Zach. This is Eelesia, and Lyn. Can you tell us where we are?"

The girl was silent for a long moment. "Okay, that's actually a relief. After all, you're way hotter than any just world would ever let Xander Harris be. I'm Cordelia, and this is Sunnydale, California."

Zach blanched. "California, like the one on Earth?"

"Is there anywhere else it could be? Really," Cordelia huffed. "Well, good luck and everything but I am so done with Halloween this year."

Cordelia stalked off, and the three Fae shared a look.

"This is impossible," Zach finally complained.

"We'll know soon," Eelesia soothed. "Look at the Overlink map. It's only sensing one node, but it's a generation ship, and it's in orbit. Let's call down a shuttle, and go investigate."

Eelesia sent the mental request through her Dreamlink even as she spoke, and she forwarded the landing coordinates to the other two. It was a short walk passed two houses to a street corner with an open area covered in Earth grass.

Zach leaned on one of Eelesia's shoulders, Lyn on the other, as they searched the sky.

"There," Lyn said, pointing.

The generation ship was visible to the naked eye. Well, Fae eyes, which were a good deal sharper than human eyes, but even human eyes would have seen an oddly-elongated star moving overhead, if they'd happened to look. Eelesia spotted the faint glowing line of something entering the atmosphere.

"Slayer," a strange voice drawled, surprising the three.

A man with bleach-blonde hair and a big black leather coat stalked out of the shadows, followed by more than a dozen men and women with oddly-shaped faces.

"Little birdy told me the most interesting story," the man said. "Seems the slayer doesn't remember who she is. Can you believe that? Why, if she's forgotten how to slay, she's just ripe... for..." The man sniffed. "the picking... sodding hell?" The man sniffed again, and turned to one of his fellows. "They smell right to you?"

"Um, what?" Lyn said flatly.

The minion shrugged, and then the bleach-blonde man shrugged, and suddenly a baseball bat connected with Lyn's head, shattering into splinters as she went tumbling to the ground. The bumpy-faced minions moved with startling speed, seizing Zach and Eelesia with fantastic strength.

Lyn flipped up to her feet and lunged at the bleach-blonde man, striking out with a flurry of blows, but it was clear she was vastly overmatched in both strength and skill, even if she was almost as fast and clearly more graceful.

Zach struggled against the bumpy-faced woman that was holding him, but his strength was no match
for the woman. She let out a feral roar and sank her fangs into Zach's neck. Then she pulled back, blinked at Zach's unblemished skin, and tried again with the same result. Her fangs sank in, but didn't penetrate.

Eelesia wasn't even bothering to struggle as a bumpy-faced man bit her over and over, with increasing frustration. Another bumpy-face was leering at her and fondling her naked breasts, while a third was giving up on trying to bite her thigh and began prodding her exposed sex with vicious glee. Eelesia merely endured with a stoic patience, as though she didn't have anything better to do, at least until the shuttle showed up. (This rather took the fun out of it, for the vampires.)

Lyn took a blow to the throat that would have killed a human and retaliated with a twisting double kick. The bleach-blonde man grabbed her ankle in mid-air and swung her around, smashing her down headfirst onto the edge of the street-curb. Concrete cracked and sent chips flying when it struck Lyn's skull. Lyn swayed a bit as she stood up, but the dizziness was gone in seconds.

The bleach-blonde man caught Lyn's wrists and just held on, looking put out. "Right then, this is getting boring. No fun in it if nothing hurts you. What a bloody rip off."

"Hey, you hurt me plenty," Lyn complained.

"He means injured, Lyn," Zach said.

"What?" Lyn screeched. "What is wrong with you?"

"Hey, sod off, Not-Slayer," the bleach-blonde man huffed, tossing Lyn away where two bumpy-faces grabbed her and held her down.

"Boss, even if we can't feed on 'em, can we still have some fun with them," one minion suggested.

"Forget it," the one who'd tried to finger-rape Eelesia snarled. "It's no fun if they don't even struggle."

The bleach-blonde man was staring at Lyn's sprawled form with heavy-lidded eyes. "I dunno, I like a challenge."

"Aagk!" one minion suddenly cried before exploding into dust.

A handsome dark-haired man, dressed in black, was suddenly a storm of violence in their midst. The three Fae all took the opportunity to unleash a paralyzing electrical shock with their auras. The man in black grabbed a large splinter from the broken baseball bat and slammed it into the chest of each of the twitching minions in turn.

Soon, there were more dust piles than minions.

"What are they? Constructs?" Zach wondered.

"Get lost, Spike," the man growled at the bleach-blonde.

"Oh? Or what, Angel?" Spike taunted. "You gonna..." Spike trailed off, staring at something above and behind Angel in bafflement. "What the bloody hell is that?"

Eelesia, Zach, and Lyn hurried up to the shuttle where it was settling to a gentle stop. The small transport didn't look like anything anyone had ever seen on any scifi TV show. It resembled nothing more than a particularly thick, cloudy, five-meter wide soap bubble. If one looked at it under a high-power microscope, one would see a fantastically-advanced example of metamatals technology,
but to casual observation there didn't seem to be any technology in the thing at all.

The three Fae all put a hand to the shuttle’s outer membrane. The cloudiness - which was actually the ships store of reaction mass - pulled away from their hands as the inner and outer membranes bent to touch each other.

Angel and Spike were staring with expressions that were far too similar for either of their piece of mind.

"Hey, Mr. Poofy-Hair!" Lyn called over her shoulder. "Thanks for helping us, but we want to get out of here. Need a ride?"

Angel stared for another second, then dashed for the bubbleship. Eelesia and Zach were sucked through the membrane and into the ship, but Lyn waited with only her hand sunk through.

"Hey!" Spike exclaimed, giving chase.

Lyn held out her hand, and as soon as Angel took it, they were both sucked inside, leaving Spike to be blown off his feet by the downwash of ionized air as Eelesia mentally commanded the shuttle to lift off.

The sensation of being sucked into the flying bubble thing was possibly the weirdest pleasant sensation Angel had ever felt. And now he was sprawled on top of a very naked, magically-beautified Buffy, on something that felt halfway between an air-mattress and a water-bed, and even if she was currently being possessed by a chaos spell, she didn't seem to mind.

It made it kind of hard to remember why he was there.

"Buffy," Angel started, but she put a finger to his lips.

"I'm Lyn," she said. "I know I look like this Buffy person, but that wasn't my doing. I'll be back to looking like me in a few days, once I have time to change my morph settings. Thanks for the help, but I'm not Buffy. Is there somewhere we should drop you off?"

"No, I need to go with you, wherever you're going," Angel said.

"Alright," Willow said from Xander's lap, and they were suddenly pressed down into the floor of the bubble as the ground shrank away.

Angel managed to sit up, but the four of them were pretty bunched together at the bottom of the bubble. Xander and Willow, or whoever they thought they were, didn't seem to mind the closeness, but Angel was feeling a bit awkward. Not to mention that they'd just broken through the clouds and were still accelerating.

"Are we in space?" Angel asked, side-tracked by the view of the curving horizon.

"Nearly," Xander said.

Angel shook off his awe. "Listen, you are Buffy, and Xander and Willow. You dressed up as, whoever you think you are, for Halloween, but the costumes were sabotaged by a malicious magic-user."

Buffy looked confused and Willow seemed to be concentrating on controlling the bubble, but Xander looked thoughtful. Angel was relieved they weren't dismissing his claim out of hand, at least.
Suddenly their weight lessened as the bubble ceased accelerating, and floating weightless, the bubble seemed a lot more roomy.

"You mention magic like its simple fact," Xander questioned.

"That's because it is," Angel said. "It is - "

But Angel never finished that sentence, because at that moment, the bubbleship passed out of Earth's shadow, and into direct sunlight. Angel had a moment to feel horror and to curse his own stupidity, before the flames took him.

"Luck!" Lyn swore as she caught the floating ashes in her aura. "Did he just die?"

"I wouldn't think so," Zach said. "I mean, he was clearly a construct, so I doubt his consciousness was housed in... that." Zach gestured to the ball of ash.

"No," Eelesia said softly. "He had the full actual mass someone his size ought to, and now that mass is gone. I'll bet Lyn won't find anything but ordinary ash in his remains."

Lyn concentrated for a moment, probing with her aura. "Leezee's right."

"But that's impossible," Zach complained.

"Yes," Eelesia agreed. "It was, literally, magic. I think maybe he was telling the truth. We're not us."

"I feel like me," Lyn said.

"Think about it," Eelesia said. "We have conclusive proof that we're not in our own universe. Perhaps we never left. There is no mechanism in our universe to allow us to do so."

"Oh. Oh!" Zach exclaimed. "But it is possible for a magical universe to, say, reach into the space of all possible humanoid beings and pull us out. Zach's excitement withered as he realized what he'd just said. "So we're stranded here. At least our generation ship was copied here too."

The generation ship Eliezera hung like a gleaming pearl against the blackness of space. The two-hundred kilometer long starship was shaped like an elongated ellipsoid, its pearlescent surface vast and featureless. In the universe it came from, the speed of light was an immutable physical law, as was conservation of momentum. There was no faster-than-light travel. No reactionless propulsion.

Like the shuttle, but on a vastly grander scale, the Eliezera moved by excreting tiny quantities of charged noble gas from pores in its meta-material hull. That heavy gas was then accelerated along magnetic lines down the length of the ship, reaching just below the speed of light, allowing the ship to exploit the relativistic effects on the accelerated mass to gain a significant thrust from a small quantity of matter. Like most relativistic stardrives, the Eliezera's could, at need, serve as a devastatingly powerful weapon.

The interior of the ship contained only one individual piece of technology bigger than a fingernail, and that was the fusion reactor. The vast majority of the room inside the Eliezera was dynamically configurable living space. Fae had no bodily needs, and any luxury items could be synthesized on demand.

The Eliezera was also a being in its own right, inhabited and controlled by a Giaa. A Generally Intelligent Artificial Agent. A synthetic mind, one of the children of the original machine.
superintelligence that engineered the Fae - the race Forever After Earth - to save humanity from evolution's mistakes. A Giaa was nothing like a human or a Fae, or even a god. At its heart, a Giaa was the distilled essence of the power to understand. It was by far the most dangerous and useful thing in the universe.

Or at least it would have been, if it had actually been there.

"It's like the Eliezera is in a coma," Zach said as the three of them walked down a stark white corridor, the floor smooth and spongy under their feet as their skeletal magnetics simulated gravity. "It's alive, and all the sub-systems are working, but there's nobody home."

"So much for asking it how we got here," Lyn sighed.

"The entire ship is empty," Eelesia noted. "It's looking more and more likely that this is a magically-created copy of the Eliezera. Perhaps whatever power is responsible deemed a Giaa to be too powerful to bring into this universe. Huh, that's a funny thought."

"What?" Zach asked.

Eelesia shook her head. "There might be gods in this universe, and if there are, I wonder if a Giaa would recognize them as sapients it should care for, or just destroy them and take their power for its own use."

The three turned a corner. A vertical corner, now walking in a direction that was previously straight up. They soon came to a larger circular space and stopped. With no Giaa to construct an appropriate environment for them, they had to program the room themselves.

Eelesia raised two platforms from the center of the floor and ceiling, each a circle three meters wide, until there was only a one-meter gap between them. Then she tweaked the material settings until the two surfaces were softer than the most expensive memory-foam mattress on Earth, and had a texture like skin.

Zach played with the color and the lighting in the room until it felt cozier, while Lyn just used her skeletal magnetics to fly around the room doing lazy loop-de-loops. Zach made cabinets emerge from one wall, where the three of them put their body ornaments.

"There," Eelesia said shortly. "Done."

Lyn promptly tackled Eelesia off her feet and carried her onto one of the newly-made beds. The warm skin-like surface wibbled under Eelesia's back. It felt like laying on a giant boob, almost. Lyn kissed Eelesia fiercely, running one hand down between the redhead's legs and dipping into her folds.

Zach floated into the space between the beds to join them. He pulled Lyn's hips up and ran his glans through her labia, slowly pushing in as her wetness spilled out, until his hips met her butt. Lyn moaned and arched her back as she clutched Eelesia's head to her chest, where the redhead was busy suckling on Lyn's nipples.

Arousal worked a bit differently for Fae than it did for humans. Physically, unlike with humans, the aroused state of the organs was the default state. Males were always erect, unless specific stimulus caused them to go flaccid. Females always had an extended vaginal barrel. For both sexes, arousal brought moisture for lubrication. Orgasms were easy to reach, and there was no recovery time needed. Female Fae did have wombs, but they remained dormant unless activated by a Giaa, and even then one had to opt-in to become a potential mother. Birth Control had a very different meaning
to the Fae than it did to humans.

Lyn climaxed three times in the first five minutes, Zach twice, and they were barely getting started. Lyn slipped off Zach's shaft and floated up until she was sitting on Eelesia's face. Zach pressed himself against Eelesia and plunged his erection into her depths with a wet squelch.

Eight more orgasms between the three of them and twelve minutes later, they reversed their magnetization and fell from one bed to the other. Eelesia sat up and rode Zach tirelessly. Lyn straddled Zach facing the opposite way, up on her knees, and resumed kissing Eelesia. Zach pushed a few fingers into Lyn's sex from below, eventually working up to his entire fist.

They didn't get tired. They didn't get sore. They didn't need to sleep. Their auras could collect and reabsorb most of their lost moisture, and pull more from the air, without them having to think about it.

For the next two hours or so, the three Fae friends abandoned themselves to simple wholesome pleasure.

Then Rupert Giles smashed the bust of Janus and broke the spell. The three Fae passed out from the backlash, and Sunnydale Syndrome stopped protecting the Eliezera.
Colonel Jack O'Neill stood on the bridge of the *Prometheus*, watching the alien starship get bigger in the window. He whistled softly.

"Boy am I glad I'm not the one who has to run around convincing hundreds of people that all they saw was a weather balloon," Jack commented. "How big did you say this thing was?"

"Approximately two-hundred kilometers in length, Sir," Samantha Carter replied. "You could fit the entire city of New York in there."

"I have never before seen a vessel with an appearance such as this," Teal'c contributed.

"It looks like a big bar of soap," Jack said flippantly.

"I want to know why they're not responding to our hails," Colonel Cauldwell commented.

Daniel Jackson said, "We don't know anything about what they're like or how they communicate. Maybe they can't hear us, or maybe they've been trying to hail us and we aren't noticing either."

"Carter, are the *Prometheus*'s engines powerful enough to tow that thing if we can't get them to move by asking nicely?" Jack asked.

Carter blew out a slow breath. "Maybe, Sir. But it'll be a tall order. Are we getting any sensor readings yet?"

"None of our systems are penetrating," the tech said, "and I'm not sure how to interpret what the Asgard system is telling me."

"Let me take a look," Carter said, leaning over the console. "Huh."


"Sir, even the Asgard sensors can't make heads or tails of what that ship is made of, but I can tell you that there are no artificial gravity distortions or naquada, and I mean none at all," Carter reported. "The only concrete readings are at the very center of the ship, which reads like a Fusion plant."

"Radiation?" Colonel Cauldwell asked.

Carter shook her head. "Nothing you wouldn't get from a routine EVA. Still, I would postulate that whatever these aliens are, they stand up to cosmic radiation a lot better than humans do."

"Life signs?" Jack wanted to know.

"Sorry, Sir. The entire ship reads like a very large, very faint life sign," Carter said.

"Carter, are you tellin' me that thing is alive?" Jack asked.

"I can't say one way or the other, Sir," Carter replied.
The alien ship was now a vast pearly wall, curving away like a strange horizon. The *Prometheus* pulled alongside, and began a slow orbit of the city-sized ship.

"Still no response to communication attempts, Sir. We're even flashing the running lights."

"Alrighty people," Jack said. "Carter, get started on figuring out if we can tow our guests for parking in the red zone. But if that doesn't pan out, what's our next move?"

"There are no seams," Daniel mused. "How do they get in and out of that thing?"

"Maybe they beam everything in or out," Colonel Cauldwell guessed.

"I would call that unlikely, Colonel," Carter said from the terminal where she was working. "If they had beaming tech, we'd have picked up the subspace signature by now."

"It's a slower than light starship," Daniel said suddenly. "It must have hidden its approach somehow, but if it can only travel at sublight, maybe the crew is still in stasis or something similar."

"If they're capable of building a ship as advanced as that thing looks, how could they not have hyperdrive?" Colonel Cauldwell asked.

"Technological progress isn't a linear monolithic ladder," Daniel said. "A culture's history often has more to do with what technologies they do or don't have, than anything else."

"Helm," Colonel Cauldwell ordered. "Take us down for a landing on the alien hull. See if that provokes a reaction."

Buffy was suddenly awake. She felt very strange, all floaty and with the tingly good feelings like she'd just had an hour-long post-slay bath, only moreso. She way laying on something soft and warm, and there was a somewhat less soft, warm pressure on various parts of her body.

The entire night ran through her mind like a dream, and for a few seconds, that's all it was. She slowly opened her eyes, and saw the other bed 'above' her, and became aware that the weight on her belonged to the naked bodies of her friends. The whole of the night came crashing down on her, and Buffy sat bolt upright with a scream.

"Angel!"

Her shout woke Xander and Willow. Willow blinked her eyes open to find herself half-pinned under a very naked Xander, who was staring at her. Xander blanched and leaped off Willow as though burned. He floated across the space between the two beds and bounced against the other one.

"Oh crap. Crap crap crap crap crap," Xander moaned. "Did we...? We... All three of us... Please tell me this is just a beautiful dream."

A wide-eyed Willow looked between panicked flustered Xander and horror-stricken Buffy. Her gaze strayed down Buffy's body and then down Xander's, and she blushed. Xander reflexively tried to hide his erection. Buffy jumped slightly when Willow put a hand on her shoulder.

"Buffy?" Willow entreated.

"Angel's dead," Buffy said numbly, then she blinked, finally registering the naked Willow next to her, and Xander trying futilely to cover his manhood. "Oh my god, we... I had sex with you!" Buffy looked at Willow. "I had sex with you!"
Willow ducked her head in embarrassment and mumbled, "Yeah, and it was all really nifty and amazing, too."

Xander ducked off the edge of the bed in an acrobatic flip, so only his upper body was visible to the girls. "Okay. Okay. We were all under a spell, right?"

"That was way more than just a spell! Oh god," Buffy fretted, scooching away from Willow and covering her chest with her arms. "This is too much."

Willow looked between her two friends, almost feeling betrayed. "I'm the shy nerdy one. Why am I the only one not freaking out about this? So we were possessed and had a wild kinky threesome. What's so bad about that?"

Xander's heart broke a little at the look Willow gave him, and his usual excuse just didn't hold water anymore. He was practically overflowing with attraction to Willow. Xander forgot all about hiding his erection and crawled over to Willow and gave her a hug.

"You're right, there isn't really much of the bad there," Xander said.

"Of course you would say that," Buffy sighed, and abandoned her impulsive attempt at modesty, flopping back with her arms at her sides. "Well, if I can't freak out about the orgy, that means now I have to think about the other thing. Thanks for that."

"I'm sorry about Angel, Buffy," Willow said softly.

Buffy squeezed her eyes shut. "I'll deal."

Xander jumped against her, and Willow realized she'd put her hand on his manly shaft without realizing it. She snatched her hand back, face flaming, but a moment later she deliberately let her hand return there. Xander jumped again, and then slowly relaxed. Willow allowed herself a little naughty smirk.

"So..." Xander said after a moment.

"So," Willow said.

"So..." Buffy began.

"... We're on a fucking spaceship!" Xander exclaimed.

Buffy winced and propped herself up on her elbow. "I'm more worried about the part where we're not, you know, human anymore."

"How much do you guys remember?" Willow inquired.

"I remember Zach Reon's whole life," Xander admitted. "But it's distant, like, it happened to me, but it happened to me before I was ever Xander."

"Me too," Buffy said. "Like I can suddenly remember all this stuff from before I was Buffy. I remember Lyn Rea-Val's whole life. It's actually really great, but jeez she was a pervert."

"Huh?" Willow questioned.

Buffy gave her a flat look. "Two words: Rape Garden."

"Oh right," Willow chuckled weakly. "Lyn loved those. To be fair, though, it was fairly normal for
most people to at least play around in the tamer outer tiers, of those places. It was kind of like going to the beach." Willow reasoned.

Buffy got a distant look in her eye and shuddered, but Willow couldn't tell if it was disgust or arousal. Probably a bit of both. Lyn's personality had been a lot like Buffy's, but she'd been born into the Fae and never knew anything else. Reconciling her upbringing with Buffy's wasn't going to be a smooth process.

"Ah, what about you Willow? How much of Eelesia's life do you remember?" Xander diverted.

"Same as you guys," Willow said, probing the back of her mind. "My Dreamlink is still there, and we're still instinctively using our skeletal magnetics to simulate weight..." Willow concentrated, and made her Utility Cloud smooth out her hair, clean it, and twine it into a braid. "Yeah, I can still do that, too."

"Why didn't we change back when the spell broke?" Xander wondered, focusing inward as well.

"I don't know," Willow said. "Oh, but I bet Giles will know something."

"I dunno Wills. Do we wanna tell the Watcher-man we're not human anymore?" Xander asked.

"Hey, guys," Buffy interrupted. She had her eyes closed. "I found those morph setting things. It's really easy to use. I think we should all use them to adjust the way we look until we can pass for our normal selves."

"Ooh, good thinking Buffy," Willow said, pulling out of Xander's embrace and settling in a meditative pose.

"Hey, um..." Buffy opened her eyes and looked between her two friends. "Is it just me or is it weird how not-weird it is that we're all naked? Or that Xander's sporting the erection of god himself? And that it seems perfectly normal?"

"It was normal, for our, um, I guess 'Others'," Willow said. "Remember? Fae guys stay hard even when they're not turned on, probably 'cause of the whole hundred-percent-efficient digestion thing, so it's not like they'd ever need to get it down."

Buffy stared off into space for a second, and blushed faintly. "Oh, right. Lyn thought it was because limp cocks were ugly."

"Holy crap on a cracker!" Xander suddenly yelped, his eyes flying open. "Look in your morph settings, in the part here, over here." Xander sent what could best be described as a menu-path over the Dreamlink.

"We can become boys?" Willow squeaked. "And Xander can become a girl if he wants..."

"Ah, all in favor of forgetting we found that option?" Buffy asked quickly.

Willow and Xander both raised a hand.

"And moving on," Willow said, settling back into her meditative pose.

The three of them all spent nearly an hour tweaking their morph settings, seeing the results in a mental mirror. Willow was the last to finish. She confirmed her choices and was given a very concrete sense that her morph settings would reach their new targets in about six hours.
"So," Xander said. "What do we do now?"

"We've been ringin' the doorbell for an hour. Nobody's answering," Jack reported to the video screen. "Ma'am," he added belatedly.

Doctor Elizabeth Weir frowned in consideration. "Do you think it's safe to attempt to tow the ship into a higher orbit?"

"Carter's still running the numbers, but it's not looking good," Jack said.

"Doctor," cut in the annoying tones of Richard Woolsey, "I am authorized to make a judgement call in this matter. A public uproar must be avoided. If towing the alien ship to a less conspicuous location is not doable, your orders are to board the alien ship by any means necessary and attempt to move the ship under its own power."

Jack groaned.

While they waited for their bodies to return to their normal appearances, Willow was delving into the Eliezera's operating system, and Xander had sat and watched her for about ten minutes before he'd given into the urge to fly around the gymnasium-sized room in a superman pose. Buffy had gone wandering off, saying she felt like being alone for a bit. Willow was busy, and while she knew Xander cared about her, she also knew he didn't give two shits about Angel.

Buffy flew in a straight line, commanding the walls to melt away whenever they got in her way. Eventually she reached the outer hull and stopped. After a moment, she put a hand against the off-white surface. She knew how from Lyn's memories, so she pushed and made the hull pull her through.

Standing naked on the outside of the Eliezera in hard vacuum was a surreal experience.

In particular, the silence was immense and oppressive, but also oddly soothing. Buffy faced the sun, realizing she could look right at it without pain, and let it warm her. When she looked away she didn't even have spots in her eyes.

Buffy picked a direction randomly and started walking, staring up at the Earth among the stars. Her tears boiled away as they formed, but the vapor was automatically caught by her Utility Cloud and reabsorbed.

Angel was dead. Pointlessly, randomly, idiotically, dead. Dead for no reason at all. Lyn's memories whispered that in reality that was the only kind of death there was, but that didn't really make Buffy feel better. Death could have meaning, Buffy insisted, and Angel's death hadn't.

Buffy couldn't sigh without air to sigh with, but she made the motions.

She'd been walking for an hour and forty-eight minutes, which she was just aware of the moment she thought about it, when her doubly-superhuman eyes spotted an odd grey lump on the pearly horizon. Curious, Buffy lifted up and flew towards it.

They'd nearly lost Teal'c when they first walked out onto hull of the alien ship. One step off the loading ramp and his magnetic boots had launched Teal'c straight up. Fortunately, the Prometheus' loading ramp is under-slung, so instead of floating off into space, Teal'c just landed upside-down on the underside of the Prometheus like a badass.
Jack couldn't make a watch-that-last-step joke. He just couldn't. Friggin' badass jaffa.

"It would appear my magnetic boots are malfunctioning, O'Neill," Teal'c intoned.

So, Carter did her stuff, and ended up having to nearly invent an entirely new magnetic boot design on the spot.

"Some of the material the alien hull is made of appears to be superconductive," Carter explained. "Superconductors are known to have unique properties when interacting with magnetic fields. I should be able to compensate..."

Once they got that issue sorted out, it was simple enough. Teal'c got the laser drill set up, and Carter got it working. A searing point of light began tracing a circle on the alien hull.

"Uh, guys," Daniel said. "Shouldn't that thing have at least made a groove by now?"


"I'm not sure, Sir," Carter responded, and switched com channels. "Prometheus, this is Carter. Can you scan the hull where we're attempting to cut through, with the Asgard sensors?"

Carter listened, then summarized for SG-1. "Whatever the hull's made of, it's...eating most of the laser energy, and reflecting the rest."

"Oh for cryin' out loud," Jack complained.

"This is actually fascinating, Sir," Carter enthused. "Despite the lack of subspace technology, in other ways this ship seems to be far more advanced than anything we've encountered before. If we can study and reverse-engineer this hull material..."

Carter went into technobabble mode, and Jack listened with half an ear while he tried to decide what to do next.

"Jack?" Daniel interrupted several moments later, sounding faint.

"Yes, Daniel?" Jack said.

"I think I might be hallucinating," Daniel said faintly, pointing to Jack's left.

Jack, Carter, and Teal'c turned their bulky space-suits towards where Daniel was pointing, and Jack's jaw dropped. Strolling towards them, as though they weren't in the middle of space on the outside of a spaceship, was an unusually pretty but otherwise normal-looking petite blonde girl with a rich tan. Oh and not only was she not wearing a suit, but there wasn't a stitch on her at all.

The naked girl had an incredulous expression on her face, like they were the ones doing something unbelievably ridiculous. She stared at the Prometheus for several long moments, then she turned to SG-1, threw her arms out, and exclaimed, "Since when does the Air Force have spaceships?"

Chapter End Notes
(If you're wondering, Buffy is touching SG-1's helmets with her Utility Cloud, and that's how they can hear her.)
First Contact

Willow was floating with her legs folded all lotus-like and her eyes closed, looking very inner peace-y, even if Xander knew she was giving her brain a workout, learning about the Eliezera. Xander had made a few walls melt to give him more room, and was having fun flying around like he had superpowers.

"Oh, wow," Willow said sometime later.

Xander looped around and floated up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist. "Well don't leave me in suspense. What's up?"

Willow opened her eyes to the sight of Xander's manhood sticking up in front of her from between her legs. She felt her face heat, but didn't stop herself from taking it in her hands and caressing it. Xander tensed up at her back, but he didn't pull his hips away.

"Zach was more right than he knew when he said the Eliezera was in a coma," Willow said. "The Giaa is missing. I can order the ship to do anything it already knows how to do, assuming I can find the command, but its intelligence, its awareness, its ability to make decisions and act on its own initiative, that's all gone."

"So, the ship's braindead, but you can be a surrogate mind for it?" Xander surmised distractedly as Willow's fingers played lightly around his glans.

The head of Xander's shaft, the membranous tissue, began to secrete lubricant as Xander became aroused, making his hardness slippery under Willow's hands. For Fae, getting wet wasn't just for women. Both sexes contributed to the lubrication.

"Well, not yet," Willow said, slowly tightening her grip. "But once I learn how, yes."

Xander gave her middle a squeeze. "That's my Willow."

Willow really wanted to turn around and kiss him, but she couldn't quite bring herself to. That seemed odd, since she already had her hands around his erection, but she supposed it was because that was further out of the context of what she had been used to - playing with his cock like she was doing was more of an Eelesia thing, but wanting to kiss Xander was just normal Willow.

Her fingers tightened around Xander's length, stroking up and down more firmly. Of course, Willow had fantasized about making love to Xander since she first learned about sex, but it had been a distant future dream, then. With Eelesia's experience in her head, and his glistening erection in her hand, fucking Xander's brains out right now didn't seem impossibly out of reach anymore.

"Aah," Xander breathed into her neck. "Willow, I'm gonna... uuuah!"

Willow watched in delight as Xander's erection pulsed in her hands and spurted his white cum through the air in a series of gooey streams. The fluid sailed across the room and splattered on the wall, where it was immediately absorbed, and Xander's Utility Cloud pulled moisture from the air to replace the loss.

"Uh, Wills?" Xander said hesitantly. "You just gave me a handjob. Is there a reason you just gave me a handjob?"
"Do I need one?" Willow mumbled.

Xander pulled back and turned her around by her shoulders. "Uh, don't you think we should slow down here? What if you're just being... swept up in Eelesia's memories?"

Willow lifted her legs and squeezed Xander's hips with her knees. "So what if I am? Xander, I've wanted you for as long as I've been able to want anyone in that way, the sexy way. Maybe I like that Eelesia makes me not afraid of my feelings anymore."

Xander dropped his head back and sighed. "My Zach memories are telling me that I'm making a big deal out of nothing. I guess it helps that he started out human, so he already went through this once." Xander shook his head and gave her a smile. "We've always loved each other, haven't we?"

"Always loved," Willow agreed softly.

"The Fae don't see a difference between friendship love and romantic love, do they," Xander mused distantly. "Take a romantic love, and subtract everything that makes up a friendship love, and what you're left with doesn't have any love in it at all. That's what Eelesia said to Zach, back when he was still adjusting."

Willow nodded seriously.

"We'll always be Xander and Willow, right?" Xander asked, gently taking her face in his hands. "Oh yes," Willow sighed happily, "but we're Fae now, and I think we should act like it... is it okay if I sleep with Buffy?"

Xander went to a happy visual place, and Willow giggled. "I'll take that as a yes," Willow said.

"Yeah, but, since when are you into girls?" Xander wondered, sliding his hands down to her waist. Willow ducked her head. "I'm, um, not really with the sureness on that. I might have been doing the repressing thing, but it doesn't matter now. Fae are pansexual by design."

Xander winced at a couple of Zach memories that surfaced, but decided to put off dealing with the idea that he'd be attracted to guys now, for later. "Yeah that. Even so, you think Buffy will go for it?"

"I think I can persuade her," Willow mused. "She's a Fae now too, and we're already friends."

"Friends," Xander intoned. "Now with Benefits included in the standard model."

Willow giggled, and Xander pulled her close, trapping his erection between their bellies. He leaned in and kissed her, his lips warm and gentle, his tongue firm and probing. Willow melted into a figurative puddle of euphoria.

Xander slid his hands up her back onto her shoulders. He angled her slightly and lined up himself up, aiming his cock with his pelvic-floor muscles, which in Fae were more sophisticated that the human equivalent. Xander yanked Willow down by her shoulders, spearing her to the hilt.

It was a move that would have seriously hurt a human girl who hadn't been worked up to it with ages of foreplay, but for Willow there was nothing but a crashing burst of pleasure that rocked her body into orgasm.
"Eaaah! Uaaah. Ooooh!" Willow gasped.

Once her spasms stopped, Xander's hands gripped her butt and she moaned against his lips. Two thrusts and she felt him cum inside her, felt his body tremble in her embrace, but he barely slowed down. Willow curled her hips to meet his firm thrusts. Their pace was easy and steady, bringing orgasms every two minutes or so.

It took them each about a dozen orgasms before they got the hang of timing it so they climaxed together almost every time. At some point they flew back to the bed platforms in the center of the cavernous room.

Xander grunted and Willow gasped as they climaxed yet again. Willow kissed him and pushed him off of her. She turned over and lay flat on her front with her legs together.

"Do the thing," Willow breathed, referring to a shared Eelesia and Zach memory.

Xander straddled her butt and sank his length back into her. Willow's butt jerked up against his hips as she moaned happily. Xander laid himself down flat on top of her, taking her hands in his and pinning them down. Then he increased the pull of his skeletal magnetics until he was pressing down on her with something like five times his Earth weight and she was having trouble breathing.

Willow shuddered in orgasm, and he hadn't even started moving yet.

Xander shifted his hips and started pounding into her hard, letting his simulated weight do most of the work on the downstroke. He climaxed quickly and often, but Willow was cumming hard almost continuously. A human would have passed out from overstimulation in minutes, but Willow was just riding a high of ecstasy and exultation.

__Xander, Willow__, a message came over their Dreamlinks, from Buffy. __We have a situation. You're not going to believe this.__

Xander stopped fucking Willow upon his next orgasm, and they both went limp while the fog of orgasmic pleasure faded from their heads. Xander moved to get off his adorkable best friend, releasing his five-times simulated weight, and with a fleshy wibble, the bed launched them up like a slingshot. They bounced between the two beds a few times while Xander fumbled in surprise.

"Oops," he said with a goofy grin.

Willow snickered and looked at the image Buffy sent with her message. "Holy moley."

Buffy was baffled. There was a ship like something out of Star Wars parked right on the Eliezera's hull, with big English letters proclaiming USAF, and a group of people in space suits. It was such an unexpected sight that she flung her Utility Cloud at their helmets and demanded, "Since when does the Air Force have spaceships?" before she could think twice.

She could only see the vaguest impression of faces through their visors, but the four space suits seemed to be staring at her in open-mouthed shock.

Buffy was suddenly very aware of the fact that she was completely naked. It took every scrap of willpower she had not to flinch and try to cover herself. Doing so wouldn't have even occurred to Lyn, and while Buffy would have preferred to confront these soldier-astronaut-whatevers clothed, it was too late for that now. The least embarrassing option was for her to pretend she didn't know any better, like the Fae she now was, and she was wary of showing weakness to unknown military people in any case.
"Ah," one of the spacesuits said, sounding like a woman's voice.

"Are you guys seein' this?" a man's voice said inside another helmet.

"Indeed," a deep male voice said inside a third helmet.

"Ah, it could be a telepathic projection or some other psionic effect," the woman's voice said uncertainly. "I can't imagine how else we'd be able to hear her, or how else she could even be out here. Unless she's a robot - no, the radio logs in my suit don't show a transmission."

"You military guys believe in psychic stuff?" Buffy asked curiously.

The woman's suit jerked, like she'd startled. "Uh, psionic, and yes, we've seen several cases of -"

"Carter!" the man's voice barked.

"I'm not a projection, by the way," Buffy said. "This here's the real me."

"But we're in hard vacuum!" the woman, Carter, exclaimed. "How are you surviving? And how are we hearing you?"

"I'd rather not say just yet," Buffy said. "No offence or anything, but I don't know if you'll use that knowledge against us, yet."

No way, came Xander's reply over her Dreamlink. Hang tight. We are so on our way.

You guys haven't found clothes, have you? Buffy sent back.

No, why? Willow sent.

Because I'm still naked out here, and I'd rather not have you guys show up clothed and make me look weird, Buffy replied.

A third suit stepped forward. "Um, hello. My name is Daniel Jackson, of SG-1. You can hear and understand us?"

"Duh," Buffy said. "So, Daniel. Nice to meet you. I'm Buffy. What can I do for you?"

Buffy put on her best irreverent act and sauntered over to the big spindly laser thingy, breezing passed the bulky spacesuits as Daniel floundered. "This thing looks all gizmo-y. What's it for?"

"Oh for cryin' out loud!" the first man's voice grumbled. "Please tell me this isn't your ship."

"Yep," Buffy said, popping the 'p'.

The spacesuit identified as Daniel Jackson stepped forward again. "Well, in that case, um, Buffy, on behalf of SG-1, the United States of America, and the planet Earth, we'd like to know more about you, and your ship, and establish peaceful relations if possible."

"Ahem."

"And," Daniel added quickly, "politely request that you move your ship somewhere less visible from the surface of the Earth."

Buffy blanched and created a message in her Dreamlink, Willow? Can you figure out how to make the Eliezera move yet? Before someone planetside decides we're an alien invasion?
"Crap, why didn't I think of that? Um, maybe? Give me a few minutes, Willow replied.

"We're working on it," Buffy said. "The Eliezera - that's our ship - is damaged."

"Great," the man's voice groaned.

"How big is your crew?" the woman asked.

"I guess it's just the three of us," Buffy said.

"You can run a ship this size with only three crew?" the woman gasped.

"Actually, it's designed to run without any crew," Buffy said blithely. "But like I said, it's damaged."

"Well folks," the man's voice cut in before Carter could have a geek-fit, "this is going well, wouldn't you say? How's about we take this somewhere we can talk face to face, Miss Buffy? Can we convince you to come aboard the Prometheus for a chat?"

Buffy thought that over. These SG-1 people seemed nice enough, and she was curious about where their spaceship came from. There was no way to know for sure, but they really didn't look like they had even basic nanotech. That wouldn't have meant anything before Halloween, but to Lyn, being pre-nanotech was like not having discovered electricity yet, only worse. If that was the case, there was absolutely nothing they could do to harm her, and probably no way for them to hold a Fae against their will.

"Alright," Buffy said. "As soon as my fr-fellows get here, we'll come in and talk."

"Carter, see to setting up a meeting room in the cargo bay. Full hazmat protocols," the man ordered.

"Yessir." Carter turned and tromped back up the cargo ramp.

"So," Jack said, rocking back on his heels. "How come you know what the Air Force is?"

Buffy winced. "Ah, well, um..."

"We come from an alternate Earth, actually," a softer feminine voice said from behind him.

"Gah!" Jack yelped, stumbling as he spun around in his bulky spacesuit.

Standing off to the side, Jack saw two new naked people, a red-haired girl and a brunette boy, both with physiques like a freakin' centerfold. The boy, of all things, had a hardon that would make even Jack feel a little insecure. He sighed. Why did SG-1 always get the weird ones?

Jack radioed Carter. "Carter, our guests are here."

"The protocols are in place, Sir," Carter replied. "Go ahead and show them in."

Jack had Teal'c take the nude aliens into the sealed room, while he and Daniel went and changed out of their suits. Fifteen minutes later, SG-1 was cleared to go in. Buffy and her two fellows were sitting on one side of the table they'd had set up. Buffy and the well-endowed boy were looking around curiously, while the red-head was sitting still with her eyes closed.

"Sorry for the wait," Daniel began. "Before we start, may we offer you clothing?"

Buffy and the boy shared a look.
"Sure," the boy said. "When in Rome, and all that."

Jack sent an airman for a few sets of BDUs.

"That's right," Daniel said. "You're from an alternate earth?"

"Well, technically only Xander and Willow are from Sol," Buffy said. "I was actually born in Procyon."

"You mean the star?" Carter asked. "The white binary system eleven light-years from Earth?"

"That's the one," Buffy confirmed.

"We haven't had an Air Force in millennia," the red-head said without opening her eyes. "But we know what it is, and we know you shouldn't have spaceships in the twentieth century."

"What year is it, in your universe?" Carter asked.

"5189, by your calendar," the red-head said, eyes still closed.

"Your Earth never encountered the Goa'uld?" Daniel asked.

Buffy's face scrunched up. "Goa'what?"

That was when the airman arrived with extra BDUs for their guests. The red-head finally came out of her trance or whatever, revealing startlingly green eyes. Buffy held her BDUs up at arms length in obvious distaste, before shrugging and pulling them on.

Once they were dressed, the boy clapped his hands together. "So, first things first. How about some introductions?"

"Of course," Daniel agreed. "I am Doctor Daniel Jackson, archaeologist and linguist. This is Colonel Jack O'Neill, the leader of our team. Major Samantha Carter, astrophysicist. And that is Teal'c, jaffa warrior and freedom fighter. Together, we're SG-1, and this is the Prometheus."

"Cool," the boy said. "I'm Xander Reon. I'm not much with the titles."

"I'm Buffy Reaval. My specialty is ass-kicking," Buffy said cheerily.

"My name is Willow Rin," the red-head said. "I was a researcher, and a teacher. I guess now I'll be a starship brain. Our race is called the Fae, and right now you're parked on the hull of the generation ship, Eliezera."

Jack raised an eyebrow at Buffy's so-called specialty. She didn't look like she could take Cassie Fraiser in a fight, and barely looked older than her, too. He hadn't noticed before, because her body was very obviously developed, not to mention the surrealness of her being out in space like that, but in the oversized BDUs she looked like barely more than a child. They all did.

"Aren't you all a little young to have your own big honkin' spaceship?" Jack found himself asking.

Willow smiled mysteriously. "I'm six-hundred seventy-four, Colonel O'Neill."

Xander put up a hand. "Two-hundred thirteen."

"Forty-seven," Buffy said sheepishly.
"You're kidding me," Jack said.

"We know it's possible for sufficiently advanced medical technology to rejuvenate aged human tissue, Sir," Carter said. "Maybe they have something like a sarcophagus, only they've solved the side effects."

But Willow shook her head. "We're not dependent on anything so crude as an external treatment, Major Carter. Fae simply do not age. Nor do we starve, or thirst, or as you've seen, suffocate."

"I find it interesting that you call yourselves 'fae'," Daniel commented. "Where did that name come from? Is it your nation?"

"It is our species," Willow told them. "The name was really a bit of whimsy, in the beginning. We are the race Forever After Earth. F-A-E. Fae. Humanity needed a new name, after we threw out the grossly inefficient and dangerously flawed biology that evolution created and started from scratch, building bodies worthy of the conscious minds they housed."

"Of course!" Carter blurted in realization. "It's bio-engineering. It's all bio-engineering, but at a level we've never even imagined."

"Molecular engineering, actually," Willow corrected. "Ooh! Ooh! I got it!"

"Got what?" Jack asked suspiciously.

"I just figured out how the Eliezera's navigation systems works," Willow said excitedly. "Give me a sec to reconfigure the thrust envelope, so's I don't rip your ship apart when I turn on the stardrive, and I'll park us at the Lunar L2."

"We appreciate that," Jack said dryly as Willow closed her eyes and went still.

"You're in mental contact with your ship?" Carter asked the other two.

"Sort of," Xander said. "It's more like having a high-bandwidth internet connection in our heads, but the interface is seamless and instinctual, just like the rest of our biology. We call it the Dreamlink."

"I thought you said you couldn't move your ship because it was damaged," Jack reminded them.

"It is," Buffy said flatly. "Our ship's supposed to be controlled by a Giaa, but the Eliezera's was destroyed when we came here."

"Imagine our ship was a person in a vegetative state," Willow said distantly. "What I'm doing would be like trying to make that person perform a complicated task by puppeteering them but only being able to make them move one or two muscles at a time."

"A Giaa is an AI?" Carter asked.

"After a fashion," Willow said distractedly.

"Ah, are you sure you've got a handle on this?" Daniel asked nervously.

"If it was anyone but Willow, I'd be worried," Xander said with smug pride.

Jack smiled inwardly. "Relax Danny-boy. I'm sure Cauldwell will start hollering if Willow hits a mailbox."

Buffy snorted. "So what's the deal with these Gaga-Olds you were talking about?"
Daniel winced. "Goa'uld. And they're a race of evil parasitic body-snatchers, who rule like warlords over a large percentage of the galaxy. They call themselves gods..."

One long explanation later, and Xander only had one question. "Hyperdrive actually works in this universe? Awesome!"

Seeing an opening, Carter pounced. "Clearly, we both have technology the other is interested in. Would you be interesting in making a few trades?"

"Ah, we're not going to say no," Xander hedged, "but we don't really know what we can offer you yet, or what we can and can't do with anything you give us. We're effectively crippled without our Giaa, and we're going to need time to learn to function without one. And as amazing as Willow is, she can't ever really replace a Giaa."

"I see," Carter said, disappointed.

"Is there anything we could offer you that you're in need of right now, in exchange for a promise that the Eliezera will aid Earth in the event of hostile alien action?" Daniel asked.

"Of course we'll protect the Earth!" Buffy blurted. "Right guys?"

Xander and Willow nodded.

"We're stranded here," Xander said. "If I understand how we got here, this isn't even our multiverse, let alone our universe, and there's no way to go back. So, your Earth is it, for us."

Daniel nodded. "Thank you. I'm sure a lot of our people will be glad to hear that."

"If that's true, how did you come to be here?" Carter asked curiously.

Willow opened her eyes and let out a little, "Whew."

"Welcome back, Wills," Xander said with a smirk. "We parked?"

"Yup!" she chirped. "To answer your question, Major Carter, we aren't sure of the exact chain of events, but as near as we can tell, we were magically summoned."

Carter blinked. "What do you mean by 'magically'?"

"I mean, something caused the magic of this universe to reach out, find us in our universe, and edit us into being in this universe," Willow said.

"You seriously think it was magic?" Carter asked doubtfully.

Willow expression turned incredulous. "Didn't you say you'd already studied genuine psionic phenomena? You have spaceships that violate conservation of momentum and temporal causality. How can you doubt the existence of magic?"

Carter sighed. "These things all function due to replicable scientific principles. Some of your technology would undoubtedly seem like magic even to some modern humans, but just because we don't understand something doesn't make it magic."

Willow rolled her eyes. "Well, d'oy. What makes it magic is that those principles you mention cannot be reduced to the quantum math. They are special-case rules imposed on this multiverse externally. You don't have a forcefield generator in your brain, so if you move something with telekinesis, it's because the universe is editing kinetic energy into existence in exception to the natural progression of
"That's a limited view," Carter insisted. "There is more than one fundamental physical equation, each a component of the panspacial whole, interacting through measurable rules."

"You just described irreducible physical laws bound by bridging laws," Willow rejoined. "That is a fallacy unless you're explicitly postulating magic. My old universe has the same fundamental physics that yours does, and yet in my universe hyperspace doesn't exist. It was... tacked on, to your universe. That makes it magic."

"But we can travel hyperspace through well-understood, completely physical means," Carter shot back.

"Sufficiently analyzed magic is still magic, Major Carter," Willow said sagely. "Mistaking magic for technology is no less a scientific sin than mistaking technology for magic."

"Is anyone else getting a headache?" Buffy cut in. Willow pouted at her.

"Oh yeah," Jack sighed. "They might as well be arguing about whether a tree makes a sound if it falls in an empty forest. Carter, you can argue semantics later."

"Yes Sir," Carter grumbled.

"Okay, so I can't actually get headaches," Buffy was saying. "It's a saying with words thing."

"Can we go back to you folks using your ship to defend the Earth?" Jack asked, sitting forward. "I wanna hear about your weapons. You wouldn't happen to have some big honkin' space guns?"

"Technically, our ship doesn't have any weapons," Xander said.

"No weapons?" Jack repeated.

Xander grinned. "No, but why would we need them? The Eliezera's stardrive can cut a planet in half if the thrust vectors are configured for it. A fully populated generation ship can accelerate at half a G, if it needs to. Do you think Gould shields can stand up to that kind of force?"

"Holy Hanna," Carter whispered.

"And, if the Goa'uld mostly use energy weapons, they can fire on the Eliezera all they want. All they'd be doing is giving us a power boost," Willow said.

Jack whistled. He'd pay good money to see that Fae ship slicing up a fleet of ha'taks. Especially if he got to gloat.

"Well, that went pretty well," Daniel commented, as SG-1 watched the three Fae walk out onto the Eliezera in nothing but their new BDUs, carrying an SGC subspace radio.

Buffy, Xander, and Willow walked a short ways, and then simply sank through the pearly hull like it was the surface of a particularly vicious pond.

"Well, I guess that answers how they get in and out of their ship," Carter said, wide-eyed.


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"That went pretty well, right?" Buffy asked as they flew down a miles-long corridor the size of an eight-lane freeway, her hideous green jumpsuit flapping in the wind.

"I think they bought it," Xander said. "I'm still stuck on the part where there've been alien invasions and nobody noticed. I mean, people are used to ignoring vampires and stuff, 'cause they've always been around, but evil alien spaceships?"

"I should be able to set up a program to operate the radio they gave us," Willow changed the subject. "I'll need to write some code from scratch, but we'll be able to call them or answer their calls as long as the radio is on the Eliezera, no matter where we are."

"Good. 'Cause my mom has got to be freaking that I never came home last night," Buffy said.

"We could always land the shuttle in your backyard and tell your mom you were abducted by aliens," Xander suggested with a grin.

Buffy rolled her eyes. "Oh, yeah, I was abducted by aliens, and my best friends are pod people."

"Well, technically..." Willow started

"Nyah!" Buffy held up a hand. "I don't want to think about that."

They swooped into a turn and eventually arrived at the room they'd woken in. It was as good a place as any. Willow flew to one wall and made an anchor stand for the radio. Setting it securely in place, she sat in the air and closed her eyes.

Buffy fidgeted in her BDUs. As at odds with her normal way of thinking as it was, she still couldn't help feeling like she'd just rather be naked than wear the thing. But Willow hadn't found the synthesization algorithms yet, so it was all she had to wear home.

Xander turned to her with a goofy grin. "So! Wanna have sex while we're waiting on Willow?"

Buffy stared. Buffy blinked. "Xander!"

"What?" Xander asked innocently.

"We are not having sex!" Buffy exclaimed.

"And why not?" Xander questioned, folding his arms.

Buffy sputtered. "Because!"

"Because why?" Xander repeated.

Buffy's mouth worked soundlessly until she finally slumped and said, "Because I don't know if it's me or Lyn, that wants to. It feels like half my thoughts are hers, now. I'm afraid of what I might let myself do."

Xander floated towards her and pulled her into a hug. Buffy accepted it, trying hard to ignore how awkward and wrong it felt to have clothes between them.

"We really are Fae now," Xander murmured. "We've got to accept that, or we'll just drive ourselves crazy. I know you remember, just like I do. You don't need to be afraid. You can let go."

Buffy pushed him away. "I can't. I'm not even sure what's me and what's not, right now. I need to process."
Xander looked at her sadly. "What is so terrible about turning to your friends for comfort and release?"

"I don't want to talk about this anymore, Xander," Buffy said firmly. "I'm going to go wait with the shuttle."

Buffy backflipped and flew off into the ship. Xander watched her go and sighed.

"Don't worry, Xander," Willow said softly. "I'll work on her. She'll come around."

A phone rang, and was picked up. "Yes?"

"What have you found out?" came the voice of Vice President Kinsey.

"SG-1 claims to have made peaceful contact with the alien ship. They brought three aliens on board the Prometheus, talked for time, and then released the aliens."

"Of course they did," Kinsey snarled. "Acquisitions?"

"None, sir. Only a promise to combat any hostile Goa'uld ships that enter our space."

"Well, I suppose that's something," Kinsey grumbled.

"There's more. Our asset tracked a small object leaving the alien ship. It made landfall in California thirty minutes ago. The SGC do not seem to be aware of this."

Kinsey swore colorfully.

"Shall I mobilize a squad?"

"ASAP," Kinsey ordered. "The SGC's let a foothold situation slip through their fingers. These aliens have landed potential infiltrators on American soil. This is our chance to show the SGC for the fools they are."

"I'll see it gets done."
Flickers of flame licked around the transparent hull of the shuttle as it shot down towards the west cost of North America. Willow was floating in the center of the bubble, concentrating on keeping them on course, and Xander had his chin on her shoulder with his arms around her waist, while Buffy sat on the bottom of the bubble.

Buffy's skin tingled pleasantly as the interior of the shuttle heated up into the six-hundreds. That was one thing about being Fae that she definitely liked. Heat always felt like standing in front of a heater on a cold winter night, and cold always felt like a blast of chill on a sweltering summer day. Unless she actually reached temperatures that were dangerous for her, but she wasn't planning to go cave diving in a volcano any time soon.

Of course, the shuttle could regulate its internal temperature easily, but there was no point in wasting the energy to do that when it wasn't necessary.

"So, where are we going to land this thing?" Xander wondered as Sunnydale came into view below them.

"I was thinking we could hide it in the garage at my house," Willow said. "But it's already morning, and getting it in there would be kinda conspicuous - oh no! We're late for school!"

"We can still make it before lunch," Buffy said. "Meeting in the library after school. We need to tell Giles what's going on."

"If you say so, Buff," Xander said.

"Sure is a good thing we don't need to sleep, huh?" Willow chirped.

Buffy made a noncommittal noise, looking down through the bottom of the shuttle. "There's my house. I need to check in with my mom. I'll see you guys later."

Buffy was sucked through the hull of the shuttle and took up a skydiver pose as she fell towards the town below. Her back yard was a small target, but the BDUs caught a lot of air, so aiming wasn't too difficult. At the last second, she flipped over and landed on her feet. Dirt and grass flew up from a small crater under her feet.

A non-Slayer Fae could have done the same thing, but their landing would have been much less dignified. Fae were about three times stronger than a human of equal muscle mass, but that wasn't enough strength to stick a landing like that without going face-first into the sod. Buffy barely noticed the extra strength under the power of the Slayer, though.

Buffy stood up and headed towards the back door.

Her mom was on the phone when she came in, with the police it sounded like. Buffy winced. Looks like she was home just in time. It was about as bad as she imagined it would be. Her mom was relieved, and furious, and concerned. Buffy was hugged, and scolded, and grounded.

Finally, Buffy headed upstairs to get changed for school, her mom asking, "And what are you wearing?"
Buffy deliberately misinterpreted the question. "I know, right? It's completely fugly, the colors all wrong for me and that's just to start with. I mean, I don't do baggy, and how can something this horrendous not even be comfortable? Isn't that like a rule? And..."

Joyce eventually waved her on, shaking her head.

Going into her room, Buffy shut the door and immediately shredded the BDUs with her Utility Cloud. She sighed in relief as the scraps of green cloth fell to the floor.

Buffy looked down at the carnage thoughtfully. Ripping through the cloth was much easier than it should have been. The BDUs were made of sturdy stuff. Buffy knew that her Utility Cloud was as much a part of her as her muscles were. Did that mean the powers of the Slayer extended to the new parts of her too?

"Great," Buffy grumbled to no one in particular. "Even my Calling is rubbing my face in it. Fine! I get it! No more human Buffy. Still..." Slayer strength in her Utility Cloud could really come in handy.

Buffy went to her closet and got dressed. Underwear. Pants. Blouse. Light jacket. Shoes. Firmly ignoring how awkward she felt being fully dressed, Buffy grabbed her school things and rushed off. It wasn't uncomfortable, exactly, but even just her underwear felt awkward, like she was going out in a cumbersome disguise. That was a good analogy, actually. She felt the same way about a nude body that she did about a nude face.

She could probably get used to clothes again, eventually, but the worst part was, Buffy wasn't sure she wanted to.

After Willow landed the shuttle in a patch of woods near their neighborhood, and collapsed it into storage mode - a dense opaque sphere about the size of a beachball - so they could hide it under some bushes, Xander snuck in to his room and changed for school. Unfortunately, the modern fashion for male clothing designs was to pretend the penis didn't exist. That just wasn't going to work, so Xander had to improvise.

With his erection in its usual place flat against his abs, he could hide it with a combination of baggy pants, a loose shirt, and a tucked-in undershirt. He studied his reflection and decided it was a passable solution. Unfortunately, the flex of his waistband as he walked, while not really pleasant, was enough stimulation to make him wet. He didn't think he was in danger of creaming his shirt, but there was going to be a visible dampness.

Finally, he hit on the idea of actively using his Utility Cloud to continuously dry and clean his undershirt. It wasn't perfect, but Xander would be able to get through the day without incident.

He met Willow for the walk to school. She was dressed more daringly than he'd ever seen her, before Halloween, in what could almost pass for a Naughty Schoolgirl outfit if the red pleated skirt was a little shorter and she tied the black tanktop off to bare her middrift.

Xander slung an arm around her waist and they set off. "That's not your usual look."

"Well, I was looking through my clothes, and I just started daydreaming about that old cliche of finding yourself naked in class, only... it just seemed funny, now," Willow said. "Like, so what? I don't need clothes. They're only wearing clothes 'cause compared to me they're cripples. Which is a horrible thing to say and I shouldn't even think like that because its not their fault and - "

Xander cut her off by pulling her around and kissing her deeply. Willow pretty much melted
instantly, giving him a dreamy smile when he pulled back.

"No, I get it," Xander assured her.

"Right," Willow said as they kept walking. "Well, if I could turn up naked in class and not die of embarrassment, I figured I could handle wearing something less with the confine-y-ness than my usual stuff."

Xander nodded gave her a grin. "So, you think Snyder will give us detention?"

"Maybe we can be sneaky," Willow suggested.

"Way to keep hope alive, Wills."

Willow giggled.

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A series of planes landed in California, each bringing a covert NID operative. They converged in a base only a few hours from Sunnydale, and one man efficiently took charge.

Areas of interest were highlighted on maps. Photos smuggled off the *Prometheus* were passed around.

"These are possible images of the alien insurgents, but we'd be fools to trust their word to the SGC, so stay sharp for possible unidentified hostiles. NID private assets tracked their landing craft to this location. We are unsure of their combat capabilities, but the reports claim they could survive in the vacuum of space, so the boys downstairs are eager to get a closer look at them."

Plans were made. Assignments were given. And black SUVs rolled out.

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Walking through the school was an adventure and a half for Xander. It was like when he'd first started noticing girls, only turned up to eleven. And he wasn't just noticing girls. He was noticing everyone. Thankfully for his peace of mind, he had Willow to focus on, and years of experience disliking one of the most physically attractive girls in the school. Who'd've thought he'd ever be grateful for Cordelia?

"I think we should go straight to the classroom and hide there," Willow said. "Eating lunch is gonna make it too easy for Snyder to find us."

Xander nodded. *Buffy, we're heading to class early and hiding out. Where are you?* he sent.

*Already there. I had the same idea. I came in through the roof. Snyder is prowling the entrances,* Buffy replied.

"Okay, no using the front doors, check," Xander said.

He and Willow went around the back of the school and Willow unlocked a seldom-used door with her Utility Cloud. When they made it to the empty classroom, they found Buffy reclining in one of the desks with her eyes closed. Xander and Willow slid into their usual seats.

"So how'd it go with your mom?" Xander asked.

"Was she mad?" Willow inquired.

Buffy sat up and opened her eyes. "I'm grounded for the weekend. What about you guys?"
Xander shrugged. "Not like my parents bother to keep track of me."

"Mom and Dad are in Chicago this week," Willow said simply.

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Buffy pushed through the swinging doors into the library, calling out, "Giles?"

There was small crashing sound from Giles' office as the man himself stumbled out into the library proper. He looked very relieved to see the three of them.

"Buffy! Are you alright?" Giles asked. "Your mother called me this morning. She said you never came home."

"We're okay," Buffy said, glancing at Xander. "Some of us more than others, but yeah we're fine. Angel... Giles, Angel's dead."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Buffy..."

"Giles, what happened last night?" Buffy demanded.

Giles polished his glasses while Willow and Xander took a pair of seats. Buffy crossed her arms and gave her Watcher an entreaty look.

"I take it you three were transformed into your costumes last night?" Giles asked.

Three nods.

"Well, you see..." And the story came out, about a man called Ethan Rayne and a spell of chaos that affected everyone who bought costumes at his shop. Apparently Cordelia stopped by the library to complain about the craziness, and that's how Giles had figured out the connection to Ethan's shop. "...so I confronted him, and I was able to persuade him to break the spell. After that everyone seemed to be back to normal."

Buffy's fingers dug into her ribs. Willow put up a hand, looking hesitant.

"Um, Giles?" Willow said. "We kind of, um, aren't. Back to normal, I mean."

"Oh dear. How so?" Giles asked. "You seem to be yourselves?"

"We remembered who we are when the spell broke, and I got my Slayer powers back," Buffy said. "But we're still what our costumes made us."

Giles polished his glasses again. "And what is that? Cordelia seemed to think you were all, er..."

"Yeah," Willow cut in. "Um, their looks were a lot with the misleadingness. We apparently dressed up as engineered super-humans from the distant future, and now we kinda still are."

"Good lord! And you're sure these effects aren't wearing off?" Giles asked.

Buffy strode over to the weapons cage. "Pretty freaking sure, Giles."

Buffy unlocked the cage with her Utility Cloud, and then pulled one of the cheaper daggers into her hand. She spun the knife in her grip, faced Giles, and rammed the point into her eye as hard as she could.

"Bloody fucking buggering sod!" Giles yelped, diving forward.
Buffy hissed in pain, quickly pulling the mangled blade from her eye socket, allowing her perfectly intact eyeball to return to its normal shape. The pain vanished almost as soon as the metal was no longer touching her, but she still reflexively rubbed her eye with her free hand as she held out the ruined dagger for Giles' inspection.

"Okay, that was kinda funny," Xander snickered. "Mean, but funny as heck."

"Yes, the Watcher is having a heart attack," Giles said faintly. "How very amusing."

Buffy blushed in embarrassment. "I should've warned you. Sorry."

Giles took the dagger, prodding at the warped steel, before tossing it onto the table and examining Buffy's eye with careful concern. "Remarkable."

Buffy caught herself about to nuzzle her cheek into Giles' hand and only barely kept a panicked expression off her face. Oh she so didn't need that. Giles was her Watcher! And a grown-up! He was a fatherly-type figure, and old. He was - younger than Lyn.

Buffy's internal rant stalled as she looked up at Giles' concerned face. The glasses. The worn lines. The hints of grey hair. The image that was simply and purely Giles. Except, he was younger than Lyn. The irredeemably grown-up Giles was younger than Lyn. Suddenly, those signs of passing years on his face didn't seem like a fundamental aspect of her Watcher's being, but instead like the first visible beginnings of a fatal genetic disease that would slowly destroy everything Giles was.

Her mind felt split in two, like she was seeing double. Immortality was the lure of the enemy. Immortality was the inevitable conclusion of succeeding at not dying. Souls were the fundamental core of what made a person. Souls were an arbitrary bit of magic tacked on to her particular universe. Seeing double. Seeing double.

Buffy wrenched away from Giles and ran her fingers into her hair. "I'm fine, Giles. No damage. No damage ever again, now, unless some demon figures out how to throw me into the sun."

"Throw you into - good lord." Giles stumble into a chair across from Xander and Willow.

Willow, Buffy sent. I want your priority for the Eliezera to be finding the treatment facility.

It already is, Willow replied, smiling. Well, after I find the refueling routines, but yeah, I've been looking.

"So, G-man, howcome we're still all with the high-tech super-bodies?" Xander asked. "Not that I'm complaining or anything. Being all vampire-proof and batman-can-breathe-in-space is just niftykeen with me."

"I - I don't know," Giles admitted. "Any number of things might have interfered with the spell to make the effects permanent, but it would have had to have been something with considerable power - wait, what was that about space?"

"Um, yeah, we have a spaceship," Willow said. "That's where we were last night. It stayed when the spell broke, too. And that's not even the important part."

One explanation of the Air Force starship and the Goa'uld and secret alien invasions, and Giles was polishing his glasses again. But impending doom was a way of life when one lived on the hellmouth.

"Goa'uld. Goa'uld," Giles murmured. "Why does that ring a bell?"
Giles vanished into the stacks for a bit, and soon came back with a big book with Egyptian-looking thingies on the cover. "Yes, here we are. The Collected Journals of the Watchers of Egypt, Volume One. I'm afraid my Ancient Egyptian is a bit rusty, however."

Buffy leaned over Giles' shoulder as he flipped the old tome open. Willow climbed onto the table with a quick cat-like move on Giles other side. A quick thought over her Dreamlink, and suddenly the incomprehensible writing was as easy to read as English.

"I can read it for you, Giles," Willow offered. "Our ship has a complete database of all known languages, linked right into our heads."

"Good lord."

"This is a Goa'uld," Willow said, pointing to a charcoal sketch of a creepy snake-like thing. "It says here that this species of demon was the true forms of the Egyptian pantheon. They burrow into a human host through the neck and possesses them. The human survives, but loses all control of their body. Wiggy. Um, it says the victim gains the magic of the demon, but the demon can't use its magic without a host, and the magic stays with the host even if the demon leaves."

Willow turned the page, revealing another sketch, this one of a standing stone ring with odd symbols all around its face. "It says one of these Goa'uld, Ra, the god of the sun, brought a portal to the world of man. The name here translates to 'Stargate'. There are a bunch of notes about how the Watchers thought it might work, but it doesn't look like they could agree on anything."

Willow turned another page. "It says that Ra ruled in tyranny for generations, until one day, a beautiful young woman was taken to become the host of one of Ra's servants. The very next day, this woman was called as the Slayer, and the Slayer Essence destroyed the demon, freeing her. It says that the Watchers didn't get the full story until later, but the Slayer became known as Sekhmet, and not only did she keep all the powers of the Goa'uld, but something in those powers enhanced her ability to call on the skills of past Slayers to the point where she remembered the entire life of every Slayer that had ever lived before her."

Willow turned the page and continued. "Sekhmet infiltrated Ra's court, becoming his trusted right-hand and bodyguard. She learned his secrets and his weaknesses, while fostering a hidden rebellion. She didn't contact the Watchers until days before before the rebellion was to begin, and then she died within Ra's sky fortress - huh, wonder if that was a spaceship - when it fell to the Earth in flames. Ra was overwhelmed by a mob of thousands and only barely escaped through the Stargate, which was then buried by the Watchers according to instructions Sekhmet had left them."

Willow sat back. "Wowie."

"And now they're back for round two," Buffy said darkly.

"Yes, well, if these 'SGC' people you met can be trusted, it would appear they've been doing an admirable job of holding off the return of the Goa'uld so far," Giles opined.

"Hey, 'S' 'G' 'C'. Do you think the SG stands for Stargate? Like, they're calling their group Stargate Central or something?" Xander wondered.

"Oh dear," Giles sighed. "I'm afraid you might be right, Xander. I'll have to call the Council, and tell them I have reason to believe the, ah, 'Chappa'ai' is not where it is supposed to be."

Men in black camo combed the woods where the NID asset had tracked the alien ship. Many knew just what town they were prowling around and knew to carry wooden stakes and a cross and had a
clip of incendiary rounds in easy reach, but several didn't, and they weren't informed by their comrades.

It was at a late hour when the call came down the line. An alien object had been found. Camo-covered figures converged on the beachball-sized sphere.

Transport was called in while others stood guard. Two men watched impassively as a third was ambushed by a wandering vampire. Once the vampire was distracted with his kill, one man coolly drew his gun and fired a single incendiary round through the vampire’s chest.

The artifact was secured and driven away.

The remaining agents were ordered to split off. Half were to set up an outpost in town, half were to stake out the woods in case the aliens came back there. The corpse of their one vampire casualty was stripped of identifying person effects and gear, and left for the local predators.

Being grounded, Buffy hadn't been able to come with them, but Willow'd had an idea to interface her Dreamlink with the present day internet. Xander had gone with her to radio shack, and now they were carrying bags of electronic components into Willow's house.

"So, tell me again what you need all this stuff for?" Xander asked as he kicked her front door closed behind him.

"Well, it's like this," Willow said as she led the way up to her room. "Basically, I need to build a signal converter that I can plug into a normal internet connection. Nobody has modems that can communicate with my Dreamlink, so I'm going to try to make one. The idea is to be able to go on the internet without needing a computer."

"Sounds great, Wills," Xander said.

Willow set her bags down on her desk and Xander followed suit. Willow sent out her Utility Cloud in two directions, flicking the lights on and twisting the blinds closed. Once that was done, Xander was momentarily startled as she casually pulled her tanktop off, giving Xander an eyeful of Willow-boobies. She kicked off her shoes and made her Utility Cloud pull her socks off, then pushed her skirt and panties down and kicked them into the hamper.

"Ahh," Willow sighed, running her hands all over herself. "That's better."

"So, I guess we're doing the naked thing, then," Xander said.

Willow spread her arms and twirled around. "Whenever we can, right?"

"Right," Xander agreed cheerfully, pulling his shirt off.

While Xander stripped, a naked Willow went to her desk and started going through the bags, pulling things out and organizing them on the desktop. She tossed the empty bags in the trash and finished arranging components with a thoughtful tilt of her head.

Xander piled the last of his clothes at the foot of Willow's bed and flopped back onto the bedspread. "Yeah, I'm definitely with you on this one. Clothes only when we absolutely have to."

Willow gave him a grin, and turned back to her project. She began by examining every component with her Utility Cloud. Bits of plastic and electronics were held up in the air in front of her, floating into different positions. Her Utility Cloud made this sort of small-scale precision work vastly easier
than it would have been with just her hands and eyes. She could hold multiple pieces in place, cut or solder, test conductivity, and other things, all without any tools.

Buffy undressed for bed.

Even if she didn't need to sleep, she was grounded and didn't have anything better to do. She thought about sneaking out to go on patrol, but her mom was a light sleeper and she didn't want to risk it. And, she figured she ought to sleep sometimes anyway, in case there was a Slayer dream waiting for her.

Stripping off her underwear, Buffy went to her dresser to get her pajamas, but paused with the white sushi-print in her hands. She closed her eyes and sighed, and put the pajamas back in the drawer. Alone in her room, she could admit to herself that she really did prefer nudity, and going nude wasn't a habit she intended to break.

Being a Fae was just... better. It rankled to admit, but she liked that baring her body didn't make her feel vulnerable. She liked knowing that she could lose a fight and not die horribly. She liked knowing the Eliezera was up there, a safe haven for if the worst happened and the world burned in hellfire.

The idea of her mom, and Giles and anyone she cared about, withering with age, just seemed so horrific now that it was avoidable. And she couldn't want to turn her friends and family into Fae to save them without admitting that being a Fae was better, even with the squicky stuff.

Buffy crawled into bed and pulled the covers up, snuggling into the soft sheets.

Somehow, her thoughts wandered back to the previous night, when Lyn, Zach, and Eelesia had their hours-long orgy, and her body reacted. Moaning softly, Buffy's hand wandered down to her silky-smooth vulva, fingers delving into her hot, slippery folds.

She spread her legs and sank three fingers into her moist flesh, thrusting her hips up as she plunged her fingers in and out. Her other hand went to her breasts, circling and fondling.

Buffy hissed out a breath between her teeth as her pussy spasmed around her fingers and the pleasure cascaded through her body.

She paused for a moment, then decided the hell with it and brought herself off several more times, before finally settling into her pillow to sleep.

Dreaming was somewhat more complicated for Fae than for humans. Fae had far more options. Fae could enter a virtuality by themselves or with others, through the Dreamlink. Fae could craft the parameters of a stand-alone dream they'd like to have. Or they could simply sink into some randomly-generated nonsense.

Eidetic memories were standard for Fae, and these experiences were not an exception.

The persistent Giaa-macromanaged virtualities of the first option were the Fae equivalent of video games and the social internet. Crafted dreams and recordings of crafted dreams could be shared on the Overlink, which quickly became the most popular form of artistic expression among the Fae.

Buffy chose the third option, guessing that the other options didn't count as being asleep enough for a Slayer dream to show up. She drifted off, dreaming of soft skin and roaming hands.
Xander rolled with the fledgling's lunge, tossing the vampire away as he spun back up to his feet with something that looked like a break-dancing move. The vampire picked himself up from a ways away and snarled as his allies spread out to surround the overdressed Fae.

It was Sunday night - well, Monday morning actually - and Xander and Willow had volunteered to patrol so Buffy wouldn't have to risk her mom's wrath by sneaking out.

Due to boredom, Buffy had been trying to help Willow sort through the workings of the Eliezera, but she just didn't have the technical mindset for it. After all, the systems they were delving into were never meant to be user-friendly to anyone but a Giaa. Even Willow would have had no hope if not for the simple fact that simplicity was efficient, and the Giaa's subsystems were as elegant as possible.

Xander had been spending his nights at Willow's place, now that neither of them cared about the so-called inappropriateness. Xander was embracing the idea that sex was just something you did with your friends, like watching movies or hanging at the Bronze, and Willow was eagerly taking advantage of that every chance she got. She'd been telling Buffy about it in excruciating detail, too, with a heavy subtext of, "wish you were there with us."

Willow's Dreamlink-to-Internet project had hit a block. There was just no way for her to jury-rig a neutrino detector from standard materials, so she was holding off on that until she could synthesize one on the Eliezera.

She'd stuck with her new Naughty Schoolgirl look for being seen in public, and he'd seen her giving other boys and girls considering, lusty gazes. Xander might have worried about how much Willow had changed if he didn't know her so well, but he recognized the vibrant girl who had so rarely shone through her insecurities in the past. Also, he had seen the results of her slashfic phase, much to his horror at the time. She'd always had a rich kinky center inside her soft fluffy crust. And suddenly he was craving Twinkies.

Xander brush-blocked a wild swing from the fledgling he was fighting, twirled around and kicked the vampire in the direction he was already stumbling. That vampire fell into the two others who were busy trying to feed on Willow, knocking them down and pinning Willow under a three-vampire pileup. Xander pulled a handful of sawdust out of his pocket and flung it towards the vampires.

"Willow, now!" Xander called.

There was an electric spark in the air, and a big fiery explosion. The vampires were consumed instantly and Xander was knocked off his feet as a bright plume roiled upwards.

Willow sat up, vampire ash billowing off her skin as her Utility Cloud regrew, her body extruding more of the complex molecules from her pores to replace those blown away by the explosion. Her outfit had been reduced to blackened tatters. Willow gave Xander a sheepish smile.

"Okay, so maybe we didn't need to look up what kind of wood would make the biggest boom," Willow said.
Xander did that flip off his shoulders onto his feet thing. "It worked, though! Extra crispy vampires."

Willow looked around nervously. "Someone probably saw that, or got woken up by the noise."

"Yeah, let's get out of here," Xander agreed as Willow flowed to her feet and they took off at a sprint.

A pair of undercover NID agents were driving a slow circuit of the town, when their overwatch radioed them to report an explosion in a cemetery in their sector. They made a turn and the driver pulled to a stop when he spotted movement.

A gleam of pale flesh resolved into a nearly-naked red-haired woman vaulting the cemetery wall in a smooth fluid motion, slapping her hands down on the top of the wall and then tucking into a roll when she hit the ground. A guy in cargo pants and a colorful shirt followed her with an almost identical move.

The driver's partner snapped a few quick pictures with his nightvision camera. They compared the snapshots to the images of the aliens.

"We have two confirmed sightings," the agent reported.

The sighting was passed up the chain of command, while the agents attempted to tail the two aliens. They lost the pair in a nearby residential neighborhood, but the implication was clear. New identities hadn't popped up matching any of the three aliens, but no one had yet thought to check existing records for a facial match. With the NID's access to private data, the aliens' human aliases were soon identified.

Agents were redeployed according to the new information, and plans were discussed.

The teacher was busy trying not to sound exasperated as Cordelia shared her opinion, but Buffy wasn't really paying much attention. Having the Dreamlink was so much better than passing notes.

*So the sawdust plan worked but it was way too conspicuous to use all the time,* Willow sent. *Not to mention hard on whatever you're wearing. Maybe whoever's playing bait should go in naked to start with?*

*As long as it's not me,* Buffy replied. *Just because I feel the need to go clothing-optional when I'm alone at home, now, doesn't mean I wanna prance around graveyards in the buff. No buff-y Buffy.*

Willow glanced over at her, amused. *Well anyway, after that we ran to my house and decided to have fun cleaning up in the shower together, which wasn't really necessary, obviously, but we hadn't had sex in a shower before and it seemed like a good opportunity. Xander feels so good when he's all wet and soapy, not that he doesn't feel good all the time. There's so much to feel for just one pair of hands, you know.*

Buffy resisted the urge to hit her head on her desk as a shiver of desire crawled down her spine. *Willow, I know Lyn would think I'm being random and ridiculous, but until a few days ago Angel was the only person I was even thinking about doing something with. I'm not over him, Wills. He's gone, and I can't just transfer my feelings over to Xander.*

*Well of course you shouldn't do that,* Willow sent. *Xander wouldn't like that any better than you would. We just want to be your friends, like always. Your Angel-shaped feelings should be for Angel, 'cause you've already got Xander-shaped feelings and Willow-shaped feelings for us. And don't even*
try to tell me those feelings don't have any sexy-wants of their own, missy.

Buffy plopped her chin into her hands with a pout. *You really think we can live like real Fae?*

*Well, not totally,* Willow replied. *Not without a Giaa. But among the three of us? What's a little sex between friends? Or, you know, a lot.* Willow gave her a sultry smile. *I'd be okay with a lot.*

Buffy snorted as the bell rang. Everybody gathered up their things and Willow followed Buffy out into the hall.

Strangely enough, Buffy was almost reluctant to resist Willow’s advances. Lyn had actually been closer to Eelesia than to Zach, but Lyn’s feelings for Eelesia were more like what Buffy thought she might’ve been starting to feel for Angel. Ironically, that made it easier to separate Lyn's memories and feel secure in her own feelings for Willow.

"I don't know," Buffy sighed. "It's like, the way I feel about you is different than the way Lyn felt about Eelesia, so I know that it's not Lyn's influence making me want to go all girl-on-girl with you. But, the way I feel about Xander, I thought it meant things should be this way, but Lyn felt the same way about Zach, and she thought it meant things should be this other way."

Xander popped up between them. "Say what meant what things should be what way?"

"It's nothing," Buffy said automatically.

"Friend things, and the sexy way," Willow revealed. "Buffy's confused because Lyn was 'just friends' with Zach but they had sex anyway."

"Willow," Buffy complained. "Do you have to be in total share mode?"

"Hey, it's me," Xander said. "If there's somethin' Faeish draggin' on your brainspace, I wanna know about it, 'cause I'm your friend and I care about you, and the three of us are in this together."

"I know, Xander," Buffy said. "Do you think maybe I'm just making things difficult for myself, making myself miserable, because I don't want to feel good about this when I just lost Angel? You guys don't think that's what I'm doing, do you?"

Xander and Willow paused on the few steps leading to the lounge area. They looked at each other, then back at Buffy, and nodded in unison. Buffy's shoulders fell and she pouted.

Xander and Willow took a seat on one of the sofas.

"Hey, why don't you come over tonight, Buffy?" Willow suggested, cuddling into Xander's side. "We can have snuggles and ice cream, and, you know, wallow and stuff."

Buffy looked at Xander. "Haven't you been staying at Willow's while her parents are out of town?"

Xander held up his hands. "Hey I can swallow my pride and mourn Angel with you if that's what you need."

"Yeah, sure, thanks you guys," Buffy said.

Xander noticed a cute boy he didn't know spot Buffy and make a beeline for her. He stopped behind Buffy and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Hey Summers, how you been?" the boy asked.
Buffy spun around. "Ford?" Her face split into an astonished smile and she threw her arms around him. "Oh my god! What are you doing here?"

"Uh, matriculating?" Ford said, holding onto Buffy's hands.

"Huh?"

"I'm finishing up my senior year at Sunnydale High," Ford explained. "My dad got transferred."

"This is great!" Buffy enthused.

Ford leaned in close, his eyes doing that soulful smoldering thing he was so good at. "I'm glad you think so. I didn't think you'd remember me."

"Remember you," Buffy repeated flatly. "Duh! We only went to school together for seven years."

She smiled coyly. "You were my giant fifth grade crush."

"I don't know, he doesn't look very giant to me," Xander joked. "I didn't see him step on even one village on his way over here."

Willow, Buffy, and Ford all stared at him.

"What?" Xander looked between the other three. "Nothing?"

"So, uh, who's your friend, Buffy?" Willow asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry, guys," Buffy said. "This is Billy Fordham. Ford, this is Xander and Willow."

"Nice to meet you!" Willow said cheerfully. Xander waved.

Ford sat next to Buffy on the sofa across from Xander and Willow. It was strange. Xander still half expected that he'd start feeling jealous any second now, but he just wasn't. Buffy being so happy to see the other boy just made Xander want to know him too.

"Ford and I went to Hemery together in LA," Buffy told them, turning to Ford. "And now you're here, for real?"

"Dad got the transfer, and boom, he just dragged me outta Hemery and put me down here," Ford confirmed.

"This is great!" Buffy said again. "Well, I mean, it's hard, sudden move, all your friends, delicate time, very emotional." Buffy put her hand on Ford's thigh and grinned widely. "But it's great to see you."

"So, you two were sweeties in fifth grade?" Willow asked eagerly.

"Not even," Buffy laughed. "Ford wouldn't give me the time of day."

"Well, I was a manly sixth-grader," Ford teased. "I couldn't bother with someone that young."

"It was terrible. I moped over you for months," Buffy reminisced. "Sitting in my room, listening to that Divinyls song I Touch Myself."

Ford raised an eyebrow. Buffy blinked, realizing how that sounded, and felt her face heat.

"Oh, that's what that song's about," Willow blurted. She gave Buffy a naughty smirk.
"Of course I didn't know that then!" Buffy said quickly.

"Though unaware, you were born through, by the soundtrack of your life," Xander deadpanned.

Ford chuckled and Buffy rolled her eyes.

"So, Ford, are you busy tonight?" Buffy asked. "You should come to the Bronze with us. It's the local club."

"I'd love to," Ford said. "But if you guys already had plans... Would I be imposing?"

Buffy looked to Xander and Willow. "You guys don't mind, right?"

"No no, you should catch up with your friend, and we wanna get to know him too," Willow assured her.

"To the Bronze it is," Xander agreed.

"Okay then," Ford said, giving Buffy a smile. "If you're sure."

The order had been given, and the teams of agents had chosen their ambush site, outside the local youth club, an establishment known only as The Bronze. SUVs were parked in strategic positions. Agents lurked on rooftops and in alleys.

"We have movement. Sector three."

"Looks like a civilian and an HST. They're in the designated engagement zone."

"Operational security is the priority. Wait until the civilian is no longer a concern, then put an incendiary round in the HST's chest."

"Yessir."

"Hold. Target B sighted in sector one. One unknown. Possible accomplice."

The blonde alien and an unidentified black-haired boy strolled away from the Bronze together, arm in arm. They spoke casually, not seeming to be in a hurry to get anywhere in particular. The HST slammed the civilian girl up against a wall, and the blonde alien froze, cocking her head. She seemed to give the unknown boy an instruction, and then dashed around the corner into sector three.

"Target B is engaging the HST. The civilian is fleeing the area."

"The civilian is not important. Move in now. Take the unknown first, then close in on the target. Capture teams, go."

Buffy was still wincing about how lame her excuse had been when she dusted the vampire. She hadn't even brought a purse. Buffy pocketed her stake, hearing footsteps behind her. She turned just in time to see Ford standing there, before there was an odd electric noise and a bolt of blue light streaked out of an alley and struck Ford in the back. Ford went rigid like he was being electrocuted, and began to fall.

"Ford!" Buffy dashed forward, narrowly avoiding another bolt of blue light that crackled through the air behind her.
Shiny black SUVs screeched to a halt out of nowhere, boxing Buffy and Ford into the alley. Buffy spotted figures in black on rooftops and behind the SUVs taking aim with something metal. She leaped and twisted, dodging three more blue light bolts. She snatched a piece of broken concrete off the ground and hurled it at the guy on the roof, braining him.

A trio of black-clad men bundled Ford into the back of one of the SUVs. Buffy took down another guy with a piece of brick and chased after the SUV with Ford in it as it peeled out.

Buffy cursed under her breath, dodging another bolt of crackling blue. Whoever these bastards were, they were getting away with Ford, and she had no idea what they wanted or where they might take him. Buffy made a snap decision, and deliberately let the next glowing bolt hit her. It barely felt like anything, but Buffy tensed up and fell to ground, mimicking what she'd seen happen to Ford.

Footsteps ran up to her and rough hands picked her up, tying her hands behind her back and her feet together with bands of heavy plastic. Buffy formed an optical sensor with her Utility Cloud, so she could watch without giving herself away. She was loaded into an SUV, which drove off in what seemed like the same direction the one with Ford had gone.

The back of the SUV was fitted with a sturdy-looking wire cage, separating her from the front seat and the tinted windows. The driver was focused on the road, but the second agent watched her seemingly-unconscious form warily, keeping his snake-shaped raygun trained on her.

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Willow, Xander. We've got a situation, Buffy sent over the Dreamlink. Me and Ford just got snatched by the freakin' Men In Black. They had rayguns and everything. They got Ford first, so I faked getting shot and let them take me, too.

Willow stopped dancing and exchanged a wide-eyed look with Xander.

Oh no! Willow replied. How? Why? What should we do?

I don't know. They weren't much with the explainy. They just came out of nowhere and started shooting, Buffy sent.

We'll sneak back to the shuttle and follow you, Xander suggested.

Xander led Willow off the dance floor while her attention focused on the distant craft.

Um, uh oh, Willow sent. Guys, the shuttle's missing. Hang on...

Be careful guys, Buffy sent. I doubt they were only after me. Their rayguns won't do anything to us, but they don't know that yet, and we don't want to encourage them to get bigger guns.

What the heck? What's the shuttle doing in Nevada? Willow questioned. Oh crud, they've got it under some kind of high-energy shielding. I can only reach it through the Overlink, and the signal latency is too high for direct control, so I can't see what they're doing with it. Should I send it back on autonav?

Leave it be and call down a new one for us, Xander advised. If they're taking Buffy to the same place as the shuttle, it'll be good for some major backup once Buffy's close enough to control it, if she needs to blow some shit up. Do you think we should call the SGC about this?

Buffy's Men In Black might be with the SGC, Willow countered. And if they're not, then the SGC will want to know what we were on Earth for in the first place, 'cause they think we're extradimensional aliens, remember?
Yeah, but they still might know something about these guys. Can you hack the SGC to find out what we're up against? Buffy sent.

Well, yeah, if my converter was working and I had a few days to search through their files for relevant stuff, Willow replied. The new shuttle is on its way, now. I sent it right to the roof of the Bronze.

Are the guys who took you saying anything? Xander asked, leading Willow up into the loft area and over to the roof access.

Not a thing, Buffy replied. No way these guys are on the up and up. I'm gonna play damsel for now, but I swear if they hurt Ford I'm gonna go total slayer mode on them.

Willow turned to Xander. "The shuttle'll be here in about twenty minutes."

"That long?" Xander worried.

"Well, yeah, if we want it to still have fuel when it gets here," Willow said. "I think we should probably stay inside until it gets here."

Xander looked down over the milling and dancing teenagers. "As long as they don't get impatient and storm the place. But I bet they figure they have us trapped in here."

"I bet somebody saw us land," Willow pondered. "They got the shuttle first, and then tracked us down after."

"They have to be with the SGC," Xander said. "How else would they know who we are? Especially Buffy. She was already home when we actually landed."

Willow scowled. "And they seemed so nice, too."

"You can track where Buffy is, right?" Xander checked.

Willow closed her eyes and pulled up the relevant subsystem in the Eliezera. She cross-referenced with current road-maps and studied the results. Willow nodded at Xander.

"She's on the interstate, heading southeast," Willow reported.

"Alright," Xander said. "So do we confront the SGC after all? Like, hey, you attacked us, cut it out or we'll wreck your crap?"

"Um, yeah, okay, but after we see if the Men In Black do the talking thing at Buffy," Willow said. "We don't know what we're gonna have to do, yet. So we don't know what to do the threatening thing about, yet."

"Right," Xander said, pulling Willow into his arms.

The shuttle drifted to a stop, its downwash of ionized air whistling softly over the roof of the Bronze. A trapdoor flipped open, and Willow dashed up with Xander on her heels. Bolts of blue light shot at them from several directions, and Willow wasn't sure if any of them hit.

In moments, Willow and Xander were inside the bubble, and Willow was flying it east, keeping low to the ground and subsonic as she held herself centered in the shuttle with her skeletal magnetics.

"Wills?"
"Yeah Xander?"

"Are we doing this as scoobies or as Fae?" he asked.

"Fae," Willow said resolutely. "I think we should stick to the story we told SG-1 until we know they know otherwise."

Willow quickly stripped out of her clothes, letting them fall to the bottom of the bubble, and Xander followed suit. It kind of felt like when they'd load up on weapons before a patrol, to Xander. Getting rid of his clothes actually made him feel less vulnerable. Xander Harris the highschool boy was safe, because he was facing this as Xander Reon the immortal interstellar traveler.

Xander floated up next to Willow and took her hand, as the green-dotted brown moonlit landscape raced by beneath them.

*Buffy, we're airborne and inbound, Willow sent. Anything new on your end?*

*I pretended I was waking up to see if they'd say anything, but they just shot me again, Buffy replied. Besides that, no.*

"Sir, we're getting a signal from the Fae," Sergeant Walters reported as SG-1 filed into the control room.

"Well put it up on the thing," Colonel Jack O'Neill ordered.

Walters hit some buttons, and a screen flashed, resolving into a remarkably clear image of Willow Rin's face and exposed chest, with a dark desert landscape streaming away behind her. Somebody dropped a clipboard in surprise, and Jack nearly rolled his eyes. Willow's glossy red hair flowed dramatically and she had a terribly severe expression on her face.

Jack held in a groan, just knowing that this was going to be another night he didn't get to sleep. Willow looked pissed off, and she wasn't bothering to hide the distinctly earthly landscape she was traveling over.

"SGC, this is Willow Rin of the Fae," she said.

"Hey there, Willow," Jack said glibly. "I don't suppose you're callin' to tell us what you're doin' in our airspace?"

"In a manner, Colonel O'Neill. Someone with information they could only have obtained from you has attacked us," Willow stated. "We will give you one chance to have our people released, unharmed. If you do so immediately, we will allow you to keep the shuttle you stole, for study, which we feel is more than reasonable. If you do not, we will take back what is ours by force."

"Whoa whoa hold on there," Jack cut in. "This is all news to me. Last we knew you fellas were sittin' pretty up on your ship. But if you tell me what's going on, maybe we can help. Who was taken, and how?"

Willow ignored the question. "I would be happy to learn you and your team had no hand in this, Colonel O'Neill, but if that is the case I suggest you pass our warning on, and tell me everything you know about the facility located at these coordinates." A series of numbers appeared on the screen.

Samantha Carter sat down at a terminal and did some stuff. Elizabeth Weir showed up, then. She did a double-take at the bare-breasted young woman on the screens. Weir was frozen in pure incredulity for a second or so until she remembered the report on the Fae.

"Sir, there's nothing at those coordinates but desert, according to our data," Carter reported. "If there's a facility there, it's not ours, or any of our allies'."

"Darn," Willow muttered.

"Who owns the land?" Weir inquired.

"It's not privately held. It's on the outskirts of a state park," Carter said.

"Too bad," Willow said. "I suggest you spread the word. If our people are not handed to us when we ask, we will destroy anything between us and them."

The screen went dead.

Buffy, came a message from Willow. We called the SGC and they say they don't know anything about these guys. I think they were telling the truth, too.

Buffy played possum as they carried her out of the SUV. They were in the middle of the desert, in front of a squat concrete shed tucked into a ravine under a large camouflage tent. She held in a sigh of relief when she saw them carrying an unconscious Ford out of the SUV ahead of her.

Inside, they carried her into a large elevator, and came out in a bland white concrete hallway. Buffy was deposited alongside Ford in a featureless concrete room with a steel door and florescent lights inset where the walls met the ceiling.

Buffy checked her Dreamlink, and sure enough the first shuttle was in range. She took control, but only to look around. The shuttle was sitting inside a large laboratory, inside some kind of force-field looking thingy. Men and woman in stereotypical sciency outfits were fiddling with various instruments that Buffy couldn't identify.

One woman sitting at a computer terminal called over her shoulder, "I'm reading a spike in neutrino emissions. Still no EM but what it's reflecting from the environment."

Several of the scientists argued over some technical stuff that Buffy didn't bother to listen too. She watched as they collectively shrugged and topic turned to material samples. Somebody complained about the tools they'd already ruined, and then someone else suggested they use something called a trinium saw.

Buffy shifted her attention and peeked at Ford, but he was still out.

Back at the shuttle, Buffy spotted a series of little obelisk things that the force-field seemed to feed into, or out of. She wondered if she ought to just blow up the lab, grab Ford, and fly out to meet Xander and Willow, but this wasn't really a slay-first-ask-questions-never situation. There was nothing that made Buffy think these people wouldn't just come after them again.

A pair of men approached the shuttle carrying something that looked like a cross between a jigsaw and a dentist drill. It had a small blade that hummed with a hypersonic whine. They brought it up to the hull of the shuttle and started cutting.

Buffy was immediately aware of the damage, but she wasn't tooworried since she knew the shuttle's
hull could easily regenerate. Then the sawblade penetrated all the way through...

CRAAKOOM!

...and Buffy's sight went dizzy as the highly pressurized radon gas exploded out, ripping a bloody hole through the bodies of the two men managing the saw, killing them instantly, and propelled the punctured shuttle into the force-field with a crash. The shuttle automatically expanded to full size and squeezed the inner and outer hulls into a seal around the rip.

The surviving scientists screamed and scrambled, choking on the heavy radon that filled the inside of the force-field. Fortunately for them, the shuttle had wedged itself into a corner near one of the field emitters, and its hull was in contact with the force-field itself. The shuttle drank in power from where it touched the force-field, quickly repairing itself and draining the emitters.

The force-field failed, and torrents of radon crashed outwards like a tidal wave. Alarms blared, heavy doors slammed closed, and armed men scrambled.

All that, and Buffy hadn't had to lift a finger, so to speak. On the one hand, HA HA! But on the other, that trinium thing was worrisome, but Fae skin was considerably harder to cut than the shuttle hull, because the skin didn't have to be permeable to large objects, but even cutting the shuttle hull should have been impossible for an ordinary metal blade.

Buffy left the shuttle and opened her eyes, sitting up and pretending to look around. She tugged at her wrist ties and felt them give just enough to know she'd be able to break them if she wanted. Buffy scoooched over to Ford and gave him a nudge.

Unknown to Buffy, the moment she touched him, her skin absorbed the energy field produced by the first shot of the zat'nik'tel, dispelling the stun effect.

Ford groaned, waking up and slowly focusing on Buffy. Buffy helped him sit up.

"Ergh. I don't think those were vampires," Ford slurred.

Buffy froze. "What?"

Ford focused on her face and smiled. "I know you're the Slayer. I was waiting for the right time to tell you, I saw what really happened that night at Hemery. I know all about it."

"Oh."

"But, unless I missed a memo, vampires don't have rayguns," Ford went on. "What happened? Where are we?"

"Somewhere in Nevada, best I can tell," Buffy informed him. "I don't know who those guys were or what they were shooting us with, though."

Ford leaned his shoulder up against the wall. "They looked kinda... spook-like."

"I noticed." Buffy agreed. "I think they're like the Men In Black or something, only evil and without the Will Smith goodness. They probably want to dissect us, 'cause they're sure not in talky mode."

Ford closed his eyes and let his head fall back against the wall. "Fuck."

Buffy tried to think of how to tell him they'd be alright without giving anything away to whoever might be listening, when Ford started laughing. It was a long, deep, body-shaking laugh, full of irony
"Ford?" Buffy tried, concerned.

Ford let his head roll to the side to look at her. "Ah, I'm sorry, it's just too fucking funny."

"Huh?"

"I would've been dead soon anyway," Ford sighed. "I have cancer, Buffy. Doctors told me I had six months, but the thing that dies at the end of that won't even be me anymore. Just a bald, smelly, tumorous vegetable. Frankly, I'd rather get cut up in some lab, than that."

"Ford..." Buffy started uncertainly, eye's wide.

"I missed you, Summers. Really did," Ford said, smiling at her. "But that's not why I came to Sunnydale, if you want the truth."

"What are..."

"I had this whole fiendish plot, you know," Ford told her conspiratorially. "There's this group, called the Sunset Club. They're idiots. Think vampires are these misunderstood romantic figures. I was gonna use them to..."

**Buffy, we're at the gates, or, um shed-bunker-thing, Xander sent. Willow's shouting at them with a simulated loudspeaker, but all they're doing is shooting at us.**

Ford swallowed, his expression somber. "I've got maybe two months before the nest of tumors in my head starts liquefying my brain. So little time. I wanted... I thought..." Ford shook his head. "I can't go out like that, Buffy. I was going to pull a con on you, sell a deal to get myself turned. Better a vampire, than a slow agony of dying piece by piece. Even if it didn't work, being one more villain defeated by Buffy the Vampire Slayer would at least be... Anything would be better than..."

Buffy was frozen in horror as Ford trailed off. He'd just confessed to serious badness, but he was Ford, her long-time friend, and he was facing an unbelievably horrible death. Buffy didn't know what to do.

Patterns of thought from Lyn's memories bubbled up. Ford's mind would be destroyed, a little at a time, before his body failed entirely. Even if his soul was going to carry his mind-state into a continued existence when it passed on - even if the soul-magic of this universe worked that way, and there was no evidence that it did - there would be nothing left of him to save.

"Ford, the thing that wakes up after you get turned, it's not you," Buffy found herself saying. "It's made of you, but its not you."

"It would be more me than what I'll become if I don't do something!" Ford insisted.

Buffy opened her mouth to argue, but her Lyn memories stopped her. Lyn had a far more concrete and specific understanding of consciousness and what made a person, a person, than Buffy did. And as much as the wrongness of it sickened her, Ford was right.

Oh gods did she not want to think about it, but she couldn't help herself. A being was wholly and exactly the sum of their parts. When a human became a vampire, some important parts went missing, and other new parts were added in, but most of the parts were the same. In the whole they became something that couldn't co-exist with unaltered humans, but they were no less *living minds* and deserving of existence - and that thought was so antithetical to her instincts and world-view that it felt
like her brain skipped gears and stalled.

"It would be a monster!" Buffy rallied, tears in her eyes. "You don't want that."

There was a way Ford could live, Buffy knew. There was a brief time, Lyn remembered, where every Fae that lived had once been human. Even the worst cancer wouldn't matter at all. There was nothing of the frail human biology left in the body of a Fae. A Fae's body was a flawlessly engineered system, built from the molecular level up. Not even DNA remained. Ford could live on, immortal, just as he hoped, without losing anything at all.

"I don't want to be a broken shell either!" Ford shouted.

"Damn it, Ford! The vampires can't save you!" Buffy's stare hardened. "But I can."

Large-caliber armor-piercing bullets puckered the hull of the shuttle, falling to the dirt like metal rain. Willow guided the shuttle in a low circle around the camo tent and concrete shed. She'd been demanding the two prisoners be released for a while now, to no avail.

"I don't think they're listening, Wills," Xander noted.

Three soldiers emerged with rocket launchers, and took aim. Three streaks of fire struck the shuttle and exploded, illuminating Xander and Willow in the orange light of the flames. A small smile found its way onto Willow's face.

"Bored now."

A mere ten-thousand or so radon atoms were accelerated by the shuttle's drive, to such speed that the shuttle swayed back from the recoil. The tiny stream of radon tore a fiery tunnel through the air itself, crushing the nitrogen and oxygen in its path with enough force to cause a fusion effect.

Thirty nanoseconds later, the front end of a Humvee blew apart, flipping it up onto its back. The soldier on the gun turret survived, but he wouldn't be getting up on his own. A shockwave of plasma from the thermonuclear backblast blew all the surrounding soldiers off their feet, those nearest suffering second-degree burns.

Willow carefully aimed a second shot at the gun truck at the other end of the firing line, striking just under the front axle, and blowing that vehicle apart too. Soldiers scrambled to retreat back into the bunker, so Willow fired at the center of the concrete roof. It blew apart, raining debris on the soldiers who were busy diving for cover.

Taking that as his cue, Xander dropped through the bottom of the shuttle. One guy with a P-90 managed to get his gun up from where he was sprawled on the ground and get a few shots off. Xander flinched in pain, landing hard with one knee on the guy's ribs. Bone cracked.

Xander stood up, his jaw working soundlessly. "You shot me in the balls! Dude! Ow!"

Moving on, Xander dashed in among the soldiers that were getting to their feet, snatched one guy's gun away, and smashed another guy in the head with it. Bullets bounced off his back, staggering him, so he turned it into a roll and came up with electricity arcing through his Utility Cloud. Two guys dropped from minor electrocution, and Xander staggered again as bullets slammed into his side.

Willow fired another focused pulse at the ground near the rallying squad, spraying them with molten dirt and sending them sprawling. Xander rode the blastwave and tucked into another roll, coming to his feet by the ruin of the concrete shed where reinforcements were pouring out.
The newcomers opened fire, and Xander stumbled back under the sheer force of that many bullet impacts. Xander dropped to all fours and clawed his way forward, slamming into a pair of legs. Spreading his Utility Cloud, electric arcs crackled through the air, and soldiers fell twitching.

Up in the shuttle, Willow adjusted the environmental controls and then dropped out to the ground herself. She made the shuttle settle on the ground and then roll itself back and forth over the battlefield, collecting the fallen soldiers.

"Any more?" Willow asked.

"I don't see any coming out," Xander said. He shook his head at the pile of camo-clad bodies in the shuttle. "I really shouldn't find that funny."

Willow had the shuttle deposit the soldiers in a groaning pile some ways away and then come pick her and Xander back up. As they lifted into the air, Willow started bombarding the revealed entrance to the underground facility, until all that remained was a large, slightly radioactive crater with severed hallways poking out of the walls.

_Buffy, the way out is open_, Willow sent.

_Thanks Wills. I've got Ford. I'm on my way_, Buffy replied.

The faint sounds of explosions rumbled from above as Buffy ripped her wrists and legs free. Pushing down on the floor with her Utility Cloud, Buffy floated up into the air as her clothes shredded into scrap. No more pretending.

Buffy yanked on the steel door with her skeletal magnetics, and her feet slammed into the concrete on either side hard enough to produce a spiderweb of cracks. There was nothing to grab onto, but that didn't matter when her entire skeleton was a slayer-powerful and precisely variable electromagnet. She slapped her hands down flat against the metal, and _pulled_.

Ford was frozen with his mouth hanging open, as he watched the steel buckle, seeming to stick to Buffy's hands. Her naked body strained, pristine and beautiful.

The door tore from its moorings, falling on top of Buffy as she crashed to the floor. She kicked it off and rolled backwards to her feet, turning to Ford. He was still gaping. Buffy scooped him up into her arms and strode out of the cell.

"Okay, I knew you were the Slayer," Ford mumbled faintly. "I didn't know you could do that."

Blue bolts of light suddenly filled the hallway as men with rayguns rounded corners and fired. Buffy ignored the bolts. Ford flinched every time they were hit, but as long as he was touching Buffy the energy field was absorbed by her skin before it could do any harm.

Some of the guys with rayguns cut and ran, while others pulled out pistols. Buffy didn't spare the time to reach out with her Utility Cloud, and magnetically yanked the guns out of their hands directly. She kicked the flying guns aside before they could break something of Ford's, and those guys turned and ran too.

Willow leaned back into Xander's arms as they stood beside the shuttle where it rested on the scorched dirt. She was a little worried about how much she had enjoyed raining destruction on those guys. She hoped none of them died.
Suddenly, a little ways around the edge of the crater, the air lit up with a flare of brilliant white. Then the light was gone and a large group of armed people with SGC patches on their shoulders were standing in its place.

"Of course! Since this universe has an exploitable subspace, you could supernavigate the quantum uncertainty as expressed in only the limited dimensions of normal space from an extraspacial vantage point..." Willow trailed off, her eyes finding Jack O'Neill and Samantha Carter among the new arrivals. "You have direct matter manipulation and you were asking about weapons?" Willow shrieked.

"Well hello to you too," Colonel O'Neill greeted, before turning and barking orders, sending teams down to secure the facility and the wounded.

Several of the marines and SG teams were staring at Xander and Willow, at least one muttering about, "Said 'they might be naked', shit, they weren't kidding."

Willow was still stuck on them having beaming technology. "You... that... you can... weapons are obsolete! Why the frilly heck were you asking about weapons?"

"Sir?" Colonel Carter checked.

"Go ahead, Carter."

Major Carter informed Willow that the technology wasn't theirs. It was on lone from an alien race called the Asgard, and the Asgard had built limits into the system. They couldn't beam only part of an object. They couldn't activate the beam unless a suitable destination was already targeted. It wouldn't let them make copies of things, or generally do anything except move things from one place to another.

"Oh, that makes more sense, then," Willow said. "But still, you'd think - Buffy!"

Buffy strolled out of the facility into the crater, carrying Ford bridal-style, and gave a team of marines a dazzling smile as she dashed up the edge of the crater with three quick leaps. She landed lightly next to the shuttle and stuck Ford inside. Willow wondered what had happened to Buffy's clothes - Ford still had his - but she wanted to encourage no-clothes Buffy, and drawing attention to it probably wouldn't do that, so she kept the knowing smirk of smugness off her face.

Instead, she just wrapped her arms around Buffy and gave her a short but heartfelt kiss. Buffy was flustered, but she tried to play it off like she wasn't, which Willow took as a good sign.

"Wills, I need you to take Ford up to the Eliezera," Buffy told her quietly. "Right now. He told me some things..."

Meanwhile, Daniel Jackson was trying to smooth things over with Xander.

"I can promise you that this wasn't a sanctioned operation, and we would all like to offer you and your people an apology, and our hope that this incident won't sour any future relations," Daniel stated.

"I think we're not quite ready to trust you completely, but I'm willing to accept that you guys are not of the evil," Xander offered.

Xander, we need to take Ford to the Eliezera. Let's go before the SGC people decide to try to keep us here, Willow sent.
"Thank you for giving us the benefit of the doubt," Daniel said. "Um, our investigators would like to take a statement. Anything you can tell us about how they managed to take Ms. Reaval and, uh..."

"Sorry," Xander interrupted, "but we've got to do a thing. We call ya, okay?"

"Wait -"

Xander used his skeletal magnetics to yank himself through the air towards the shuttle. He slipped through the hull, joining Buffy and Willow inside.

There was a gust of wind from the silent downwash as the shuttle lifted from the ground, Willow floating in the center of the bubble. Ford sat at the bottom with Buffy while Xander settled himself halfway up the curve of the sphere, in front of Willow.

Buffy smiled softly as Ford stared at the slowly shrinking Earth through the hull of the shuttle. She slid closer and put her hand on his.

"Not what you were expecting?" Buffy asked wryly.

Ford shook his head. "I thought I knew what was going on, with you being the Slayer. I never imagined anything like this. I'm so sorry Buffy. I was such a fool to think I could... play you."

"Yes. Yes you were." Buffy held serious-face for a few more seconds and then grinned at him.

"So, is there some reason you're all naked?" Ford asked, finally looking away from the shrinking Earth. "I mean, don't get me wrong, your transformation sequence thing was very badass, I'm just wondering what happened to the ending part where your magical girl uniform appears." Ford gazed up teasingly at her through his eyelashes.

Willow burst into giggles, turning a slow somersault as she clutched her knees to her chest and shook with laughter. Xander snorted and ducked his head to hide his grin.

Buffy pouted. "Come on, what's so funny? Make with the 'splainy."

"You never watched anime, Buffy?" Willow asked, getting herself under control.

"Um, no?"

Ford shook his head. "Never mind, then. But seriously, why all the nudity?"

"Why not?" Buffy chirped. "We've become something more than human, Ford. We've become Fae. We've outgrown the need."

Willow shot Buffy a sneaky proud look.

"That's the point of all this," Buffy said. "We're going to turn you into a Fae. You'll live forever, you'll be nearly impossible to harm, and you won't be trading your moral instincts for demonic urges."

"You can really do that?" Ford asked.

"Can and will," Buffy confirmed.

The shuttle passed through the Eliezera's hull, transitioning from dark starry space to a beautiful
meadow with rolling hills and palm trees, lit by the glow of a vast greenish-blue gas planet with gleaming lavender rings that filled more than half the sky.

"Whoa, that's new," Xander commented.

"I found some of the landscaping presets, remember?" Willow said. "I did some remodeling yesterday. Like it?"

"It's beautiful, Wills," Buffy told her.

"What planet is that?" Ford wondered.

"Oh, it's not a real planet, just an image I made up," Willow confessed.

The shuttle deposited the foursome on the grass. Buffy, Xander and Willow stood, while Ford floated, holding on to Buffy's hand. Buffy felt kind of like she was towing a Ford-shaped balloon around.

"Hey, this isn't grass," Ford said.

The grass under their feet was green, but that's where its resemblance to grass on earth stopped. Each 'blade' was a rounded blunt stalk about the size of a finger, and squishy like an earlobe. It was far more pleasant to the touch than natural grass.

"It's Fae grass," Xander deadpanned.

"The grass and flowers and trees and stuff are all engineered," Willow explained. "The Giaas never just copy what nature came up with, 'cause they have goals nature didn't."

They came to the top of a hill, where a fleshy translucent egg-shaped thing jutted up through the grass. It looked like something you'd come up with if you tried to make the Zerg aesthetic cozy and comforting. A thick muscular base, diverging into four thick bands of reddish flesh that somehow managed to look pretty instead of gross, all meeting at the top. The translucent membrane they cradled seemed to glow with a faint, warm, inner light.

"This is a birthing pod," Willow explained. "Or in your case, a rebirthing pod. It'll manage and monitor the process of your transition. It'll take between two and three weeks, but you'll be, ah, asleep the whole time."

Willow didn't want to go into details unless he asked. Once in the pod, his biorhythms and brain activity would be suspended, then engineered molecules would break down his body until there was nothing left but the brain and spinal cord. The brain would shrink as each neuron was carefully replaced with an optimized design while preserving the existing structure, chemical information, and connections, then expand once more to human size as control circuitry for the Utility Cloud, skeletal magnetics, Dreamlink, and morph settings was wired in, along with the vastly improved memory capacity, basic Fae language, and optimized motor skills. As this happened, the rest of the new Fae's body grew out from the nervous system and skeleton, and their morph settings were preset to match the extrapolated ideal of the macroscopic scan of the original human. That all sounded kinda scary if you didn't understand the science behind it.

Ford looked at the pod a bit nervously. "And when I wake up, I'll be..."

"Safe," Buffy supplied.

Ford nodded. "What do I have to do?"
"You might want to strip down, or at least empty your pockets, but you don't have to do anything but climb in," Willow said.

"Alright," Ford said, handing his wallet to Buffy and kicking off his shoes.

Willow triggered the pod to open, and it peeled itself apart like a blooming flower, the membrane dissolving as the fluid womb flattened and drained away.

"Willow, there's already someone in there," Xander said suddenly.

Willow flew forward. "What? How?!"

Willow had only made the pod grow itself less than an hour ago, and it had been empty then. And yet, a sleeping girl floated in a cradling nest of delicate tendrils, curled up in fetal position. She looked about thirteen by human standards, like a newborn Fae, and had short sandy-brown hair, with a skin tone and face shape reminiscent of Buffy's. Willow was ready to call shenanigans.

"Who's she?"
New Dawn

Chapter Notes

(At this point I realized that I goofed on the Stargate timeline, so I'm shuffling things a bit: Hayes has been president for a while, and Weir has been in charge of the SGC for almost as long, with the events surrounding Anubis pushed back to coincide with post-Halloween. Unfortunately, this means Kinsey getting told to shut the hell up happened back during Death Knell, before the story starts, when he tried to order Weir to abandon Carter and the anti-Kull weapon.)

A New Dawn

The squishy grass split apart under Lyn's feet as tentacles of reddish glistening flesh burst out of the ground, grasping for her legs. Lyn rocketed straight up, bounced off the soft silky surface of one of the giant leaves of a nearby tree, and shot off in a random direction. She laughed giddily at the close call, pressing one hand to the slight visible bulge of her womb.

Lyn landed on the side of a cliff that rose in her path, and took off at a sprint.

She'd been pregnant for a month now, and the new life in her womb would not grow any further until it was extracted and placed in a birthing pod. For many expectant mothers, the extractors simply presented themselves whenever she stopped in one place for more than a few minutes and waited for her to use them, but for others like Lyn, the Giaa saw in her mind that she would have more fun if she was chased, and so made a carefully calibrated effort to take her without her consent.

Lyn had been startled, but not surprised. She'd intended to play keep-away from the moment she first felt the new life kindling inside her. There was a small subculture among pregnant Fae, who competed with each other to see who could avoid being taken by the extractor tentacles for the longest time. Lyn was nothing if not competitive. The Giaas, of course, noticed and seamlessly ensured that the competition remained both challenging, interesting, and fair.

Lyn fled for four days, and was starting to get bored, but she had a friend who's time she wanted to beat, so she kept going until she'd been at it for just long enough to win that contest.

"Ha!" Lyn crowed in victory as she came to rest on a hilltop, pumping her fist in the air.

Reddish glistening tentacles sprouted from the ground around her, licking their way up her legs and arms. Lyn petted the lengths of fleshiness that twined passed her hands, even though they were just mechanisms, because they simply felt nice to touch, all warm and slippery.

The muscular base of a birthing pod grew out of the ground directly under her, between her feet. A prehensile stalk of glistening red sprouted upwards towards her apex, while her legs were firmly lifted and spread. The stalk was about ten centimeters thick, and ended in a ring of small tendrils surrounding a soft-looking orifice.

Lyn was already wet and throbbing with anticipation. She'd been running for nearly a week straight, and that was just too long to go without some sort of sexual release, in her opinion.
The top of the thick fleshy stalk molded itself to Lyn's vagina, stroking her folds and rubbing her clit with its little tendrils. Moaning loudly, Lyn's head lolled back, and then after a few more seconds of stimulation her body quaked in orgasm.

The tendrils squirmed, spreading her open, and the thickness of the main stalk squeezed its way into her. Lyn bucked her hips, riding the thick phallus as it slowly thrust deeper and deeper. She climaxed quickly and still, trembling through the waves of pleasure as the thick stalk continued to fill her, then started moving her hips again.

The fleshy stalk filled her completely, molding its end to her cervix. For a moment it was still and so was she, savoring the feeling. And then her world dissolved in an explosion of orgasmic ecstasy as climax after climax crashed into her in a continuous stream. The tendrils drove forward, pulling Lyn's cervix open and reaching into her womb.

A bulge traveled down the fleshy stalk, and the constant orgasms ceased. Lyn trembled, a rapturous expression on her face. She moaned as the fleshy stalk pulled out of her, and drifted away languidly when the tentacles released her.

The birthing pod itself grew to completion over the next few minutes. Lyn drifted down and stood on the squishy grass. The pod and its contents would grow for a month, until it was taller than Lyn. After that month, the pod would unfurl like a flower and the newborn Fae would wake up for the first time.

The newborn would, by human standards, look about 13 or 14, and be fully sexually mature. He or she - she, in this case, which was determined by the Giaa in response to innumerable subtle factors - would already be pre-imprinted with optimized motor skills and the basic vocabulary and grammar of the Giaa-designed Fae language. She would grow and learn for two to three years, until she looked 20 by human standards, at which point her morph settings would unlock.

Lyn came back to the pod every few days, but she wasn't too worried. Newborn Fae were more or less self-sufficient, and if her little Dawn needed Lyn, the Giaa would arrange for them to happen across each other. Not that Lyn was planning on that. She fully intended to be there when her daughter was born, and be the first thing her little Dawn saw.

Lyn rested a hand on the warm membrane of the birthing pod, and smiled.

"This is Lyn's daughter," Buffy said softly, staring at the sleeping girl.

"Shit," Xander breathed.

"Oh... she must have been brought here with the ship," Willow suggested. "According to the pod, she's fully developed. No reason not to pull her out. Buffy?"

"Yeah," Buffy murmured, swallowing a lump in her throat. "Dawn..."

"Who's Lyn?" Ford asked from where he was holding onto the grass with one hand to keep from floating away.

Buffy reached in and pulled the sleeping girl into her arms. "I'll explain later, Ford. You should get in the pod."

Ford nodded slowly, watching her curiously as he carefully maneuvered himself. Delicate pale tendrils steadied him. Willow concentrated on the pod, and started it doing its thing. It closed up around Ford, and moments later he drifted into unconsciousness.
"I don't get it," Buffy said, still cradling Dawn to her chest. "How can she be here? No one and nothing else came through with the ship."

"I know right," Willow agreed. "I don't know. Are you okay, Buffy?"

"Yeah," Buffy said. "It's just, it feels like she's mine, not just Lyn's."

"Well, good," Xander said, resting a hand on Buffy's shoulder. "Because you're who's here."

"Okay, well, um, I need a little while to do something," Willow said.

"What's up, Wills?" Xander asked.

"Well, it's like this," Willow explained. "I want to write some command access restriction programs. We don't have a Giaa to keep problems from happening, so, like, I want to make sure only the three of us can control the ship and stuff, 'cause I mean, we're not going to stop with Ford and little Dawn there, are we? And we don't want some doofus crashing the Eliezera or blowing up the moon or something, right?"

"Oh, yeah." Buffy nodded. "Right."

"Hold up, what are we talking about here?" Xander questioned.

"We can give people the upgrade, now," Willow said, settling into a meditative pose. "Think about it, Xander. This is the early twenty-first century. How many people are dying right this second?"

"Fuck," Xander whispered. "We can't keep this a secret, can we."

"No," Buffy agreed quietly.

"The SGC is going to have kittens," Xander groaned.

"I don't care," Buffy said firmly. "I had my head up my ass about this long enough. I'm not letting millions of people die just so the bureaucratic overlords can feel important."

Xander tugged on his chin in thought. "We can't do it up here. It'll be too slow and resource-intensive to ferry billions of people to the Eliezera by shuttle. If we don't want a war on our hands we have to cover the whole planet in rebirthing pods, everywhere at once. Upgrade as many people as possible before governments have a chance to react."

"Okay, but then how'll people know what the pods are for?" Buffy wondered.

"Well, they'll... um..." Xander gestured helplessly.

"I guess we'll have to figure something out." Buffy suddenly blanched. "Do you think the upgrade would work on demons?"

"Not vamps. It would depend for others," Xander said after a moment. "Does it matter? Even if some big bad gets Faed, we do this right and there'll be no one left they can harm."

Buffy was a little torn, but before she could think about it, she was distracted by Dawn.

The newborn Fae in Buffy's arms was waking up. Dawn's eyes opened gently, and her mouth formed a little 'o' of interest as she stared up at the projected sky and all around the idyllic landscape with wide curious eyes, taking in her first sights ever. Dawn's gaze locked onto Buffy's face, and the newborn girl put her hand to Buffy's face, feeling her.

Buffy’s grin was almost painful. Dawn moved her thumb to Buffy's lips, tracing her mother’s smile, and Dawn's face split into a reciprocal grin.

"And you are too, my little Dawn," Buffy cooed.

Dawn wriggled out of Buffy’s arms and set her feet on the grass, twisting around in a circle as she took in her surroundings. She moved as though there was gravity. Other skills had to be learned, but the deceptively complex task of using one's skeletal magnetics to simulate weight was instinctive.

Dawn took a moment to peer at Xander, who smiled and gave a little wave. Dawn suddenly bounded towards him with innocent enthusiasm, slamming into him hard enough to knock him over. Xander bounced off the grass and stopped them in mid air, snickering. Dawn had her knees clamped on his hips and her hands on his ribs as she peered closely at his face.

"Hi there," Xander chuckled.

"I am called Dawn!" Dawn shared brightly. "You are called Xander."

Xander tilted back onto his feet and gave her a goofy smile. "Sure am."

Dawn giggled and looked up from Xander at the projected sky, reaching up with one hand as though to touch it. Shoving off of Xander, Dawn touched the grass and sprang straight up, shooting off like a rocket.

"Dawn wait!" Buffy called, leaping after her.

Xander winced as Dawn smashed face-first into the ceiling at a speed that wouldn’t be out of place on a freeway. Dawn drifted back, tumbling slowly with a stunned expression on her face. She blinked and gave the pretty planet a pouty glare.

"The sky is mean!" Dawn complained.

Fighting an amused smile, Buffy pulled Dawn into a hug. "That's not a real sky, Dawnie."

Xander was having a harder time holding in his amusement. That had been downright cartoonish. But then, that was kind of the point. The freedom of having a body that wouldn't fail you, no matter what you did, no matter what mistakes you made. Xander shook his head and dove towards Willow, who was still motionless, sitting against the side of the birthing pod.

Dawn snuggled into Buffy as they followed Xander down, the imagined sky forgotten in the face of yet another new experience. The intimacy of full frontal skin to skin contact was a profound thing. With a cute little sigh, Dawn wrapped her arms and legs around Buffy and nuzzled her face into the top of Buffy's chest. Buffy landed on the squishy grass and smiled indulgently...

...until Dawn's wriggling became less kittenish and distinctly more sensual. Buffy's smile froze in place and her face slowly reddened as Dawn obliviously dry-humped her abs. And the dry part of that was quickly becoming otherwise. Buffy had no idea what to do. She knew it would be wrong to reprimand Dawn, but at the same time she was so not to the point where she was comfortable participating in her daughter's sexual explorations.

Buffy shot Xander a pleading look. *Um, help?*

"Uh," Xander said, looking just a little deer-in-the-headlights-y.
After standing there blinking for a few moments, Xander's face suddenly lit up and he jumped over to them. Xander's fingers danced over Dawn's torso and neck, looking for ticklish spots. With a bright peal of laughter, Dawn flailed, releasing Buffy and squirming to get away from Xander as she giggled wildly.

Dawn somersaulted out of Xander's reach and took off at a sprint. She ducked into the roots of a tree a ways away, clinging to the firm but velvety smooth surface. Her head peeked out, and Xander made threatening tickling motions with his hands. Dawn squeaked and ducked back into her hiding spot, but they could still hear her faint giggling.

"Well done, Commander," Anubis rumbled hollowly.

The jaffa stepped back from the piece of cut stone containing the Alteran repository, and did his best not to look smug. They'd been expecting Tau'ri interference, but when they got to the planet all they found was one of the Tau'ri's wheeled probes.

Anubis had the device taken to his research laboratories, and ordered that he not be disturbed. He had knowledge to reclaim, and this was not work he could delegate.

SG-1 sat in their accustomed seats around the table in the briefing room, Jack O'Neill looked up from his copy of the report.

"So, it would seem that over a dozen of the rogue NID agents we have in custody, all agree that Buffy Reaval and the other one were both grabbed in a small town in California. On Earth," Jack summarized flatly.

"Do we have any reason to discount this version of events?" Doctor Weir asked.

"Well, they could all be feeding us a pre-arranged lie," Jack allowed. "Here's an idea, why don't we call up the Fae ship and ask them what they were doing on Earth. See what they say."

"If they are indeed, up to something, would not such questioning, tip our hand?" Teal'c inquired.

"They'd have to know we'd question the rogue agents," Daniel pointed out. "And they never actually said how or where it happened."

"They did leave the bubbleship for us to study, Sir," Carter added.

"How is that going, by the way?" Doctor Weir asked. "Have the science teams learned anything yet?"

Samantha Carter puffed up her cheeks and blew out a long sigh. "We're not even sure where to begin, to be honest. The hull seems to defy analysis. We're not even sure if it is a liquid or a solid. We have determined that the shuttle uses radon gas for its reaction mass."

"Isn't radon highly radioactive?" Doctor Weir asked.

Carter nodded. "Yes, but as best we can tell, the hull of the shuttle, for lack of a better term, eats both the radiation and the decay products. Presumably that is one of its power sources, but that's just conjecture at this point."

"Is that all?" Jack asked.
"We're fairly sure that the bubbleship doesn't interact with subspace at all," Carter continued, "and exploiting subspace through the unique properties of naquada is the basis for nearly all the advanced technology we've encountered off world thus far. I'm finding myself wondering if maybe Willow Rin was right."

"About?" Doctor Weir prompted.

"It was something she said to me during our first contact," Carter said. "She claimed that subspace phenomena were, in her words, 'tacked on' to this universe. I can't know for sure until I have a chance to study their version of the Unified Field Theory to see if it matches ours, but I think she might be right. Our Unified Field Theory perfectly predicts the properties of our quantum reality, except when naquada gets involved. Our physics are simple, elegant, and perfectly reducible, except for this one mineral and its variations. Well, there are other exceptions, Willow was right about that too, but naquada is the only one we actually understand."

"Carter," Jack cut in. "This is all very fascinating, but what's it going to do for us against the immediate threat?"

"Maybe nothing," Carter admitted, "but maybe a whole lot."

"How so?" Doctor Weir asked.

"The bubbleship itself is, well, pretty much useless to us as a military asset, but the implications of it being built in a universe that lacked some of the physical laws of this one - possibly all the physical laws of this universe, except Unified Field Theory - are huge," Carter said. "There are a lot of little inconsistencies... in our observed reality, now that I have some idea what to look for."

"Like what?" Daniel asked curiously.

"For starters?" Carter paused. "Entropic Cascade Failure. Or if you want something simpler, how about, why do we remain conscious in transit between stargates?" Carter let the question hang in the air for a moment. "We've seen, again and again, phenomena where consciousness has effects that supersede the fundamental laws... I honestly can't blame the Fae for calling it magic. The term is scientifically apt."

Daniel felt a chill go down his spine.

"Of immediate use," Carter continued, "is the known fact that the Alterans were physiologically identical to us. Willow was right about that too. They didn't have forcefield generators or subspace radios in their brains. And yet a great number of them displayed powerful psionic abilities. Telekinesis, telepathy, cellular regeneration, thermokinesis, electrokinesis..." Carter trailed off.

"What are you getting at, Major?" Doctor Weir asked.

Carter took a breath. "I believe it is possible for Daniel, and most likely others, to regain at least some of the mental powers displayed by the Alterans, through nothing more than training. We have the same physical brain structure they did. It must be possible for humans to do what they did."

"Um, really?" Daniel questioned, shooting uncertain looks around the table.

"Well... yeah," Carter asserted. "If -"

The warning klaxon sounded. "Unscheduled Offworld Activation!"

SG-1 shared a look and got up, heading down to the control room.
“Recieving SG-3's IDC.”

"Open the iris."

SG-3 came through the gate at a run, somewhat out of breath, but looking intact. Doctor Weir gestured for Jack to follow her and went down into the gate room.

"Colonel Reynolds," Doctor Weir said. "What happened?"

"Anubis landed in force while we were on the planet," Colonel Albert Reynolds reported. "We went to ground, but the jaffa forces didn't stay long. Ma'am. Sir. They took the ancient repository."

"Oh. That's... bad," Jack opined.

Buffy watched Dawn sit knee to knee with Willow, mimicking the redhead's posture, with an impish expression on her young face. Willow was still working on her security program, but every time Dawn would start to get bored and look away, Willow would peak her eyes open, wait for Dawn to notice, and then go back to pretending to be oblivious to the world.

It was surprisingly effective at keeping Dawn entertained.

Buffy looked sideways at Xander. "Xander?"

"Yeah, Buff?"

Buffy just looked at him for a long moment, her face unreadable. Then she turned and floated up until she was level with Xander's face. She kissed him, soft and full of promise.

"Buffy?" Xander breathed.

"I've decided I'm pro-Fae," Buffy said softly. "I figure this is inevitable, and I figure, if I know what I'm gonna think later, I might as well go with that, now."

Xander gave her a lidded smile. "Well. It's about dang time."

Buffy rolled her eyes. "Quiet, you."

And then she was kissing him again, hot and eager, probing his tongue with hers. Her breasts flattened against his firm chest as his arms enfolded her. Buffy pushed Xander off his feet and flew them around behind a hill. As Xander's back settled against the squishy grass, Buffy trailed kisses down his jaw and onto his chest. Her warm wetness brushed his glans and she shivered in anticipation.

Xander wrapped his arms around Buffy's lower back and sat up, aiming himself so his glistening phallus pressed against her dripping entrance. Buffy curled her hips forward and down, popping his girth through her labia and into her depths. Buffy shuddered in pleasure and arched her back, pushing her chest into Xander's face.

Xander nuzzled his nose into her breasts, making Buffy grin. With a buck of her hips, she sank herself the rest of the way down onto Xander's length and began to slowly ride him. Xander kissed his way to a nipple and latched on, nibbling and sucking while his hands stroked her back and his thumbs traced her spine.

Meeting Buffy's slow riding with languid thrusts, Xander took a moment to let the part of himself that idolized Buffy exult in profound victory. Then Buffy trembled as she reached orgasm, and with
a few firmer thrusts Xander quickly followed, spurting deep inside her. And Xander moved on, letting that part of himself fade into a comfortable memory.

Xander gave Buffy a smile and a raised eyebrow. She grinned at him, and her lips crashed into his as she planted her feet in the grass under Xander and raised herself up about half of Xander's length. Xander grabbed her butt and pulled himself back into her forcefully, their flesh slapping together. Buffy moaned into his mouth as Xander pounded into her, quickly building them both to a second orgasm.

They stopped, Xander buried to the hilt as they trembled together with orgasmic convulsions. Buffy looked into his eyes for a long moment, and then seemingly without either of them initiating it, they were suddenly moving again, fucking without restraint.

They climaxed in quick succession a third time. And then a fourth. And a fifth. And a sixth. And a...

"And... done," Willow murmured, opening her eyes and grinning at Dawn.

Dawn pointed at her and giggled. "You looked! You looked!"

"Yep," Willow agreed, booping Dawn on the nose.

Dawn bit Willow's finger and gnawed on it. Willow grinned impishly and started pulling Dawn this way and that by her teeth. Dawn was soon laughing too hard to keep Willow's finger trapped.

Dawn's giggles died down, and she cocked her head. "What are the funny noises?"

Willow smirked. "Oh that's just your Buffy and Xander having a moment." Willow snerked. "Or sixty."

Dawn looked at her blankly.

"We should probably leave them be," Willow mused. "This time, anyway."

It was early morning, and SG-1 was back in the briefing room.

"This is... We were counting on this," Daniel said. "With the Lost City in the hands of Anubis, I think we have bigger problems than whatever the Fae were doing in California."

"Unless the Fae are working for Anubis," Jack contributed.

Carter winced. "Frankly, if that's true, we're totally screwed. Sir."

"Unfortunately, I have to agree with Major Carter," Doctor Weir said. "For the moment, the Fae ship is the only thing standing between us and Anubis' fleet. I think we have no choice but to trust them."

"Indeed," Teal'c contributed.

Jack planted his elbows on the table. "So, assuming the Fae are on our side, what can we do?"

"Well, they can probably say more about that than we can," Daniel pointed out.

Doctor Weir nodded, and stood. "Let's call them up."
Dawn was lying prone in the grass, spying on Buffy and Xander's athletic fucking. Willow hung back, half amused, half hesitant. Sure enough, during a post-orgasmic lull, Buffy eventually noticed.

"Dawn!" she shrieked.

Dawn flinched back, folding back onto her knees. Her lip trembled, and her wide eyes started to shine. Buffy winced, looking supremely torn, and repeated Dawn's name in a softer tone, pulling away from Xander and going to her with a sigh. Dawn pouted about being yelled at, but it didn't look like tears would come.

Shaking her head, Willow took a step forward.

"Fae ship Eliezera, this is Doctor Elizabeth Weir, leader of Stargate Command. Please respond."

Willow blinked and directed her attention to the her interface with the SGC's subspace radio. On the video feed, she saw a tall sharply dressed brunette woman standing in front of a group she recognized as SG-1. Willow formed a camera with her Utility Cloud and opened the connection.

"This is Willow Rin. What can I do for you, Doctor Weir?"

The woman glanced behind her for a moment before turning back to the screen. "Firstly, I would like to once more apologize for the actions of the rogue members of the NID who caused you trouble, and thank you for the restraint you showed in your response."

"We appreciate that," Willow said with a nod.

"I would like to invite you, and miss Reaval and mister Reon, to come visit our facility," Doctor Weir said. "The goa'uld Anubis recently won a major intelligence victory over us, and we would like to discuss our plans for the defense of this planet with you."

"Of course," Willow agreed, worrying her lip. "Um, when?"

"As soon as possible," Doctor Weir said. "However, before that, some of my people have concerns I'd like to address now. According to the rogue agents we apprehended, miss Reaval and her unnamed companion were on Earth when they were abducted. We'd like to know why."

"Oh," Willow winced. "I can see how you would. I assure you our reasons were completely innocuous, Doctor Weir."

"That's a little vague," Jack O'Neill grumbled.

"I am sure we'll both be all with the details soon, Colonel O'Neill," Willow said. "If you'll provide landing coordinates, we'll be there in... an hour or two?"

Major Carter came forward and did something off screen, and Willow received the coordinates. Apparently Stargate Command was in Colorado.

"We look forward to your arrival," Doctor Weir said.

"Thank you, Doctor Weir," Willow said, closing the connection.

Willow sighed. Giles' books hadn't had much to say about Goa'uld who weren't Ra or his court, so all she knew about Anubis was the mythology. Even that wasn't very heartening. And, though she couldn't be sure, it had seemed like Doctor Weir was downplaying the situation when she called it a major intelligence victory.
"I was just startled that you were watching, Dawn," Buffy was saying in a tone that was meant to be reassuring, but came out just a little pained.

"You were doing sex," Dawn announced. "I wanted to see what was making the noises."

Buffy opened her mouth to say something and then cut herself off, no less than three times. Watching her, amusement began to return to Dawn's face. Buffy giggled at herself, still a little loopy with afterglow.

"Hey guys," Willow interrupted. "The SGC just called. They wanna talk, like right now. I think things might be getting a bit... apocalypse-y."

"Apocalypse-y huh? How apocalypse-y, exactly?" Xander asked.

"They didn't say," Willow admitted. "I told them we'd land at their base in an hour or two."

"Okay," Buffy said, ruffling Dawn's hair, then she blinked. "Wait, no, not okay. It's already morning in Sunnydale. Aw crud. My mom's gonna get all stern and lecture-y and with the grounding again."

"What if we told her the truth?" Xander suggested. "Why can't we just land a shuttle in your back yard, explain, then bring your mom up here to get upgraded?"

Buffy paused. "Okay, we'll call that Plan B, alright? Hey, Willow, you can synthesize stuff now, right?"

Willow nodded. "Yep."

"If we're gonna go to like an actual official meeting thing, I think we should dress for it," Buffy said. "And I mean in Fae fashions, don't worry."

"Oh, uh, yeah," Willow agreed. "What did you have in mind?"

"For me?" Buffy asked. "I was thinking mostly metal, maybe a few ribbons..."

"Okay, everything will be waiting for us in the shuttle," Willow said.


Xander stopped. "Wait, what are we going to do with Dawn? She can't come with us. She'd be a hazard to ordinary humans."

"What are you talking about, Xander?" Buffy demanded.

"She's not even a day old, Buffy. She has almost no impulse control, or any understanding of how fragile humans are," Xander said softly.

Buffy frowned. "Well, we can't just leave her up here alone, can we?"

Dawn chose that moment to climb onto Xander's back and poke him in the ear. Xander playfully swatted her hand away and Dawn decided she wanted to chew on his ear instead.

"See what I mean?" Xander asked. "If she did this to a human, instead of cute it'd be a medical emergency."

Dawn looked up and then scrambled over Xander's head, kicking him in the face in the process, and further proving his point. A human would have a broken nose after that. Willow bit her lip in amusement as she caught Dawn and booped her on the nose. Dawn giggled.

"I came to Willow!" Dawn announced.

"Yep! Now pay attention," Willow said. "I'm gonna do the education thing to you."

"Do it to me!" Dawn agreed.

Willow turned Dawn around and pulled them both down onto the squishy grass, so Dawn's back was to her chest and Dawn was slouched between Willow's legs. Dawn peered over her shoulder at Willow, wriggling into the embrace.

At Willow's command, a small panel, about a foot square, rose from the grass between Dawn's thighs, its side forming a mirror. Silently, Willow had Dawn look at the reflection of her vagina, while Willow slid her hands onto the back of Dawn's. Willow guided Dawn's hands, slowly exploring the features and folds of Dawn's sex. She guided Dawn's other hand to a breast, leading her in stimulation there as well.

Dawn made a cute little moaning sound, and her hands moved from beneath Willow's as she was caught up in the profound new sensations. Willow planted a kiss on Dawn's cheek and slid out from behind her. Buffy's mouth was hanging half open as she was once again looking supremely torn. Xander was just giving her a funny eyebrow.

"There. That should keep her occupied for a while," Willow asserted.

Stamping down a flicker of insecurity, Willow nodded resolutely and took Buffy and Xander by the arms. As she pulled them along, she sent the command for a shuttle to assemble itself.

Buffy shook herself and twined her hand into Willow's. "Right. Good thinking, Wills."

"So," Xander started as they reached the shuttle. "What did the SGC say, exactly?"

"Oh right, here," Willow said, forwarding a recording of her conversation through the Dreamlink.

The shuttle emerged into space and accelerated towards the moon's spinward horizon, while Xander and Buffy closed their eyes and watched the recording. Willow guided the shuttle to within a mile of the lunar surface as they used the moon's gravity to help bleed off a massive amount of orbital speed and begin their assisted fall towards Earth.
"When did you decide?" Willow asked softly.

Buffy let her forehead rest against Willow's and smiled wryly. "The moment I ripped my clothes off in front of Ford. It was just suddenly so clear. It just hit me that this is so much bigger than the Slayer. How many people on Earth die in a day? Two-hundred thousand or more? How many of those are 'cause of vampires?"

"Less than five thousand," Willow estimated.

Buffy nodded, turning to the side and slipping down to rest her head on Willow's chest, nuzzling a nipple with her chin. "I've been clinging to the hope of a normal life, and being Fae just seemed like one more thing taking that away from me. But, it's like, the stuff I've been clinging to since Halloween isn't stuff I actually care about, you know, for its own sake. And I realized, being stuck on it might cost the lives of people I care about. I just don't have time to change my mind a little bit by bit..."

"Yeah," Willow agreed.

"Actually, I've been thinking about it," Xander said, sliding down onto Willow's other side and meeting Buffy's lips in the center of Willow's chest. "And... Venus."

"Venus? What about Venus?" Willow asked.

"We ask for it, or just claim it as ours outright," Xander said. "There's nothing there to preserve, so we could terraform it right now, couldn't we?"

"Um, since it wouldn't matter what got, uh, grey-gooed, yeah I can make a basic indiscriminate planetary environment seed," Willow said thoughtfully.

"But what do we need a new planet for?" Buffy asked.

"Okay, so go with me on this for a minute," Xander said, sitting up. "Willow covers Earth in sensor fog, and then sets up an alert that'll let her know when someone on Earth is about to die..."

"Uh, Xander, that's gonna be a lot more complicated than it sounds," Willow said. "I'm still a long way from understanding the Eliezera's abstract reasoning functions, so I can't just order the ship to notice dying people. I'd have to write a notice-dying-people narrow AI from scratch. That's a big job."

Xander nodded. "That's okay, 'cause that gives me and Buffy time to pull off the other part of my plan."

"Okay," Buffy acknowledged. "What's the other part?"

"The Prometheus," Xander revealed. "We get our hands on it, either by convincing the SGC to help, or by tricking them, or by just plain stealing it, and we use the subspace matter transporters to grab everyone Willow's program finds, and stick them in a birthing pod on Venus. Or here, if Venus is out of range, and send the pods to Venus the slow way."
"Okay," Buffy said slowly, "but what's the point of the sending them to Venus?"

"Because we don't have a Giaa to keep the peace on Earth," Xander pointed out.

"He's right, Buffy," Willow said with a thoughtful nod. "Eelesia knew a bit of the history. Back in the days of the Antarctic Coherence, there were attempts. Fear and anger and fighting to maintain the status quo, even if the status quo was horrific. In some places anyone who was outed as seeking the upgrade was in danger of being mobbed and murdered, though with the Giaa Seed in control of the planet by then, mostly everybody was okay. China tried to launch nukes at Antarctica once, and it was only okay 'cause the Giaa Seed had control of the missiles."

Buffy grimaced.

"People already expect their human life to come to an inevitable end," Xander mused. "We can fight against the idea that it's proper to die a natural death. We can try to change people's minds, try to..."" Xander's lips quirked in a nostalgic smirk. "...raise the sanity waterline. But it'll be a lot more efficient to exploit that idea instead. People die, and then they vanish in a mysterious flash of light... People want to believe that dying is merely going somewhere else, and we can use that. We can take what lots of people already want to believe, and make it true."

"It's probably the best thing we can do," Willow agreed.

"I like it," Buffy declared. "Do you think you can pull it off, Wills?"

"I think so," Willow said, closing her eyes in concentration. "Whatever we do, we are probably going to need the sensor fog, though. I'll start making it now."

Below them, the Earth was growing. Once Willow opened her eyes, Buffy pulled her down for a heated kiss before pushing away and snatching up her outfit. Xander took a turn flying the shuttle, nudging their course to make sure they came down over the right area.

Captain Carl Grogan waited with the rest of SG-9 in the hanger off the helipad. The personnel elevator opened, and Carl straightened up when he recognized Dr. Jackson. Jackson nodded to him as he meandered over to the threshold of the hanger and looked up at the sky.

They were waiting for another ten minutes before Dr. Jackson took a step and said, "They're here."

Carl grabbed his radio and called it in as he waved his team forward. SG-9 had been briefed on the Fae an hour ago, but he was still surprised when something that looked like a giant greenish soap bubble dropped out of the sky from directly overhead.

It was silent and still as it slowed to a stop on the tarmac, but it still somehow produced a downwash like a small helicopter. The bubbleship touched down, and the wind vanished like it had never been. Three figures moved inside, passing through the bubble and out onto the ground. Carl only barely kept his mouth from hanging open, and if he hadn't been warned in the briefing, he might not have managed even that.

The voluptuous redhead in the middle was wearing a dark green corset-type thing that covered her from belly-button to solar plexus, laced with glinting white cords, emphasizing her bare breasts and hips. A criss-crossing of matching cords wrapped her upper arms, anchoring a set of gossamer green tassels that trailed from her shoulders. Colorful flowers were scattered in her hair and she had an ornate silver bracelet on her left shin, with more white cord criss-crossing up that leg.

The petite blonde on the left had what looked like polished triangular bars of gold bent into helices...
around her right thigh and left forearm, with matching gold spirals on her breasts, and a thin golden cord riding on her hips. Pleated tails of glimmering white cloth flared out from the waist cord, like someone had taken a floor-length skirt and removed all but two three-inch sections just behind the hips. She also had a pair of golden bracelets on each of her upper arms, trailing white ribbons.

Lastly, the sleekly muscular guy on the right was wearing a pair of dark red belts around his shoulders that crossed at his collarbone and the top of his spine, each running under one arm and over the other. A pair of matching belts circled each of his thighs, anchoring a black, red-ribbed covering on the outside of his thighs that went from his knee to a point above his hips. A pair of the red ribs followed his iliac lines, branching to meet at a rounded black diamond-shape that covered his navel and contrasted against the pale pinkish fleshtone of his manhood. The guy was... up. Gravity-defyingly so, flat against that patch of black.

The girls were gorgeous, and the guy was a walking recipe for male insecurity. Shaking himself, Carl mentally yanked his eyes back into his head and firmly reminded himself that he was a professional diplomat and that this was not the weirdest thing he'd had to deal with.

"Willow. Buffy. Xander," Dr. Jackson greeted, gesturing back towards Carl. "This is Captain Grogan and SG-9. They'll be escorting you around the base and answering any questions you have about our protocols."

Carl stepped forward. "Ma'am. Ma'am. Sir. If you'll follow me."

The planet glowed with the molten flows that covered its scorched crust. Anubis' flagship sank slowly towards the sole remaining artificial structure on the dying planet, ash and embers scattering as the massive ship's shields extended, encompassing the small Alteran outpost.

Anubis, with a squad of Kull warriors at his back, stepped off the ring platform and stalked towards the psionic control chair. His warriors spread around the dark and empty facility, but Anubis didn't expect to need them.

Twenty minutes later, Anubis' flagship rose away from the molten landscape. Inside the once-again dark and powerless Alteran outpost, beside the inactive control chair, a small Octagonal socket was open and empty.

"And these will be your temporary quarters, should you need to remain on base for any length of time," Lieutenant Veronica Hamilton explained.

Buffy peered into the room. "Well, it's very... clean. And right-angle-y."

"Thanks for, um, the consideration," Willow said, "but it's probably unnecessary."

"Just in case you're down here longer than you planned, Ma'am," Captain Grogan assured her.

"I actually meant, we don't need rest, so quarters are kind of superfluous," Willow told him.

That got some raised eyebrows. The other two members of SG-9 hadn't said much, and seemed to be strenuously refusing to look directly at any of the Fae. The two young male soldiers were obviously fighting blushes, but Grogan and Hamilton seemed successful at ignoring the Fae's state of dress, except for the occasional lingering glance. Grogan and his second exchanged a look.

"How does that work?" Captain Grogan asked.
"Really well," Xander joked, clapping his hands together. "So, where to next?"

Captain Grogan turned. "Lieutenant?"

"We're on schedule," she replied.

"To the briefing room, then," Captain Grogan announced.

The three Fae got a lot of stares as they traveled the concrete corridors. Willow privately marveled that she still wasn't feeling immodest or embarrassed. All the attention to her nudity just made her feel otherly, a constant reminder that she and Buffy and Xander were a piece of something else, outside the scope of earthly custom, and these people recognized that.

"Forgive me if this is rude, but I can't help my curiosity," Lieutenant Hamilton said. "Does your culture have a taboo about, uh, non-nudity?"

"Nope!" Buffy said.

"The only taboo we have is taboo itself," Xander stated sagely, getting an elbow from Willow.

"Clothing simply serves no purpose with us beyond ornamentation," Willow elaborated.

"But, if what you're wearing now is typical of your fashions, why is it... why does it leave you so, er, deliberately exposed?" Lieutenant Hamilton inquired.

"For much the same reason your fashions leave your face deliberately exposed, I expect," Willow told her, Buffy nodding in agreement.

Lieutenant Hamilton blinked at this answer, frowning thoughtfully.

Captain Grogan jogged ahead and spoke to an airman. The airman ran into the briefing room to alert Doctor Weir, returning shortly and giving Grogan a nod.

Buffy, Xander, and Willow filed into the big conference room type place. SG-1 was already seated, and Doctor Weir walked around the big wooden table to greet them.

"Thank you for being here," Doctor Weir said.

Willow shook Doctor Weir's hand. "Of course. By the way, I have a gift for you. Or rather, for Samantha Carter." Willow reached into her flower-adorned hair and pulled out something shiny and black about the size of a cell phone. She set it on the table.

"What is it?" Carter asked.

"A complete copy of our scientific database, formatted to be read by present day computers," Willow explained. "It won't be of much immediate practical value, but I expect it will provide you and your scientific community with many useful insights."

Carter stared at the innocuous-looking device, looking like she was barely resisting the urge to pull out her laptop and start going through the information right then and there.

"Your gift is much appreciated," Doctor Weir said.

Once they were seated, Jack O'Neill put his elbows on the table and asked, "So what were you folks doing in California?"
"Jack," Daniel Jackson warned.

"It's alright," Willow said. "We were visiting."

"Visiting," O'Neill repeated flatly.

"When we were first summoned to this universe, we weren't actually on our ship," Willow explained. "We appeared on the ground, in that town. Our ship didn't show up until some time after that. We don't know why the delay, though."

"We have friends there," Xander told them. "So yeah. Visiting."

"These friends of yours have names?" O'Neill asked.

"Yup," Buffy said, "but we're so not gonna repay their trust by ratting them out to you."

"We can understand that," Doctor Weir cut in, shooting the Colonel a quelling look.

"So anywho," Willow changed the subject. "The first time you asked us about trading technology, we couldn't really give you an answer, but I've learned a lot since then. We can offer you a few very useful things."

"Like what?" Carter asked curiously.

"Well, for an example of something I could do for you right now," Willow replied. "How about a bunch of high-capacity space elevators?"

Carter's jaw dropped. "Um, wow, that would be..."

"Conspicuous?" O'Neill finished.

"That's a generous offer, Willow, but there's no way we could conceal something like that from the general population," Daniel elaborated.

"So don't," Buffy said.

"I'm afraid its not that simple," Doctor Weir said, sounding genuinely regretful. "Though I'm curious as to what you would want in exchange for something like that."

"We're mostly interested in your subspace matter manipulators," Willow revealed. "Even with the Asgard limiters Major Carter told me about, even mere teleportation would be very useful to us."

"Because you plan to keep visiting?" O'Neill questioned.

"That, and other stuff," Willow agreed cheerfully.

"We'll have to confer with our superiors on that," Doctor Weir warned, "but we may be able to make such a deal, if certain conditions are met."

Willow nodded. "If you're not interested in space elevators with enough lift capacity to evacuate a majority of the Earth's population in the event of a planetary threat that cannot be stopped with luck and plucky heroism," Willow forced herself not to look at Buffy, "then how about a few tons of room-temperature superconductor?"

Carter choked.
Doctor Weir looked at her. "Major?"

"Ma'am, a room-temperature superconductor is widely considered one of the holy grails of materials science," Carter explained. "There are a number of technologies that we could theoretically build, if we had such a material. We've had some successes exploiting the pseudo-superconductive properties of refined naquadah, but a true room-temperature superconductor would be immensely useful."

"What's naquadah?" Xander asked.

Carter explained, "It's a rare super-dense mineral, with several exotic properties..." She went on to explain its liquid form had an unparalleled ability to produce energy, how it reacted with bioelectric fields to power some examples of goa'uld technology, how the crystal form produced subspace emanations, and how it could manipulate gravity, and so on.

"Oh, so it's basically Eezo," Xander blurted. "Gotcha."

Everyone, including Buffy and Willow, gave him the 'huh?' face. "Eezo?"

"Oh, its from a science fiction franchise Za - I liked from back during my human life," Xander explained. "Eezo was the magical substance that all the physics-breaking technology was based on."

Samantha Carter almost said something, before stopping herself and looking uncomfortable.

"So," Buffy cut in. "What's this major intelligence victory that Anubis pulled off?"

Doctor Weir stood up. "Why don't I let Dr. Jackson and Major Cater fill you in on that while I make some calls about your offers of trade."

The three Fae readily agreed, and Elizabeth Weir retreated to her office while Daniel Jackson began to explain about the Ancient Repository of Knowledge that was left behind by a precursor race called the Alterans.

"Where are these Alterans now?" Buffy asked.

Daniel adjusted his glasses. "Tens of thousands of years ago, the Alterans evolved to the point where they were able to shed physical form and Ascend to live as energy on a higher plane of existence. Since then, they've avoided interfering on our plane, because they discovered that in that form, they actually gained power from being worshiped, so they hold themselves apart to avoid the temptation to set themselves up as gods. A year ago I was one of them, but they took my memory and returned me to human form as punishment when I tried to use my power against Anubis."

"That is really not how evolution works," Xander muttered to himself.

Willow put up a hand. "Um, excuse me, but how the flipping fiddly fable of fortune did you actually encounter incorporeal consciousnesses that can continue to think and act without technology or biology or any material system, and can manipulate the universe through thought alone, and gain energy directly from being worshiped, and you didn't recognize it as magic when it was staring you in the face? You call yourself a scientist?"

"Hey now..." O'Neill defended.

"No, evolution really does not work that way," Xander repeated.

Buffy reached over and put an arm around Willow's shoulders. "Come on, Wills, you're getting all worked up."
Willow abruptly glanced around the table and blushed faintly, sinking back down into her chair. "Ah, sorry, Major Carter. I didn't mean to be so blunt."

Samantha Carter nodded, her teeth on edge.

Buffy looked at Daniel and frowned thoughtfully. "So, if these Alteran guys are so non-interfering, what are you doing here?"

Daniel blinked. "Well, I'm not Alteran. I was dying of radiation sickness, and an Alteran called Oma who we'd met in the past came and helped me Ascend."

"So they do interfere in mortal affairs after all, when they can get away with it," Buffy said.

"Well..." Daniel trail off.

Willow's eyes flew wide. "Oh!"

Everyone looked at her, but Willow didn't elaborate. She just sat back in her chair looking stunned. For over a year Willow had been studying witchcraft, making small progress and struggling to understand it on a deeper level so she could wield the power of magic to help her friends. Sometimes she'd get a spell to work, but she never had any real idea why it worked.

And here, in a military base, a group of alien experts had inadvertently given her a huge clue. Willow would bet that this 'higher plane' wasn't a place existing in higher dimensions at all. After all, these guys had spaceships that traveled higher dimensions all the time, and there was a different-dimensional portal in Willow's high school. The place where Ascended Beings went wasn't a place at all. It couldn't be.

"Willow?" Xander prompted.

Minds, human and alien both, existing bodyless, outside the universe itself. Not physically outside the universe, which was nonsense, like trying to go to the center of the surface of a sphere. Computationally outside the universe, yet causally linked to the universe and to each other, following a system of constant rules that recognized specific conscious phenomena: the fundamental laws of mental magic that operated across their multiverse without exception.

"Are you well, Willow Rin?" Teal'c intoned.

And through that system, the universe could be edited. A witch's spells invoked those 'higher' entities who were fully recognized by the system, since their consciousness was being explicitly enacted by the system. And the witch traded - well it wasn't exactly worship, that was an oversimplification, but a particular kind of attention, of mental exertion, perhaps - that the system recognized without any special prompting, and in exchange the invoked entity wills a piece of the quantum math to change. With each invocation, the system was prompted to recognize the witch's mind, and that degree of recognition directly translated to a witch's power level.

"Willow, what's up?" Buffy prodded.

The chain of inference wasn't rock solid, but it was promising. It was a disturbingly good explanation for why spells tended to go wrong in the particular ways they did. If she was right, there must be a way to get the system to increase its recognition of a mind without invoking an already-Ascended, if the Alterans really did develop their magic personally, without invocation. If that was true, no wonder they erased Daniel's memories. He must have known the secret that would free human mages from Alteran dependency, which would deprive them of the pseudo-worship-y mental energy that strengthened them. And it was exactly the sort of secret that might be hidden in that ancient
repository that Anubis got his hands on, which meant...

"Um," Willow said faintly. "I think we might be... in trouble."

"What're you talking about?" Jack O'Neill asked.

"I think Anubis may be about to discover how to obtain unlimited magical power, from that repository thing," Willow revealed.

"Huh?" "What?" "Huh?"

"Actually, Willow," Daniel said. "Anubis already has all the powers of an Ascended Being. He was Ascended himself, until the others cast him out. He fought back somehow, and managed to retain his powers, but he's not allowed to use them. If he does use anything he got from being Ascended, the others will destroy him."

Willow nodded slowly. That fit with her hypothesis, if Anubis was returned to being a piece of their universe rather from being an independent process, but somehow got the system to continue its previous level of recognition. "Daniel? Do you remember anything at all from when you were one of them?"

Daniel shook his head. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I may have just found a hypothesis about the fundamental nature of psionic magic," Willow said bluntly.

Samantha Carter blinked.

Jack O'Neill kicked back in his chair. "As fascinating as all this is, can we get back to talking about how we're gonna not all die when Anubis decides to get off his incorporeal butt and come destroy us all? Thoughts? Ideas?"

" Unscheduled Offworld Activation!"

"I am afraid I am not the bearer of good news," the elderly jaffa warrior said as Jack, Teal'c, and Weir greeted him at the base of the embarkation ramp. "We've had word from jaffa loyal to our cause. Anubis has gathered the full force of his fleet. He will be here, in three days."

Bra'tac didn't bat an eye when he was introduced to the Fae, simply welcoming them as allies and asking about their capabilities. The assembled group went over the capabilities of goa'uld ships, and the capabilities of the Eliezer. Jack was impressed despite himself at little blonde Buffy's grasp of tactics.

"The problem is, we just can't protect the whole planet," Buffy summed up. "We can defeat any goa'uld ship in our line of sight, but a ha'tak is too fast to chase down, especially if you want us to stay out of low orbit."

"Wills, could we make new ships by the deadline?" Xander asked.

"Maybe," Willow said. "But what good would that do? I can't fly multiple ships at once, and there's no reason to think that whatever stripped the Giaa out of the Eliezer wouldn't propagate to the assembly of new ships. I could probably figure something out if we had more time, but we just don't. Do we?"
"Now that Anubis possesses the knowledge of the ancestors, he will not be made wary by rumors of Ancient weaponry possessed by the Tau'ri," Bra'tac advised. "Any attempt to stall his attack through intimidation is likely futile."

"We need to lay an ambush," Buffy said. "How long would it take a ha'tak to re-enter hyperspace right after coming out?"

"Ten to twenty seconds, approximately," Carter informed her.

Buffy nodded. "So, we need a way of having the Eliezera waiting within ten light-seconds of where Anubis' fleet is gonna pop up. Then we'll have a chance to to take them down before they scatter."

"Bra'tac, do you have anyone in a position to let us know Anubis' course?" Jack asked.

"It appears we will have but one opportunity," Bra'tac reported, handing a tablet over to Doctor Weir. "Anubis plans to pause his advance at this planet to bolster his ranks of jaffa."

"How long do we have?" Doctor Weir asked.

"Anubis' fleet is expected in less than ten hours," Teal'c told them.

"This is better than I was hoping for," Buffy put in. "If I can get on board Anubis' flagship, I can get to Anubis. The ambush will go a lot smoother if the bad guys get there and their leader's dead."

"Look, Buffy," Jack said. "We appreciate the help and we're glad to work with you and all that, but this is going to be a surgical military operation. We can't have a liability like - "

"I'm going," Buffy overrode him. "This is what I do, Colonel, and not to step on your ego and stuff but the fact is, I'm a better... combat asset, than your entire team put together."

"You think so, huh?" Jack challenged.

"Sir, it would be better to have multiple plans in place," Carter put in. "We could use a personal assault on Anubis as a distraction and a cover for a second team to join the fleet covertly with an encrypted subspace transponder, allowing us to track their approach to Earth."

"The problem with that, is that if Buffy slays Anubis, that might stall this attack, but there'll still be a huge invasion fleet sitting there just waiting for some wanna be big bad to claim it. There's no telling how long that would take, how long the infiltration team would have to keep their cover," Xander pointed out. "Our goal is to stop the invasion, yeah, but it's to stop the invasion, not just delay it, right?"

"Indeed," Teal'c contributed.

"What if I sneak on board myself?" Buffy suggested. "I can do the stealthy thing. The best time to strike might be right when Anubis begins his attack. If I go alone, I could even serve as a targeting beacon for the Eliezera. That would make your vulnerable human selves the liability, Colonel. I could survive anything but a direct hit, and I trust Willow's aim."

Willow gulped, but nodded resolutely.

"So, what, with the world at stake, you expect us to sit around twiddling our thumbs while you execute this op all by your lonesome?" Jack demanded. "That's way to much riding on a single point of failure."
"Buffy, I think maybe it's time for some showing off," Xander said. "They've never seen you in action."

Jack got a raised eyebrow from Buffy, and turned inquiringly to Doctor Weir, who's expression was suddenly alarmed. Jack spun back, only to find Buffy's chair empty.

"Where'd she go?" Jack snapped as the rest of his team slammed their chairs back and looked under the conference table.

A pair of thumps alerted made everyone spin towards the doors, where the pair of MPs were unconscious on the floor. Willow and Xander were still in their seats, looking slightly smug.

"What was that? What's she doing?" Doctor Weir demanded.

"Demonstrating," Willow said evenly. "Buffy says you have ten minutes to stop her from stealing your Stargate." Her eyes widened. "Oh don't worry! She wont actually take it! She's just trying to make a point. But yeah, ten minutes."

Jack was already moving towards the lockdown alarm, and the air was filled with the sound of alarm klaxons. He snatched a base phone up and started snapping out orders. Willow was probably telling the truth, but he wasn't going to take the chance she wasn't.

Nearly ten minutes later, Jack watched as the little nude blonde woman streaked into the gate room with a crash of torn metal, a Zat in each hand and a pair of staff weapons floating without visible support over her shoulders. She paused, hovering fifteen feet in the air, to smirk at Jack.

This was the first time in ten minutes anyone in the base even saw her long enough to identify her. He'd been getting reports of soldiers dropping unconscious for no apparent reason, and a fleshtone blur appearing in completely unpredictable places, shrugging off weapons fire like it was nothing, and just generally being made to look like fools.

Buffy tossed away her four weapons and tapped her wrist, giving Jack a raised eyebrow. Moments later a squad of marines along with Teal'c and Bra'tac moved in and opened fire.

The petite bare-skinned blonde just folded her arms and hovered in mid air as bullets and staff blasts struck brutal blows, suppressing a grimace of pain. She darted backwards two feet, and caught the incoming staff blasts in her Utility Cloud, surrounding herself with a whirling torus of orange plasma.

Her attackers dove for cover as some of their bullets were sprayed out from their target in molten form while others joined the spinning torrent of fiery death. Meanwhile, Buffy turned to the massive power cables hooked up to the Stargate, and without visible movement on her part, the cables and clamps detached themselves.

Buffy flew above the Stargate and swept her arms upward, sending a torrent of energized plasma and molten lead drilling upwards through the blast doors in the ceiling.

Looping down to the top of the Stargate, Buffy gripped it under the rim and, straining with effort, lifted it from its moorings and carried it up the shaft towards the surface.

"Well, if it makes you feel better, Colonel, you guys did manage to wreck my outfit," Buffy offered generously. "But I think I've made my point."

Jack O'Neill scowled down at her while behind him Samantha Carter and an army of technicians
along with Willow Rin scrambled to reconnect the Stargate to the base's systems. "And what if it takes us more than nine hours to get the gate working again?"

"I was careful not to damage any of the stuff you had hooked up to it," Buffy pointed out petulantly.

"Your capabilities are indeed fearsome, Buffy Reaval," Teal'c contributed.

"Yeah, about that." Jack pointed accusingly. "You can fly!"

"Well, not really," Buffy denied.

"Not really? Then what the hell was all that?" Jack demanded, waving towards the Stargate.

"Magnets!" Buffy proclaimed.

Jack blinked. Teal'c blinked. Daniel stared at Jack, and promptly cracked up. Buffy gave Daniel a confused look, because he was clearly laughing at Jack, but she couldn't figure out what was so funny.

"Aht da ta!" Jack snapped, stalling Daniel's laughter but not his mirth. He gave Buffy a long searching look. "I still don't like it. But, just maybe, you're our best shot."

Jack watched uncomfortably as Buffy gave Willow a lingering kiss.

"Go be sneaky," Willow told her.

Buffy fidgeted with the SGC tactical vest that Jack had talked her into taking, as she stepped back and glanced towards the shimmering blue of the active Stargate. Willow retreated to Xander's side and put an arm around his waist.

"We'll be ready," Xander said.

"I know," Buffy said, giving them a dry smile, like there was something she wanted to say, but stopped herself with a glance at the various SGC personnel present.

Buffy turned and looked up at the open Stargate. Then, she moved, and Jack had to suppress a flinch as the diminutive blonde shot forward. She cleared the embarkation ramp in a single step, hurtling into the event horizon at nearly thirty miles per hour.

As the Stargate shut down, Willow and Xander shared a look and gave Jack a nod. Without another word, the pair of Fae lifted into the air and flew up the shaft above the Stargate. Their movements were slower and shakier than Buffy's seemingly effortless flight, but they disappeared up into the passage quick enough.

Willow and Xander pulled themselves up by the metal reinforcement in the concrete walls, gaining as much speed as they could before they shot out the top of the mountain. Willow was already controlling the shuttle to come intercept them. Finally they rocketed up into cold open air, their ascent slowing with gravity.

Under Willow's control, the shuttle came streaking out from behind the rocks and caught them before they could start to fall. Willow bounced off the inside of the shuttle and settled herself in the center of the sphere, and the shuttle blasted upwards with a sonic boom.

"My lord, I'm reading another anomaly on the internal sensors," First Prime Her'ak reported dutifully
from the pel'tack control console. "This one appears to be on the superweapon maintenance level. Shall I send a squad to investigate?"

"No," Anubis rumbled. "The hour of our victory approaches. We have greater concerns than these minor glitches. I will deal with the responsible incompetents in due time."

Her'ak bowed. "Your command, my lord?"

"When we arrive at the Tau'ri homeworld, you will lead the attack in my stead," Anubis ordered hollowly. "There is a task I must see to in secrecy."

"Yes, my lord."

Willow watched with half an eye from her perch on the large round fleshy cushion she had raised in a little hollow between two trees, as Dawn did her level best to rape Xander. He was fending her off playfully, and Dawn was laughing at the game. Apparently, after spending something like thirty straight hours masturbating, Dawn had put one and one together and figured out just what that big firm phallic appendage of Xander's was for.

A small part of Willow still found the idea of Buffy's young daughter trying to molest Xander to be disturbing, but thanks to Eelesia she remembered what had happened when the First Generation had tried to impose their behavioral standards on their Fae offspring. Nearly an entire generation simply shut their parents out of their early lives. It was hard to lie to one's kids about things like sexuality when they were born physically mature with perfect eidetic recall and a Dreamlink. It was hard to enforce one's authority when one's kids weren't dependent on their parents for anything material.

It was a simple story that had repeated countless times in those early days. There simply wasn't any point in trying to convince a young Fae that their urges were wrong.

So, Xander was playing, keeping it light-hearted as he fended off Dawn's attempts to grab him by the cock and impale herself, as though it were an innocent tickle-fight, because in a very real way that's the sort of thing it was. Also because it would be irresponsible to expose Dawn to the concept of shame before she was old enough to handle it.

Willow took a moment to giggle into her hand as Xander hefted Dawn by her waist with the young girl sideways, her head down behind Xander's knees and her legs kicking in the air. It was the quiet before the storm, in a sense. The ship was as ready for battle as it was going to get, and she and Samantha Carter were both sure she was at least over the correct hemisphere to avoid putting the Earth between them and Anubis' fleet. It was just a matter of waiting for Buffy's Dreamlink signal to reappear, now.

Shutting her eyes, Willow returned to her work on what she'd come to call her Salvation Seeker Program. Just because they didn't have the subspace transporters yet, didn't mean she couldn't work on the meat of the problem. Drawing on every bit of knowledge she could think to look for, she was slowly gathering the pieces she'd need to write a search algorithm that sifted through the massive data influx from the sensor fog that now covered Earth, looking for... dying people. Such simple words, just four syllables, and yet defining those words in rigorous mathematical terms was by far the most daunting project she'd ever set herself to.

She'd get it right though. She would. Literally everyone's life was at stake. Three people died every time her heart beat, and that was just on Earth. With a sense of surrealness, Willow realized that if Anubis' invasion lasted even just one day, delaying Willow's work, the toll in lives lost to natural causes could easily exceed the number of lives lost in the actual conflict.
Willow continued mapping the SSP out in her head, her mind a storm of research, abstraction, and math. Perfect eidetic recall was so useful.

"No, no, I'm sure she's fine," Rupert Giles assured Joyce Summers over the phone.

"So you do know where she is?" Joyce inquired in a dangerously calm tone.

Giles rubbed his forehead. "Ah, not as such, no."

Joyce hung up shortly after that, and Giles sighed as he looked around the empty library.

"Where is that blasted girl?"

With a whorl of blue plasma, the massive flagship of Anubis' fleet dropped out of hyperspace just outside the orbit of the moon. In its wake, the star-filled black lit up as dozens of hyperspace windows produced a vast fleet of ha'tak and al'kesh.

From the flagship, a single tel'tak emerged and cloaked as it accelerated towards the Earth's southern pole.

"Mr President, a short time ago, our space-based radar detected over three dozen Goa'uld vessels emerging from hyperspace," General John Jumper reported without preamble.

"It would appear Anubis doesn't know about our newest allies," General George Hammond noted. "Those numbers are consistent with our estimates of Anubis' forces. I think we can safely assume the Fae operative has avoided detection."

President Henry Hayes paused as the lights in the oval office began to dim. The air in the center of the room warped, and a circle the height of a man shimmered like a hole was being cut in the air, forming a perfect window through which the bridge of a Goa'uld ship was visible. Most prominently, standing before the portal was a jaffa with the gold marker of a First Prime, flanked by a pair of Kull, with an ominous hooded figure further back on a golden throne.

The president's advisers scrambled away as secret service rushed into the room and started firing into the portal.

"Hold your fire! It's a hologram!" General Jumper shouted.

President Hayes straightened up and walked towards the portal.

"I am Her'ak, First Prime to the one true god, Anubis," the jaffa announced. "In Anubis' name, you will submit, or you will be destr - "

Suddenly, a small girlish figure plummeted into view from above, smashing down on the figure in the golden throne with an electrified fist. The black-cowled figure fizzled out in a shower of sparks as the blonde Fae's fist put a crater in the seat of the throne, revealing him for a hologram.

Her'ak made an undignified noise of surprise, whirling around as he went for his Zat. The blonde Fae closed the distance in a single step and Anubis' First Prime died with a broken neck before he could even activate his weapon. She spun, kicking one of the Kull in the chest hard enough to send him flying across the room and dent the wall. The other opened fire on her, but she just shrugged off the hits and grabbed the arm with the blaster. She forced it up under the Kull's chin, breaking through
the armor with a two-finger strike and allowing the plasma bolts to penetrate.

"Holy mother of..." someone whispered.

Buffy looked through the portal into the oval office, and spoke aloud for their benefit. "Willow. Open fire."

It was like a thread of greenish light, stretching through space. Innocuous, even sort of pretty, and not very impressive, but as that thread swept through the great mothership, there was a flare brighter than the sun as the shields were pierced and the ship was first cut in half, then ripped into shrapnel by the secondary shockwave, all in less than a heartbeat.

The shock was like nothing Buffy had ever experienced before. It completely overwhelmed her senses, and also actually hurt her, badly enough that her pain receptors cut off. The first comprehensible thing Buffy became aware of was that she was tumbling through space, and her skin was numb. Her eyes weren't working right, but she still had enough intact skin on the side that hadn't been facing the explosion to regenerate her Utility Cloud, and she used that to look around.

It was like being in a nest of stars, as dozens of ha'taks were ripped apart in silence by the sheer kinetic impact of the Eliezera's tightly focused reaction mass. Turning her sight onto her own body, she saw that the skin over half of her body was some odd combination of bruised, scraped, and burned. They weren't really directly comparable to human injuries; the internal composition of her tissues was just too different.

A subsystem of her morph settings prodded her awareness, informing her that she'd be healed in about forty minutes. Make that eight minutes, taking Slayer healing into account. Eight minutes. Eight minutes to recover from what was effectively a small nuke going off in her face. Sometimes, Buffy loved being Fae.

The reports came in. One ha'tak had fled into hyperspace, but four others had managed to disperse into Earth orbit before the Fae ship could destroy them. One of those was damaged from a graze that drew a line of fire across the upper atmosphere over Australia, lighting up the night like a second sun.

"George, I believe I have one more job for you," President Hayes said.

Moments later, General George Hammond departed to take command of the Prometheus and hunt down the remaining Goa'uld ships.

*Nice aim, Wills, Buffy sent.*

*Buffy? Are you okay? Willow sent back.*

*Yeah, Buffy replied. I could use a ride, though.*

*A shuttle is on the way, Willow promised.*

*Awesome, Buffy replied. How did we do?*

*Four of the big ships managed to scatter into low orbit, Willow informed her. I'm moving the Eliezera into an elliptical polar orbit. The SGC says they're sending their ship out to help hunt down the motherships. Xander wants to take a shuttle and go after the smaller support craft.*
Deep under the ice of Antarctica, a ring platform activated. A flash of light and the rings sank back out of sight, leaving the cowled figure of Anubis standing alone on the platform.

The ship that had destroyed most of his fleet was unknown to him, but soon that wouldn't matter. He'd made the right decision to come for the Alteran outpost immediately and in person.

Moving like a ghost, he found his way to the control chair. He knelt on the dais and produced a glowing orange ZPM from his black robes. With deliberate unhesitating motions, he removed the depleted ZPM and replaced it.

The outpost lit up around him as it recognized his power. Triumphantly, Anubis sat in the control chair.

"Blue Squadron, you are go for launch," came General Hammond's order.

Lt. Colonel Cameron Mitchell opened the throttle of his F-302 and screamed out of the Prometheus' hangar bay, followed by the rest of his squadron. Behind him, the Prometheus turned to engage the ha'tak mothership as orange plasma splashed on the smaller battleship's shields.

There were three al'kesh in range, and handful of death gliders, coming to aid the ha'tak. Mitchell barked orders, arranging his forces and assigning targets, and battle was joined.

The first run did some satisfying damage to one of the al'kesh, but required some wild evasion to dodge the return fire from the heavy bomber's cannons. A deathgider lined up for a shot. Mitchell cut thrust and pitched down hard, cutting an arc with his guns and blowing off a piece of the deathgider's wing. He slammed the throttle up and shot off in an entirely different direction, curving to rejoin his wingman.

A narrow miss streaked by the canopy as a new trio of deathgliders came in at high speed. Mitchell pulled up hard and returned fire, but the deathgliders were already breaking away and taking up a new attack vector. A plasma blast struck his wingman and that F-302 erupted in a fiery explosion.


"Mitch we got two more coming in on our seven," his co-pilot Adam Banks warned.

"I see 'em."

Cameron Mitchell was a very good pilot, but space combat was hardly a refined art form. All of the hard-won experience and wisdom fighter pilot training might call on assumed an atmosphere, gravity, and aerodynamics. F-302 pilots were a new breed, and they were learning fast, but they were still learning.

Cameron twisted his plane out of a crossfire and launched a missle, but, "Fuck! Banks, where's number three?"

A plasma bolt grazed the wing, answering that question. Mitchell hesitated a split-second before yawing left hard, a move that was suicide in an atmosphere, and the delay left him right in the deathgider's sights.
Suddenly, a barely-visible thread of greenish light lanced right through the deathglider, and the Goa'uld fighter erupted like someone had stuffed the cockpit entirely full of C4.

"Holy shit, are you seeing this, Banks?" Mitchell gaped.

Something that looked like a soap bubble flitted through the battle, those little lances of green snapping out in every direction, never once missing or needing a second shot. Mitchell watched as the bubble flitted into the path of a plasma blast from the last al'kesh. There was no flare of a shield, but the bubble merely wibbled under the impacts. A moment later another green thread lanced out and cut the al'kesh into smoldering halves.

"Is that... a naked blonde girl?" Banks asked faintly.

Sure enough, as they flew into formation, the bubble passed close enough for Mitchell to make out the female figure inside. The bubble seemed to deliberately slow, pulling around to hang in front of the reformed Blue Squadron at close range. She gave a little salute, and then spun around and streaked off at what had to be something like sixty Gs. Mitchell noticed that she turned, but the bubbleship didn't, it just moved it whichever direction.

"I don't know what that was, but I want one," Mitchell breathed.

"Yeah, she was seriously hot," Banks agreed.

Mitchell snorted. "Oh yeah, but I was talking about her ship."

Xander cut another of the big silver ships into scrap, and looked down at a strange golden light that suddenly appeared on the icy white continent below. His eyes went wide in alarm as he made out what looked like an almost organic column of glowing gold sprouting into space far to quickly to be anything terrestrial. It was heading right for where the \textit{Eliezera} was approaching in its new orbit.

\textit{Willow! Incoming!} Xander sent as he rocketed towards the rising column.

Once he got closer, he could make out that the golden light was made up of a swarm of smaller glowing things. As the golden swarm neared the \textit{Eliezera}, it fountained, splitting up into dozens of smaller streams that curved around the massive pearlescent ovoid ship before arcing in towards it. Streams of relativistic radon lanced out, cutting explosive holes in the golden swarm.

Xander noticed that the swarm didn't seem to want to maintain more than a dozen or so separate streams, but at the same time Willow was having a hard time hitting multiple targets at once.

A stream of the swarm struck the hull like... like nothing Xander could think to compare it to. A rapid sequence of explosions, blending into an almost constant flare. He could actually see the hull discolor as vast amounts of energy were dissipated across the whole of the ship, and for a moment he thought the ship was standing up to the assault, but then a greatly diminished stream of the swarming golden glows erupted from the opposite side of the ship.

Xander's mouth fell open and he forgot to control his shuttle as he watched the golden swarm rip its way straight through something like twenty miles of of starship. What the hell were those things? Granted, the interior of the ship was orders of magnitude less tough than the hull, and that was a relatively thin cross section of the generation ship, but still.

More streams penetrated the Eliezera, and Xander watched in helpless shock.

\textit{Oh crap! Xander, those things are breaching the fusion core! I'm about to go nova over}
And it happened. There was a blinding flash and a nimbus of nuclear fire as the *Eliezer* ripped itself into two ragged halves. One of the halves was still firing on the swarming golden things, and Xander watched as it maneuvered itself back towards the severed half, matching its velocity. As soon as it got close enough, the dead half revived and resumed firing as well.

*Willow!* Xander sent urgently.

*Holy moley,* Willow replied. *Xander! We're running on nothing but stored power now, and we're already low on radon from chasing ha'tak all over the place. I don't know how long I can keep this up.*

Xander grunted in frustration, and then he had an epic lightbulb moment. *Willow! Those things came from the surface! Here!* He sent the image from his memory of where the golden light first appeared.

For an eternity of two whole seconds, Willow stopped firing entirely, and then a single glimmering thread struck at the planet, carving a line of fire down through the atmosphere. Another blinding flash, and the swarm of golden glowy things just went dark and died, while a mushroom cloud bloomed over Antarctica.

"Everything shook a lot and then it got really warm and then the air went away for a while, but its back now," Dawn summed up her take on the battle, making Xander smile and Buffy shake her head.

"Antarctica is never going to be the same," Willow lamented, closing her eyes. "I thought I held back enough, but just look at it! Antarctica is so not supposed to be that color!"

"Well, nobody's talking about global nuclear winter," Xander pointed out. "So I think you hit Anubis just hard enough."

"We didn't know that was Anubis, and we were only guessing it would stop the drones," Willow fretted.

Buffy patted Dawn on the head and floated up to hug Willow from behind, pressing her breasts into the red-head's back. "You did good, Wills."

Xander joined them, making a Willow samwich as he gave her a gentle kiss. Willow sighed and gave her two best friends a sheepish smile. Her expression firmed up and she nodded.

"Right, so first things first," Willow said. "Refuel and restock the ship, then get back to work on the SSP. You guys should talk to the SGC about the matter transporters, or else start planning how to steal them... uh, maybe after Buffy checks in at home?"

Buffy winced. "My mom is going to kill me."
For the second time in as many days, Eelesia Rin found herself in a strange place, with no response from the Overlink. As she picked herself up off the warm, packed sand, she took a look at herself, and saw that at least this time, she was back to her normal appearance. Buxom, sleekly muscled, with bone white skin, jet black hair, and vividly violet eyes in a welcoming heart-shaped face.

There was a sun shining brightly overhead, and rocky hills in the far distance. Great swaths of swaying grass-like plants covered the lands. Peering up at the sky, Eelesia was fairly sure that it was real, same as last time, but she couldn't see anything beyond that.

Lyn? Zach?

Eelesia tried, but there was no one to receive.

The last thing she remembered before arriving in this grassy desert, she’d been on board the copy of the Eliezera, having sex with Lyn and Zach, but it looked like this time whatever it was that happened, hadn't brought them with her.

She wondered for a moment if she was a third magically created copy of Eelesia Rin, but decided it didn't really matter. She'd already accepted that she was a magically created duplicate of the original Eelesia Rin after realizing she was in a magical universe the first time.

Shrugging, Eelesia picked an interesting-looking direction and started walking.

Eelesia walked for days, but such was not much of a hardship for a Fae.

She was alone in the desert, until one evening when she spotted movement. Eelesia watched as what could be called a wall of men riding horses crested a rise. It wasn't long before the riders spotted the pale gleam of her nude skin, and Eelesia quickly found herself being circled by muscular tanned men on horseback, clad in sewn hides and wearing bladed weapons.

Eelesia studied their faces curiously, noting a mix of reactions, ranging from wary fear to naked lust. She blinked as her eyes landed on a still-bleeding scratch on one man's arm. They were human, she realized, like in the last place she found herself.

Those circling her pulled back as a larger man with his hair in a long braid woven with little bells reined his mount to a halt before her.

"Hello," Eelesia greeted serenely. "Do you understand these words?"

Eelesia repeated the question in all of the seventeen languages she knew, but the long-braided man merely stared at her, his expression unreadable. There was low whispering among the other riders, until the long-braided man, without moving his gaze, rumbled out an order in a calm, commanding tone.

"I'll take that as a no," Eelesia said.
The horses parted, and a younger man with short hair came forward with a youthful woman sitting behind him. She dismounted with the ease of long practice and came towards Eelesia.

"Do you know my words?" the girl asked in something very similar to English.

Eelesia nodded. "I do. My name is Eelesia Rin. Can you tell me where I am?"

The long-braided man spoke, and the girl translated, "You face Khal Drogo's horde. The Khal asks who your people are, and how you came to be wandering the Dothraki Sea in not but your skin."

"My people are called Fae," Eelesia answered. "I woke up in the desert, with no memory of how I came to be there."

"Are there others of your people in these lands?" the girl translated.

"No," Eelesia replied.

The man apparently called Khal Drogo said something else, and then wheeled his horse and continued on without waiting for a reply.

"The Khal says you may travel with, and shelter with, his khalasar, but you will not be provided for, and must find your own food and fashion your own tools," the girl said.

Eelesia just smiled. "No problem there. What's your name?"

The young man she arrived with rode up next to her, and she reached up to clasp his arm. The two spoke a few words, and the girl said, "I am Irri. This is Rakharo. We ride now, while light remains."

With the sunset, the khalasar made camp, erecting a small town's worth of sturdy leather tents.

Many of the men watched her with wary eyes, but several others came up to her and started touching her as they loosened their trousers of hide and rough cloth. Eelesia went along with it, having no reason to refuse their sexual overtures, but there was a small scuffle between the five men, presumably over who would fuck her first. The men were all remarkably similar, so she didn't have much of a preference herself, but she was a bit worried one of the fragile humans might be hurt. Unfortunately, she'd only picked up about a dozen words of the language and couldn't do much to mediate.

Once the fight was over, fortunately with only scratches and bruises, the first man pushed her to her knees and bent her over, grabbing her hips as he sank himself into her. Eelesia sighed in pleasure, moaning through two orgasms before the first man finished.

Eelesia did think it was kind of strange how they only fucked her one at a time, and always insisted on the same position. She made a note to ask about that once she'd learned the Dothraki language.

More of the men made advances on her after that, emboldened by those first five men, and over the next several days she had sex with several hundred riders in Drogo's khalasar. Most of them were fairly boring lovers, but Eelesia didn't really mind for the time being. She did wonder why it was only men who came to fuck her.

The whispers and curious-to-somewhat-spooked glances sent her way when they thought she wasn't looking, had died down after that first night, but were now growing steadily worse. Eelesia figured it wasn't worth worrying about, though. It wasn't a hostile kind of feeling she was getting from them.
Eelesia found Irri sitting on a flat rock near a bonfire, stitching some sort of leather bracer together with a crude needle. Eelesia went to sit next to the girl, the rock warm, hard, and slightly powdery under her bare butt.

Irri glanced up, and Eelesia smiled in greeting. "Good evening, Irri."

Irri paused in her stitching. "There is talk of your strangeness." She repeated the sentence in Dothraki out of habit, for the sake of Eelesia's learning, as she resumed sewing.

"Is that bad?" Eelesia asked.

"It is not known," Irri said. "I hear tell that for a tenday no man or woman has seen you eat, nor drink of water. You wear no cloth or hide, yet your unnatural fair skin does not burn under the light of day. The riders whisper of strange sorceries, when they do not boast of your cunt. You are not known."

Eelesia pondered how to explain while she asked another question. "Irri, since I've traveled with this khalasar, hundreds have wanted sex with me, but all of them were men and not one of them a woman. Why is that?"

"Such play is only for when there are no men who wish a mount," Irri said. "It is known."

Eelesia nodded, accepting that as one more Dothraki cultural quirk. She'd learned that there was little point in asking for details about something that 'is known'.

Eelesia reached an arm around Irri's back and lightly caressed the exposed skin above her hip.
"There seem to be no men wishing to mount either of us right now. Would you like to play with me?"

Irri looked at her in surprise. "I... I cannot. I must finish this." She held up her sewing. "Then I must return to Rakharo."

Eelesia smiled. "Alright. May I see your needle for a moment?"

Irri paused, confused, but slipped it off the cord and handed it over. Eelesia held it in the palm of her hand, and probed its composition with her Utility Cloud. She smiled when she realized it was mostly iron. She got up and went to the bonfire, snagging a piece of blackened wood from the edge of the flames.

"Eelesia, your hand," Irri gasped as Eelesia returned to her seat.

"I'm fine," Eelesia reassured her.

Eelesia cupped her hands, so it wouldn't be too obvious what she was doing from a distance, and suspended the cinder and the crude iron needle in her Utility Cloud. Irri's eyes went wide as she saw the two objects float seemingly without support.

Eelesia arranged her Utility Cloud into a magnetic scaffold around the needle, and ran an electric current through the metal until it was glowing white-hot. Irri sat frozen, watching the pale nude woman stare in concentration at the glow cupped between her hands.

A short while later, the glow had faded and Eelesia blinked and looked up, holding out something silver and gleaming. Irri took the new needle from Eelesia's palm with slightly shaky fingers.

"It's stainless steel," Eelesia said. "Much stronger than iron, and it will never rust."
"I have heard tales of such things, but never seen," Irri said, examining the large needle closely. "How is this possible?"

"Among my people," Eelesia said. "My strangeness is not strange. My home is not within the lands of Essos or Westeros. I come from a place that is beyond the sky, and in that place I am unremarkable, but I am not the same as the men and women of Essos and Westeros."

The first time Eelesia spoke the Dothraki language, it was in anger.

She came upon a trio of large men, surrounding a young girl. They were handling her roughly. Her clothes were torn, she had bruises on her arms, and her lip was bleeding. This wasn't an entirely unfamiliar sight in the khalasar, but in this case the girl couldn't have been older than twelve, and she was whimpering in pain and crying freely.

With a frown, Eelesia stalked up behind the one who had grasped the girl by the throat, and grabbed his wrist, forcing his hand open as she shoved him away.

"What is wrong with you no-heart beasts?" Eelesia demanded. "Can you not see her tears?"

The one she had shoved regained his balance with an angry grunt and backhanded Eelesia hard enough to knock teeth out of a human. Eelesia didn't think about it, she just hit back out of habit. There was a sickening crunch as her uppercut broke the man's jaw and sent him sprawling onto his back in the dirt.

Eelesia didn't have time to feel sheepish. The other two men dropped the girl and drew blades, coming at her with a snarl. On reflex, Eelesia met the first stab with a palm strike, shattering the blade as it failed to penetrate her hand.

With a sigh, Eelesia restrained herself. These were humans, and while they couldn't hurt her, she could easily hurt them, so she really couldn't justify fighting back against them. She wasn't in any danger.

They stabbed, slashed, and beat on her with increasing frustration and fear, while a crowd watched in shocked silence. The man who'd been behind the young girl, in the process of raping her, threw away his bent blade and tried to strangle Eelesia. He crushed her neck with all his strength, picking her up and slamming her head against the ground, then lifting her and throwing her.

Eelesia touched down with one hand and rolled gracefully back to her feet, facing him. He came at her again.

"Stop!" came the bellowed roar in Khal Drogo's voice.

The men froze, and the crowd parted as the Khal himself strode onto the scene.

"Explain," the Khal rumbled.

At this, everyone but Eelesia started talking at once, until the Khal barked for silence. He eventually got the story from the men and the spectators, and strode up to Eelesia.

"What sort of creature are you, pale woman?" the Khal asked.

"I told you on the day I met your horde, Khal," Eelesia said respectfully. "I am Fae."

Khal Drogo snorted. "Whatever you are, you will not interfere with a mounting. A man has the right
to what, or who, he is strong enough to take."

Eelesia brushed that off. "The girl was distraught, and your men did not care or take notice of this. If they have the right to ignore her anguish, I have the right to ignore theirs."

"No," Khal Drogo said. "You do not."

The Khal turned and strode off, ignoring Eelesia's dissatisfied frown. "Well. That's hardly fair."

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Months later, Daenerys Targaryen was sitting beside the pillar of masculinity that was Khal Drogo, glancing nervously at him whenever she let her gaze wander. Ser Jorah Mormont sat a step below her, translating and explaining the parts of the celebration for her.

Daenerys' eyes were drawn to the side, as a cluster of Dothraki came into sight, and the unknowing dragonsouled girl spotted an anomaly in the sea of tan flesh and dark hide. Skin fairer than Daenerys’ own, hair darker than a raven's wings, and a breathtaking figure that jiggled as she rutted with the nearest man.

"Ser Jorah, who is that?"

The knight followed her gaze. "Ah. She is called Eelesia Rin. The Dothraki say she walked out of the desert without a thread on her, impossibly hale, without any sign of the sun on her skin. They say she comes from a land beyond the sky, where great magicks are common. That she does not sleep. That she fought three warriors at once to defend a young girl from rape, and that steel breaks on her flesh."

Daenerys narrowed her eyes in interest. "Is it true, Ser Jorah?"

"Perhaps," the knight confided. "I know it is true that she goes unclad and yet her skin does not redden, and I have seen a blade break on her flesh with my own eyes."

Daenerys turned to him. "You've seen her perform such magic? Truly."

"Indeed, my lady," Jorah Mormont confirmed.

Daenerys didn't take her eyes off the unusual woman until it was time to accept her gifts.

Eelesia quietly crept along the rocks, making no sound as she snuck up on Khal Drogo and his new wife. The silver-haired girl had apparently never had sex before, and would be expected to tonight, and Eelesia was curious how it would go.

She came upon the Khal and the Khaleesi in a sandy clearing between rocks and grass, and stilled to watch.

Both Drogo and the young Daenerys were naked, with Drogo seated against a rock, and Daenerys on his lap with her back to his chest. He had one hand between her legs, stroking her folds, while the other caressed her breasts. His lips tickled her shoulder, and Eelesia saw him say something. With her eyes shut, Daenerys nodded hesitantly, and Drogo reached down to position his cock at her opening.

Eelesia was impressed. She didn't think the Khal had it in him to be so tender.

Drogo adjusted his hips and guided Daenerys with his hands, sinking into her with one firm thrust.
Daenerys winced, and then trembled as he drew out. Drogo kept them moving like that, slow and firm. It was clear that Daenerys wasn't entirely comfortable, but it was also obvious that she was well on her way to an orgasm.

Eelesia crawled backwards and slipped away.

"The Stallion Who Mounts the World! The Stallion Who Mounts the World!"

Daenerys stood triumphant, her face covered in blood, as her beloved Drogo lifted her onto his shoulders and carried her around the wildly cheering crowd.

At the edge of the crowds, the nude form of Eelesia stood still, with only an expression of sadness on her face. Noticing this, Ser Jorah sidled over to her.

"You are not happy for your Khaleesi?" he asked softly.

"Daenerys is not my queen," Eelesia responded. "But I do like her. She is both clever and kind, and in her own way she is very strong. It is my hope that her heart will never grow cold, but if it does not, I think she will look back on this moment in years to come, and regret it."

"I see," Ser Jorah murmured.

"You love her," Eelesia said.

Ser Jorah's head snapped around and he looked at her sharply. "I serve the rightful queen."

"You do," Eelesia agreed. "But you would serve her regardless of her righteousness. Regardless of her righteousness."

"I would," Ser Jorah stated with conviction.

Eelesia touched his arm and gave him an understanding smile. "I hope you live without regrets."

Eelesia left the knight and the crowd, and went back to the tent next to the Khal's. Doreah was there, bathing herself with a sponge. She looked over her shoulder and smiled when she saw Eelesia.

"How goes the celebration?" the Lysene woman asked.

Eelesia knelt behind the other woman, snaking her arms around her and pressing her breasts into Doreah's bare back. "They cheer the promise of slaughter for slaughter's sake."

Kissing the other woman's neck, Eelesia took the sponge and pulled back enough to continue Doreah's bathing. Eventually, she set the sponge aside and took Doreah into her arms with a searing kiss, as she slid a hand down between Doreah's legs.

Drogo lay on his furs, breathing shallowly, his eyes open but unseeing. Daenerys knelt with a hand on his chest, eyes glistening. Irri knelt beside her with a comforting hand on her shoulder, while Eelesia and Doreah looked on.

"I'm sorry, Daeney," Eelesia murmured. "I should have insisted on treating him. I should never have let that hedge witch near him."

Daenerys took a steadying breath. "No. It was my decision. I am the one who put my beloved's fate in that witch's hands, merely because she claimed surer results. You are only guilty of being honest."
"What will we do, Khaleesi?" Irri asked.

Daenerys didn't answer.

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Insert montage of crossover awesome here.

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Eelesia held tight to Daenerys' waist as they rode into the sky on the back of her lone surviving dragon. The dragon's wings beat hard against the turbulence of the upper sky. Daenerys' skillfully kept Rhaegal on course even as gravity and space warped around them, playing havoc with their sense of balance.

Ahead of them, the faux sun at the center of the great shell world burned bright. This close to it, it was searing even in the dead of winter. Daenerys' clothes began to smolder and char, but they pressed on.

The shining faux sun resolved in detail, revealing rotating rings of light swinging around a central point. Eelesia grinned, seeing further confirmation of her guess.

Daenerys' clothes burst into flame in earnest, flaking off of her and leaving a trail of smoke and ash behind them. No amount of heat bothered Daenerys, but Eelesia was starting to get uncomfortably warm, and she was glad they'd figured out that escape was only possible during the winter anyway.

The seasons of the shell world, it turned out, were caused by the portal at the center of the sky switching directions. Summer came with the energy of an incoming portal, and winter came with the void of an outgoing portal.

With a last heave of his wings, Rhaegal carried Daenerys and Eelesia between the orbiting rings of searing light. Space around them peeled apart like a blooming flower, and quite suddenly, they were very much elsewhere.

Chapter End Notes

(Game of Thrones is an awesome show, but I will never forgive HBO for completely ruining the scene of Drogo and Daenerys' first time, which was far better handled in the book. Or for lobotomizing Shae the way they did.)
The Dark Age

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Dark Age

Lightning struck from thick clouds of sulfuric acid, lashing out towards the small black object that was now in freefall through an atmosphere of carbon dioxide ninety-two times denser than than the air at the surface of the Earth. It grew slowly as it fell, pulling usable molecules from the thick scorching air.

At last, it reached the rocky desert surface, impacting like a meteor and blasting rock and red-hot sand into the oppressive yellow sky.

As the ejecta settled, an inky blackness crept over the rim of the crater and began spreading out through the desert, growing outwards in all directions with tendrils of discoloration. Slowly, the terrain under the growing black smoothed and flattened out, creating an ever-expanding circular plane.

After the blackness had grown for a while, delving deep into the ground, on the surface at the center of the growing material, the blackness shimmered as it gave way to a softer white material which grew outwards, following in the wake of the consuming inky darkness.

With the Eliezera once more whole, Willow once more parked it at the moon's secondary Lagrangian point. Out of the earth's sight, a small low-power matter stream struck the surface of the moon, kicking up enough mineable material for the ship to replenish its lost material and hydrogen fuel, and reignite the fusion core. At the center of the two-hundred kilometer long starship, a miniature artificial sun blazed inside the magnetic containment of a tiny dyson sphere, thirty kilometers in diameter.

Meanwhile, negotiations with the SGC for the transporters fell through in the wake of Anubis' defeat, but as is often the case, there was a much simpler solution none of the three thought of until later. Willow looked over the profile of the Prometheus built up from sensor fog data, stripping all the recognizable systems out of the simulation, until just the naquadah tech was left. From there, she spent a day identifying the beaming system until she had a stored model of the whole mechanism.

It wasn't enough to synthesize one herself. There were internals the sensor fog couldn't reach, and naquadah itself seemed to be partially composed of exotic particles, in a configuration that was only stable because the magic system recognized it and forced it to remain stable, so she couldn't just synthesize the stuff. But it was enough to have the ship search for other beaming systems.

And she found one, on an abandoned goa'uld ship, cloaked in low orbit. She'd pulled the system out of the al'kesh and walled it up at one end of the Eliezera, connecting it to the ship. After some testing of the alien system, Buffy and Xander had beamed down to Sunnydale, while Willow shut herself away, determined to finish her work before allowing herself to spend precious time on anything else.

The flash of light faded and the world returned to Buffy as she materialized in her kitchen. Joyce Summers gasped in shock, dropping the mug she was holding, as her missing daughter appeared in a flash of brilliant white light, wearing a silky white tanktop and shorts.
Buffy snapped out her Utility Cloud and caught the falling mug before it could shatter. She lifted it back to her mom's hands, which gripped it in sheer reflex. For a long moment, Joyce just stared, gaping, before Buffy finally broke the silence.

"Do you remember what I told you, after the Hemery thing?" Buffy started. "You didn't believe me, then, but it was all true. There's more, though. more you don't know. More you're not gonna wanna believe. But I just... I don't want to lie to you anymore, Mom."

"Buffy... what...?"

Buffy smiled hopefully. "I'll show you, if you let me."

With a shaking hand, not taking her eyes of Buffy, Joyce set her mug down and lunged forward, wrapping Buffy up in a tight hug. "Oh thank god, Buffy, do you have any idea how worried I was? Where on earth have you been?"

"I'll show you, if you let me," Buffy repeated. "Or are you going to try and pretend you didn't just see me appear out of thin air in a flash of light?"

Joyce pulled back and held Buffy by the shoulders as she shook her head. "I don't know what I saw, but I am disappointed in you Buffy. I don't know what possessed you to run off like that -"

"Let me show you," Buffy repeated for the third time, interrupting her mom's scolding.

Joyce frowned at her before looking upwards and sighing. "Alright. Fine. Go on. I'll hear you out. But this better be good."

Making a face, Buffy gently pulled her mom out the kitchen door and into the backyard, where a greenish beachball sized sphere was resting on the grass. At Buffy's mental poke, it quickly ballooned up to its normal five meter size.

Joyce gasped. "Buffy, what... what is that?"

"It's a disposable spaceship," Buffy told her wryly. "Come on already, Mom. You want to know where I've been, don't ya?"

Joyce gave her daughter a warning look. "Buffy, what is this?"

Buffy sighed and grunted in exasperation. With a mental command, the shuttle rolled forward and sucked Buffy and a startled Joyce inside. While her mom was recovering her wits, Buffy closed her eyes and focused on the interface Willow had built for the transporters. A moment later the shuttle and its contents vanished in a flash of light, and rematerialized in lunar orbit.

It took a while to sink in, but Joyce's surprise could only last so long. She was in space. This was just... so cool. Her arms were aching a bit from holding on to Buffy to keep herself steady in the weightless bubble, but she didn't care.

"How?" Joyce finally asked.

"Do you remember my Halloween costume?" Buffy asked.

Joyce dragged her gaze from the lunar landscape. "I still think it was too revealing, by the way."

Buffy had to laugh. "You have no idea."
Joyce decided to revisit that ominous comment later. "What does that have to do with... all this?"

"Well, that night, some butthead with a lot of magical power and a sick sense of humor invoked a power of chaos..." Buffy went on before her mom could speak. "The point is, every costume this guy sold turned the person wearing it into... it. The costume. For about five hours, I was Lyn Rea-Val, like for real."

Joyce shook her head. "Buffy, I don't..."

"This is complicated," Buffy whined. "But, the point is the costumes became real for a few hours. As far as we can tell, most everybody changed back into themselves at the end of the night, and all the costume stuff turned back into fake costume stuff, but me, Willow, and Xander didn't change back, even when we remembered who we were. I guess you could say that now I'm Buffy in Lyn's body, but that's not quite..." Buffy sighed. "Willow is so much better at the 'splainy stuff."

"You... still look like you," Joyce pointed out slowly. "And I still don't see what this has to do with... this!" She gestured outward.

"Do I still look like me?" Buffy asked neutrally.

Joyce blinked and studied her closely for a few moments, and her eyes widened. "Your skin... your eyes have too much color, your hair too, and... your chest is bigger!" Joyce shook her head. "But how can..."

"Lyn isn't human," Buffy said. "Her kind call themselves Fae, and Fae can... well it's not really shapeshifting, but we can sort of slowly morph the details of our appearance, so I can look like me, or a tiny bit improved me." Buffy smiled hopefully. "The good news is it makes being the Slayer way less dangerous! Fae are made of majorly tough stuff, like cartoonishly hard to hurt. You could throw me into the grand canyon and drop an anvil on my head and I wouldn't even have a bruise. And we never get tired, or sick, or old, or other bad stuff like that."

Joyce was quiet for a long moment, but this time it was thoughtful. "This is all real, isn't it. Willow and Xander? The same thing happened to them? They're... Fae?" Joyce paused and shook her head. "Okay, but where did you get a spaceship?"

Buffy had to laugh. "Lyn lives on a starship the size of a city, and they're so high tech that, if they want, spaceships like this one can literally grow on trees. Not that this one did, it grew on a wall. In ours. Our copy of the starship, the one that got made by the magic that changed us into our costumes."

Joyce looked at her with some alarm. "You have a starship? The size of a city?"

"Yeah, but really only Willow can fly the thing," Buffy admitted. "We've all got the memories, which helps, but Willow's the only one with a head for it. Look."

Joyce looked where Buffy was pointing, just as the pearlescent ovoid rose from behind the lunar horizon. It looked small from the moon's surface, until she realized that the lunar landscape was zipping by in a hypersonic blur and the distant starship wasn't getting noticeably bigger. Joyce gasped.

"I wanted you to see it, so you'd know how big a deal this is," Buffy said. "You wanted to know where I've been the past few days, well, that's where. Willow's there right now, and I wanted to show you around, but Willow told me you'd get radiation poisoning if we stayed inside for even an hour. It's not safe for humans who plan on staying human."
Joyce’s head whipped around. "Staying human?"

Buffy nodded seriously. "The Fae were created, with technology and stuff. It takes on average seventeen days to upgrade a human, but the procedure is cheap and automatic and completely reliable. That’s the other reason I wanted to show you this."

A flash of light deposited Buffy, Joyce and the shuttle back on the grass of their yard. Buffy collapsed the shuttle and tucked it out of sight, then followed Joyce inside.


"I know. It's scary stuff," Buffy agreed. "That's why I want you to be Fae. Mom, you're just not safe in this world as a human, and I couldn't stand it if I lost you. Please. It's only three weeks, at most."

"Buffy, you're talking about giving up my humanity," Joyce exclaimed.

"I know, Mom. I thought the same thing, at first," Buffy confessed. "But it won't be like what happened to me. You won't have memories of half a century of someone else's life dumped into you head. Yes, you won't be human anymore, but you won't actually be giving anything up! Not even your pierced ears, 'cause there's a morph setting for that."

Joyce shook her head. "Even if that's true, you're still asking me to live a lie. What about my job? My friends?"

"Mom, look at me," Buffy said. "I've been Fae since Halloween. Is there anything about me that gives it away? I promise, if you just want to go about your life like normal, you won't even notice anything different, except, you know, the parts about not getting tired and never having to go to the bathroom at an inconvenient time, if you go at all."

"If it's so great, why should I be the only one you do this for?" Joyce asked. "Shouldn't you go public with this so everyone can benefit?"

Buffy nodded. "Yes."

Joyce blinked.

"Willow's up on the ship working on it right now," Buffy told her. "She's already got a plan, but I'm sure she'll listen if you have a better one. If you take the upgrade, it'll be safe for you to go up and talk to her about it. Please, Mom. Let me make you safe."

Joyce gestured helplessly with her hands. "How would this work, exactly? If I said to go ahead?"

A subtle tension eased from Buffy's body. She reached into her mouth like she was going after a wad of gum, and pulled out a little red blob the size of her thumb. She held it out on her hand, and the way her stance shifted made it obvious that it was far heavier than its size would indicate.

"Willow made this for me," Buffy said. "It's basically a grow-anywhere-on-earth seed for the... thing that does the upgrade. I figure we put it in the basement where there's room and it won't get in the way."

Joyce regarded the little red lump with a mix of wariness and curiosity. "And it's safe?"

"It'd kinda defeat the purpose if it wasn't," Buffy said. "In the world Lyn came from it worked
perfectly billions of times."

"I did just get back from a buying trip," Joyce mused slowly. "I suppose the gallery could get by for a while if I were to... take a bit of a vacation."

Buffy smiled brightly and hugged her mom, careful not to touch her with the heavy seed.

"I'm gonna go plant this," Buffy said, stepping back, "and then I should really report in to Giles. I didn't have a chance to tell him anything before the, you know, whole alien invasion thing... I wonder how many times I can get him to say 'dear lord!'"

Leaving her mom shaking her head, Buffy went down to the basement and picked out a nice empty section of floor out of sight of the staircase. She dropped the seed, which hit the cement with a solid smack. It started growing as soon as it made firm contact with something that wasn't Fae, slowly consuming the cement as it rooted itself.

Joyce was sitting on the sofa, lost in thought, when the doorbell rang.

Buffy came bouncing up from the basement and pulled the front door open without a moment's pause. Joyce smiled as Xander was revealed on their doorstep, wearing cargo pants and a loose hawaiian shirt, but she stared in surprise when Buffy sprang into his arms, wrapping her legs around his waist as they shared a lingering kiss.

As Xander carried Buffy inside, the door swung shut seemingly on its own, but Joyce ignored that to focus on the more comprehensible part of what she was seeing.

"When did you two start dating?" Joyce inquired as Xander let Buffy down, sounding approving and a little smug.

Buffy almost hated to take the wind out of her sails. "Oh. We're not dating. Just being friendly."

"Hey, Mrs. S," Xander greeted, looking sheepish but not overtly embarrassed or guilty.

Joyce gave her daughter a measured look. "Not too friendly, I hope."

Buffy put on her best innocent grin. "No such thing, Mom."

Joyce didn't sputter. She very calmly and deliberately didn't sputter. "You're teasing me."

Buffy changed the subject as she grabbed a pair of sandals and put them on. "Well anyway, I really need to fill Giles in. Don't go into the basement until I get back, okay?"

"Okay, Buffy," Joyce said, standing up and giving her a stern look. "You'll call first, if something comes up, and let me know where you are, won't you?"

Buffy nodded. "I promise."

Xander fidgeted with his belt buckle as they strolled along the way to Giles' apartment. "I forgot how awkward this was."

"Huh?" Buffy inquired.

"Squishing my man-bits with my belt so the bulge doesn't show," Xander explained.
Buffy blinked. "Oh, uh, right. I guess it is a little harder for you."

Xander sniggered.

"I didn't mean like that!" Buffy laughed.

"I know. I get how it's an aesthetic advantage and an equalizer when everybody's nude, which is cool," Xander said. "It's just uncomfortable when we have to pass for human."

"Well, maybe once my mom gets the upgrade, I can ease her into the idea that clothes are totally optional for us," Buffy confided. "So hopefully, that'll be one more place you won't have to."

"You think you can change her mind that fast?" Xander wondered.

Buffy made a face. "I don't think it'll be that easy. I think once she gets over getting to go into space, I'm still gonna be in for a ranty lecture for running off, even though I explained that. Or would that be a lecture-y rant?"

Xander shrugged.

Giles had gone beyond polishing his glasses and was pouring himself a drink by the time Buffy and Xander had finished recounting everything from saving Ford, to Anubis' invasion with a fleet of motherships, to glassing Antarctica.

"I had wondered," Giles said as he drained his glass. "The news is claiming it was an asteroid impact. I take it Willow is still up in your spaceship - and sod if that isn't something I ever thought I'd say - ah, effecting repairs?"

Buffy shook her head. "The ship finished healing itself in just a few hours. Willow's working on something else."

Giles went over and put his empty glass in the sink. "Dare I ask?"

"Giles," Buffy began. "We can make other people into Fae, and it's really easy too. We can save a lot of people that way. Way more than I could even if I slayed for a hundred years. This is freakin' panacea, Giles, and we've been handed it on a silver platter. We can't keep it to ourselves."

"It was a power of chaos that brought this into being, Buffy," Giles pointed out. "I don't think it wise to trust it. Such magics always have a price, and if it is a legitimate cure-all, the price could be enormous."

"I think you're wrong there, G-man," Xander said. "The upgrade isn't magical, and the more I think about it, the more I'm sure the chaos spell didn't bring us into being, either."

Giles sighed. "Xander, I hardly think you're qualified to - "

"I wasn't," Xander interrupted, "but Zach Reon was. He studied metaphysics as a hobby, and his memories are telling me that the magics couldn't have... invented the Fae. There's just too much information the magics, or Janus himself for that matter, couldn't have gotten from this universe. I looked it up on Willow's computer, and our costumes were loosely based on a single novella, and that book doesn't mention the people we turned into or the Eliezera, or any technical details about our molecular technology."

"He's right, Giles," Buffy said. "This isn't a bargain with a higher power. This is... medicine."
The end of medicine - hey double meaning. Look, do you really think I'd be trying to talk my mom into the upgrade if I didn't know it was perfectly safe?"

"For the sake of argument, say you're right," Giles said. "How do you plan on offering this to the world at large?"

Buffy and Xander shared a glance. Buffy looked at him expectantly, and Xander shrugged concedingly.

"Well, we tried to think of a way," Xander said, "and tried some more, but we couldn't come up with anything that would work. But, the goal is to save lives, not to Faeify the Earth, so I had an idea. We're terraforming Venus, and Willow's working on a scanning program to detect when someone dies. Anyone, anywhere, as soon as they die, Willow's program automatically beams their body up, and revives them with the upgrade. On Venus."

Giles was busy polishing his glasses again with a scowl. He put them back on and said, "That is what you intend to do? Did you even bother to consider what kind of chaos that could cause?"

Buffy and Xander both nodded seriously, and Buffy said, "Any of our other options would be worse. This way, everybody who can be saved, is, and life on Earth is disrupted as little as possible."

"It is an admirable cause, Buffy, but that does not mean you should resort to mass kidnapping!" Giles exclaimed.

"If you have a better plan, please," Buffy retorted defensively.

"Technically, it's not kidnapping if they're legally dead when we rescue the bodies," Xander added.

"Be that as it may," Giles said, "you're talking about permanently changing people into something else and taking them from their homes, without their consent or even an explanation."

"It's better to have a hundred people pissed off about that, than it is for just one person to die who didn't want to," Buffy said.

Giles looked at her like she was crazy.

"What?" Buffy snapped. "You're always saying I have a destiny, that my purpose is to protect people. This is orders of magnitude bigger than the Slayer! Hundreds of thousands of people die every day, and we have a way to save pretty much all of them."

Giles blinked in confusion for a moment, before his mouth dropped open and he stared askance at Buffy as he finally realized just what she was really talking about. "It is your destiny to protect humans from supernatural threats! It is not your place to upset the entire mortal coil!"

"Wow, G-man, I don't think I've ever heard you hit that pitch before," Xander contributed.

"Screw my place, Giles," Buffy retorted. "Letting people die needlessly is never the right thing to do."

Giles sat down heavily. "I am appalled that you three would be arrogant enough to, to play god like this. I cannot condone it."

Buffy sighed. "Giles, seriously, if you can think of a better way, that doesn't kill anybody who wanted to live, and gets us informed consent, I'm all for it. But, with what we've got to work with, Willow says it's pretty much one or the other, and we've made our choice."
Giles went to pour himself another drink, and there was a long awkward silence.

"The Council called back," he finally said. "They confirmed that the Cha - the Stargate went missing from its burial site in Egypt at some point in the nineteen-twenties."

"They already knew?" Xander asked.

"Quite," Giles said. "Apparently the records show that they searched for it at the time, but couldn't locate it. They were less than pleased that all I had was your guess about the initials of an organization they'd never heard of."

"Stargate Command."

"Right, well, I ought to report that the Stargate has indeed been found," Giles said. "I will see you at school, Buffy."

Recognizing the dismissal with a pout, Buffy followed Xander out the front door. She paused on the threshold and said, "If you want the upgrade for yourself, just say the word. I don't want you dying on me, Giles."

Daniel Jackson was late to the briefing, but when he finally showed up, he looked very excited. He put down a small but very old book on the table and didn't bother with sitting down.

"Sam! You were right!" Daniel announced, pacing back and forth and waving his arms as he spoke. "I started with some of the more obscure parts of my collection, works dealing with the occult and the like. I almost immediately started finding parallels to the teachings of Kheb, so I tried cross-referencing the texts and, after several hours of work, I found this!"

Daniel opened the book to a marked page and turned it around, pushing it towards the others. Carter examined it suspiciously while Jack raised an eyebrow.

"A magic spell, Daniel?" Jack asked, giving him a look.

"An invocation to Oma Desala, Jack," Daniel told him excitedly. "I spoke to her just ten minutes ago."

"What did she say?" Doctor Weir asked.

Daniel paused. "Well, mostly just that she was bending the rules by talking to me, and I shouldn't expect to see her in person again if I repeated the ritual."


"But don't you see?" Daniel prompted. "What if other occult rituals are also invocations of Ascended Beings?" He pointed at the open book. "The one I performed is described in the book as a healing spell. I gave my self paper cuts to test it, and Oma healed me a dozen times before she ever showed herself. What if the entire occult tradition is, is some kind of etiquette for directly trading the 'worship energy' whatever that actually is, in exchange for intervention?"

"That's amazing, and more than a little disturbing in its implications," Carter admitted, "but what exactly are you saying I'm right about?"

"This," Daniel said triumphantly, before glaring hard at Carter's coffee mug.

For a moment, nothing happened, but then jaws dropped around the table as the mug slowly rose off
the laminated wood. It floated steadily for a moment, before starting to wobble and slip sideways as it flipped over and dumped Carter's dregs out as it clattered back to the table.

"Crap. Sorry, Sam," Daniel said.

Jack recovered first. "Wait. I know this one. Isn't this just like the thing with those monks on Kheb? That was Oma too, wasn't it? She made you think you were moving stuff with your mind, lighting candles and whatnot, but it was all a trick."

"I don't think so, Jack," Daniel said. "It was borrowed power, yes, but while I held it, it was me doing those things. And I don't think it's borrowed power this time. It feels different. Sam's theory about the Ancient's psionic powers being something we can learn to do, even if it ends up being more complicated than just mental training, this proves the idea is sound."

Samantha Carter, meanwhile, was feeling somewhat faint as she stared off at nothing. She'd suspected, ever since she let herself think about it seriously - ascension really was egregiously magical, and while she could think of technological explanations for little things like seemingly being conscious while dematerialized in transit between stargates, the magical explanation actually had a lower complexity penalty, given the available evidence - but she wasn't really completely ready for her suspicions to be right. It meant she wasn't as good a scientist as she thought she was, always just assuming something was physics without even bothering to check.

"I'm afraid we'll have to revisit Daniel's discovery at another time," Doctor Weir said, getting the meeting back on track. "The IOA and the DOD are concerned about the Fae. Specifically, we've been ordered to treat Fae presence on American soil with the attention due a foothold situation."

Jack shot Daniel one last look before shaking his head and turning his attention to Weir. "Is this even our jurisdiction? The Fae didn't come through the Stargate, and they didn't come from anywhere we've been through the Stargate. They didn't even know about it until we showed them. Not that I think it'd be anything like a good idea to have some other agency harassing our incredibly powerful modesty-challenged friends."

"Unfortunately, that's just the problem," Doctor Weir explained. "The Fae freely admitted that there are civilians in the know about them. Now that the Fae are aware of the SGC, the Pentagon is worried they might be divulging classified information to their native allies."

"So they don't really think they're a threat," Daniel guessed. "The foothold protocols are just an excuse."

Doctor Weir nodded. "That was my own assessment of the situation. Unfortunately, the Fae did technically qualify for foothold status when these came to light." She opened a folder and spread several printouts onto the table. "Buffy Summers. Willow Rosenberg. Alexander Harris. Our Fae friends have established aliases, complete with a history and associated records. Homeland Security is very worried by how thoroughly the Fae were able to create identities for themselves."

"So, what would our objective here be?" Carter asked.

"Primarily, to get non-disclosure agreements signed by the three Fae and any civilians who know about them," Doctor Weir said. "However, they also want SG-1 to investigate the Fae's activities, to confirm that their presence is indeed innocuous."

"Well then, I guess it's once more up to us to go poking our noses into things that might get them nuked from orbit off our faces," Jack deadpanned. "I like my nose."
Carter hid a smile. "Where are we going, exactly?"

"The town is called Sunnydale," Doctor Weir told them, and then frowned.

"Elizabeth?" Daniel prompted.

Doctor Weir shook her head. "The name is familiar somehow, though I can't seem to remember where I heard it before. It's been bugging me." She brushed it off. "You leave on Monday, SG-1. A cover story has been arranged. It seems the local high school is having a Career Week. You'll be posing as Air Force recruiters..."

"Mom! I'm back!" Buffy called as she shut the door and kicked her sandals off.

After a moment, Buffy heard her mom's voice in the other room and then the beep of the phone hanging up. Joyce emerged from the dining room, her face a conflicted mix of trepidation, curiosity, suspicion, and resolve.

"How was your, ah, talk with Mr. Giles?" Joyce asked awkwardly.

"He freaked a little," Buffy admitted. "I think he's gonna be busy talking to his bosses back in the land of tweed for a while."

Joyce folded her arms. "I don't like that you've had this whole other life I never knew about, Buffy."

"I know, Mom," Buffy said. "I didn't like it either. That's why I'm letting you in on it all now. I would have told you sooner, but, well, you remember the first time I tried to tell you I was the Slayer."

Joyce winced. "That was different, Buffy. You were different."

"Yeah, 'cause I needed you, and you didn't even try to hear me out," Buffy groused, then sighed. "Mom, that sucked, but I'm over it. Please, just trust me this time."

After a long moment, Joyce came over and gave Buffy a hug. "Alright. I will."

Buffy smiled. "Good. That's good. Come on, follow me."

Leading her down into the basement, Buffy stood aside as Joyce laid eyes on the birthing pod and gasped. Joyce stared wide-eyed at the sight, taking a slow step closer.

"Oh, Buffy, it's beautiful," Joyce remarked.

Buffy shrugged. "Kinda, I guess. So, are you ready? The sooner you do it, the sooner you can get back to your routine."

"I suppose I am as much as I'll ever be," Joyce said. "Oh wait, no, I need to hide the car, first."

"Oh, right, yeah," Buffy agreed. "Hey, why don't we clean up the garage tonight? We can do it like a total mother-daughter bonding thing. I'll do the heavy lifting. How 'bout it?"

Joyce turned to her with a wry smile. "My daughter, offering to clean the garage. Surely, this is a sign of the end times."

Buffy laughed. "No, that was yesterday, and I kicked it's ass, then Willow nuked it from orbit."
Xander strolled out of the pawn shop several thousand dollars richer, having sold off a few rare gemstones he'd synthesized before beaming down. He jogged to the supermarket. It was time to do something he'd always wanted to do.

The lady at the checkout gave him funny looks when he pushed up a cart loaded to the brim with nothing but boxes of twinkies. He'd had to talk a stockguy into letting him into the back.

Xander just grinned at her.

"What's it like?" Joyce asked as she stacked a few boxes in the corner.

Buffy picked up an old table and put it against the wall. "Being Fae?"

Joyce nodded.

"It's like... Imagine the best you've ever felt. Totally rested. Completely clear-headed. No aches or pains," Buffy told her. "Imagine feeling like that all the time, no matter what you do. It's like that. And there are extra benefits on top of that."

"Like?" Joyce inquired.

"Besides being harder to scratch than a diamond?" Buffy asked impishly.

Joyce gave her daughter a patient smile.

"Well, I already told you about one," Buffy said. "You have total control over how you look, and it's totally zero maintenance. Makes getting ready for your day a lot easier, and you'll never need nailclippers or a haircut either."

Joyce was thoughtfully quiet for a while. "Back when you... beamed down. You made my coffee mug levitate. What was that?"

"It's called the Utility Cloud," Buffy explained. "It's these little bits of... something. Willow could tell you. Anyway it's these little bits that work with the magnet-type stuff your bones do to make something called prehensile magnetic fields. And the little bits can do all kinds of useful stuff, if you know how. It's like the ultimate swiss army knife."

"It's almost like magic," Joyce commented.

"But not really," Buffy said. "If I could pick things up with magic, I wouldn't need to balance the weight. If I hold something heavy enough out in front of me with my Utility Cloud, I'll topple over."

Joyce chuckled. "I see."

Philip Henry was desperate. It was closing in on him, and his heart thundered in primal fear. He dashed around a corner and almost shrieked when he nearly collided with a custodian who was busy dumping out trashcans into a dumpster.

"Can I help you?" the custodian asked.

"Rupert Giles," Philip gasped. "I need to see him."

"Mr. Giles? He's our librarian," the man revealed. "Next building over, first door on your left."
Rushing off in the indicated direction, Philip barely registered the sarcastic, "You're welcome," from behind him.

Philip spotted the door marked Library with a surge of relief, but before he could reach it, a noise made him spin around in fright. Backing slowly towards the building, Philip strained his eyes, searching for his pursuer in the darkness.

He could hear it, coming closer, and his shaking hand scabbled behind him for the door handle. There. Glowing eyes, peering menacingly out of something human-shaped.

"Oh gods..."

His foot caught on the concrete step and he almost tripped. The thing moved closer during his distraction, but as it shuffled into the light, giving him a pleasant smile full of black, rotted teeth in a decaying bluish face, Philip's knees went weak in recognition.

"Deirdre..."

She reached for him, and he flinched back, whirling to yank open the door, but a rotting hand slammed into the cheerfully-painted metal.

"No!" Philip cried. "Help me!"

In the library, Xander stuffed yet another twinkie into his mouth. The big box he'd brought with him was on the table, and the chair next to him held a plastic shopping bag full of empty wrappers. Giles was pouring over several books, looking for further references to the Goa'uld and giving Xander occasional queasy looks.

"Must you gorge yourself on those abominations in here?" Giles asked tiredly.

"They're not abominations! They're good food!" Xander insisted.

"Food has actual ingredients. Those things aren't food," Giles argued inanely.

"I can finally eat my twinkies by the box-full without making myself sick," Xander countered.

"Where do you put it all?" Giles asked semi-rhetorically.


"Delightful," Giles muttered sourly.

Xander stuffed another wrapper into the plastic bag and reached for the box, but he froze in place a moment later. "You hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"...omebody! Please!"

Xander swore and leaped out of his seat. He reached out a hand and one of Giles' swords hurtled across the room, smacking hard into Xander's palm blade-first. Xander flipped the handle into his hand and dashed for the library's side door.

Xander slammed the door open with his shoulder, sending two people who were just on the other
side sprawling to the ground. No, not two people. One middle-aged guy and one...

"Holy crap zombie!" Xander exclaimed.

With a snarl, the zombie lunged for the guy, who was crawling away, but Xander swung hard with the sword, lopping the zombie's arm off. Pushing a current through the steel blade, Xander stabbed through the zombie's chest, and it fell back, twitching.

"Good lord, Phillip? Is that you?" Giles said, stepping out behind Xander and helping the other guy up.

"Rupert, thank god," the guy, Phillip, gasped. "It's back."

"What's back?" Xander asked as he aimed to chop the zombie's head off.

"No!" Phillip yelped. "Don't! If you destroy her it'll just leap to a new host!"

As Xander lowered the sword, Giles finally got a good look at the zombie. Possessed zombie? Whatever it was.

"Deirdre," Giles breathed in horror.

"Giles, what's going on?" Xander questioned.

"Quickly, help me get her into the weapons cage," Giles said.

Still reeling from the electrocution, Giles and Xander managed to wrestle the zombie across the library without getting bitten or anything. Once she was locked up, zombie Deirdre seemed to shake it off, and gave them a very creepy smile. Giles waved them back into his office.

"G-man, seriously, what's going on?" Xander asked again.

"You should go home, Xander," Giles said evenly. "This is a personal matter. You don't need to be involved."

"Really? 'Cause this looks more like another exciting episode of Adventures in Hellmouth Central," Xander retorted.

"Xander," Giles nearly growled.

"It's called Eyghon," Philip revealed, wilting when Giles glared at him. "What? The kid just saved my life. Ah, Philip Henry, good to meet you, young man."

"Xander Harris." Xander shook his hand. "So... Eyghon?"

With a sigh, Giles explained, "It is a demonic spirit that I, Philip, and a few other impetuous boys... dealt with, during our youth."

Xander stared. "Dealt with? Or made a deal with?"

"Ah, that would be the second one," Giles admitted.

Phillip rolled up his sleeve, revealing a three-pronged tattoo. "It marked us, and now, finally, it has returned to claim us."

_Buffy, are you busy?_ Xander sent.
Kind of, Buffy replied. I'm hanging with my mom, and I've just about got her convinced to take the upgrade. Why?

Don't worry about it. I'll tell you about it later. Or Giles will, Xander sent.

Problem? Buffy asked.

Small one, maybe, Xander admitted. I can handle it.

Okay, I'll be there in a flash if you need me, Buffy affirmed.

Xander looked between Philip Henry and Giles. "So how do we kill it?"

"I'm... I'm not sure we can," Philip confessed. "It doesn't have a physical form we can hurt."

Xander thought for a moment. "How well can it get around without a host body?"

"It was little more than an amorphous blue mist when it moved between hosts," Giles said. "But if you're thinking of trapping it, there's nothing to stop it from passing through solid walls."

"Actually, I was thinking of stranding it somewhere it'll never find another host." Xander looked at Giles. "You think it could survive on the surface of the sun?"

Philip choked. "The surface of the sun? How would you even..."

Giles, meanwhile, sat down, stunned. "It couldn't actually be that easy, could it?"

"Why don't we find out," Xander said, striding back into the library proper.

The zombie gave him that creepy grin again, so Xander electrocuted her. While she was reeling, he opened the cage and dragged her across the library and out the side door. Giles and Phillip followed, anxious and confused respectively.

With a flash of light, the transparent sphere of a shuttle appeared just outside the door, and Xander tossed the zombie inside.

Phillip stared open-mouthed. "Wha... what on earth is that?"

Xander activated the shuttle's autonav, and set the destination. Inside, the zombie was looking around in confusion and clawing at the inner membrane. With a gust of air, the shuttle lifted up and accelerated into the night sky.

Xander made a show of dusting his hands off. "Done and done."

"I need another drink," Giles sighed, turning to Philip. "Join me at the pub?"

Joyce pulled her car into the garage, and then followed Buffy into the house and down to the basement. The birthing pod opened like a flower, and Joyce shot Buffy a nervous look.

"Is there anything I need to do?" Joyce asked.

Buffy shook her head. "Nope, but you should strip first. Anything you're wearing is gonna dissolve."

"Dissolve?" Joyce repeated.

"Well, yeah, the thing's changing your whole body at the molecular level," Buffy said. "Clothes
"Alright," Joyce said, undressing and handing her clothes to Buffy, who folded them and set them aside.

Once she was down to her skin, Joyce stepped gingerly onto the reddish fleshy surface. "Oh, it's warm."

Feeling bolder, Joyce waded into the wafting forest of waist-high pale pink tendrils. With a liquid sound, a bubble of fluid swelled up under her feet. It felt like sinking into a hot bath. No, better than that. It felt like sinking into a bath of hot oil massage. That didn't even make sense, but that's what it felt like.

The petals of the pod began to close, curling up around the fluid, but Joyce was already floating on a cloud of relaxed contentment. The fluid rose over her head, and unconsciousness claimed her.

Chapter End Notes

(Has anyone else noticed that Anubis and Eyghon are pretty much the same kind of entity? And people say Stargate and Buffy don't share a universe. :P )
The woman who had taken to calling herself Jenny Calendar hurried across the small courtyard of Rupert Giles' apartment complex. She hesitated on his doorstep, eager to see him, but dreading the news she had to tell him and couldn't put off any longer.

Jenny ducked her head and closed her eyes, breathing out slowly to center herself. Swallowing the lump that had risen in her throat, she knocked.

Rupert opened the door and smiled when he saw her, greeting her, "Jenny."

Jenny took a measured step over the threshold and replied with a slow, deliberate kiss. "Good evening, Rupert."

He took her coat, revealing the clingy black dress she'd worn for the occasion. She put a little sway in her hips as she went passed him to the base of the stairs, watching him watch her with a smirk.

Once he'd shut the door and come back into arm's reach, Jenny ran her hands up his chest and started undoing the buttons of his shirt, exchanging inane pleasantries that weren't really important enough to pay attention to.

Somehow, they made it up to Rupert's bedroom by the time he was down to just his pants. Jenny slipped her shoes off and pushed the straps of her dress off her shoulders, letting it fall into a little puddle of black fabric around her feet. She wasn't wearing anything under it, and smirked at the way Rupert's breath caught.

Jenny crawled onto the bed and started playing with herself while Rupert finished undressing. He was hard and ready by the time he joined her, kneeling between her legs and running his lips over her breasts.

Rolling them over, Jenny straddled his waist as she reached over and grabbed a condom out of the nightstand. She tore it open without ceremony and reached behind her where Rupert's manhood lay against her buttcheek.

Rising on her knees, she positioned him and sank down, sheathing him in her body with a sigh of pleasure. Jenny's hips undulated, rolling forwards and back on him as she leaned down and kissed him like it was her last chance to do it.

Ruperts hands roamed over her skin, caressing her just right. He played her body like a guitar, coaxing from her flesh a slowly building crescendo of orgasmic harmony. Notes, a melody of touches, flowing through her, raising her up and up and...

"Ahhhhhh!" Jenny cried as her sweltering core spasmed around her lover's hardness and she fell against him, trembling in ecstasy.

Once her orgasm passed, Rupert rolled them over and spread her legs wide, sliding his arms under her shoulders as his thrusts slowly built back up to a firm rolling pounding. Jenny moaned loudly, throwing her arms around his neck as they kissed deeply, their tongues questing for a saliva-soaked embrace.

Quite a while later, cuddled together and basking in the afterglow, Rupert looked at her with some
"Jenny? Is there something wrong?" he asked.

Sighing, Jenny was both glad and annoyed that Rupert was perceptive enough to notice that she was... well, saying goodbye.

"I'm leaving, Rupert," Jenny confessed, then quickly added, "town. I'm leaving Sunnydale."

"Why now?"

"I... have to," Jenny started.

"Jenny..."

She shut her eyes and swallowed hard. "My name isn't Jenny."

Rupert shifted and propped himself up to get a better look at her.

"My real name was... is... Janna Kalderash," Jenny told him. "I was sent here by my clan, to ensure the vengeance of our family is not broken, to make sure that through all his days, Angelus continues to suffer."

"The curse," Rupert put together, sitting up and sliding his legs off the bed. "Your ancestors were responsible for the curse?"

Jenny reached for his shoulder and flinched when he pulled away. "Yes. And now that Angel is dead, my family is calling for me to answer for my failure."

Rupert looked over his shoulder at her. "You lied to me, to us, about everything."

Jenny knelt beside him. "Not everything! Only what I had to, Rupert. These are old secrets, and they aren't mine to tell."

"Then why are you telling me now?" Rupert asked.

Jenny pressed herself to his back and rested her head on his shoulder. "Because you deserve to know why I'm leaving. Because I want you to know the truth, even if my family doesn't. Because I trust you. And because I might not be allowed to come back."

Rupert let his head fall back and stared heavenward with a sigh. "When are you departing?"

"Tomorrow," Jenny admitted softly.

Rupert didn't reply for a while, but he did caress her arms where they were wrapped around him. Finally, he said, "In that case, I suppose we ought to make the most of tonight."

Jenny let out a little relieved laugh, and surreptitiously brushed a tear away.

Buffy and Xander were at school, and the normalcy was kind of surreal after their crazy week they'd had. Amidst the bustling activity of displays and banners being set up for Career Week in the lounge, the two of them sat at an out of the way table with a pair of career aptitude tests and the obligatory number two pencils.

"So... shrubs. Do I like shrubs?" Buffy wondered.
"What kind of shrubs?" Xander asked.

"I don't think they care," Buffy said.

"Hm, am I a people person, or do I keep my own company?" Xander read. "Agh, who wrote this test?"

"Maybe we should just mark 'B' for everything and go hang with Giles," Buffy suggested.

"Speaking of Giles, you got him to talk yet?" Xander asked.

Buffy shook her head. "Every time I bring it up, he changes the subject and gets all Watcher-y with and extra side of British. I don't like it, Xander. I don't like it that Giles is against us on this."

"I'm not sure he is," Xander confided. "I mean, he's being all disapproving, but he's not trying to talk us out of it."

"I know. It's weird," Buffy agreed.

Coming in their direction with a test of her own, Cordelia read, "I aspire to help my fellow man." She marked her test. "Check. As long as they're not smelly, dirty, or something gross."

Xander slowly turned his head to stare at her. "Cordelia Chase, ladies and gentlemen, always ready to offer a helping hand to everyone who doesn't need one."

Cordelia smiled evilly. "Which, lucky me, excludes you."

Xander opened his mouth, and then just shut it and smiled mysteriously. Cordelia rolled her eyes and strode off.

With a grin, Xander remarked, "She still doesn't know. Nobody told her yet." He laughed.

"You know, she'd probably jump on the chance to be Fae," Buffy pointed out.

"Aw, do we have to?" Xander whined.

Buffy smacked his arm. "Xander!"


"You know, it's funny," Buffy mused after a while, prodding her own test with her pencil. "This sort of thing used to really bum me out, 'cause it was like, why bother. My fate was sealed the moment I was Called." She grinned. "But now that I've got a future to look forward to, everything's so different and none of this matters anymore. It's not like we even need jobs, now."

Xander nodded. "Why are we even taking this thing, again?"

"Because we don't want to abandon our lives here, and this is Snyder's hoop of the week," Buff reminded him needlessly.

"Right, well, it should at least be good for some entertainingness," Xander said optimistically.

"Read it again," Spike ordered.

Dalton leaned over the stolen book, flustered. "I'm not sure. It could be, uh... deprimere... ille...
Spike flipped through the pages of the paperback dictionary to the indicated words. "Debase, the beef, canoe."

Dalton smiled hopefully, and Spike couldn't take it anymore. His fist smashed into the dweeby vampire's face. Spike grabbed him by his collar and loomed threateningly.

"Why does that strike me as not right?" Spike wondered sarcastically.

Drusilla looked up from her carefully arranged tarot cards with a moan. "It all falls apart. Miss Edith says we're barking up the wrong tree." Drusilla barked a few times to illustrate. "Nothing he can do, Spike. Secrets. Secrets locked up without a key. Useless secrets." Drusillia gave Spike an unusually lucid stare. "Can't work without daddy." She flinched at something only she could see. "Burn it, rip it, make it gone, Spike. It taunts me."

Spike hurried around the table to comfort her. "Your sire. It won't work without your sire?"

Drusilla nodded into his chest and Spike slammed a fist into the tabletop. "Sodding Angel! Lousy pillock manages to be a pain in the arse even when he's dead."

"Does that mean we don't need the book?" Dalton asked.

"Get rid of it," Spike said despondently.

Drusilla nipped at his chin. "Don't fret, my love. You'll find a way to make things right."

Spike scooped her up into his arms and kissed her. "Damn right I will. We'll keep searching. I promise you, Dru. You will be strong again."

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Xander let himself into the Summers house through the kitchen and strolled into the living room. He found Buffy slouched nude on the sofa, staring listlessly into the space just beyond her knees.

"I know that look," Xander sighed. "You're thinking about Angel, aren't you."

Buffy just nodded.

"Don't move," Xander said. "I'll be right back."

Xander let himself out and jogged to the nearest convenience store, where he grabbed a tub of Buffy's favorite ice cream and a small variety of snacks to go with it. He paid cash and jogged back to the house.

Buffy was where he'd left her, her nude body slouched into the sofa cushions. She looked up as Xander came in and held up the ice cream.

"Willow ideas are usually good ideas," Xander told her sagely.

Buffy cracked a smile and let out a little laugh. Xander tossed her the ice cream and a spoon, which she snatched out of the air. He dropped the other snacks on the coffee table and started taking off his clothes, piling them on the armchair.

"Willow ideas are usually good ideas," Xander told her sagely.

Buffy cracked a smile and let out a little laugh. Xander tossed her the ice cream and a spoon, which she snatched out of the air. He dropped the other snacks on the coffee table and started taking off his clothes, piling them on the armchair.

Once he was down to his skin, Xander flopped onto the sofa next to Buffy. She opened the ice cream, jammed the spoon into it, and carved out an enormous bite. Buffy pulled the empty spoon through her lips with an expression of bliss on her face.
"No brainfreeze," she remarked smugly.

The two of them shared a comfortable silence as they took turns with the spoon.

"There was just no point to it," Buffy finally said. "Why didn't he tell our others what sunlight would do to him?"

"Do you really want me to answer that?" Xander asked impishly.

Buffy snorted. "Aren't you supposed to be all in supportive mode right now?"

Xander rolled over so his chest was on the seat-cushion between Buffy's legs and his elbows were outside her thighs. He put his chin on his hands and looked up at her with his best expression of wide-eyed earnestness.

"Angel's loss will be an ache we shall carry in our hearts for years to come," Xander murmured. "He was the light in our darkness, the fire in our souls, and the beauty of the universe is diminished by his destruction. Without our Angel, life is meaningless."

Buffy stared at him for a good ten seconds before she cracked up. "Okay! Okay! Stop it! That was all kinds of disturbing."

With a mock shiver, Xander returned to his seat. "Yeah. I feel dirty now."

Buffy gave him a playful push, and ate another huge bite of ice cream. "It's just, me and Angel were just starting to have something, and then he goes and dies in a completely avoidable way."

"He did a lot of good, even though he had a whole mess of issues," Xander admitted. "His issues had issues, and he still made with the helpfulness. Sort of."

Buffy leaned into his side and put her head on his shoulder. "I miss him."

They spent a long while just reminiscing and remembering their times with Angel. Buffy snuggled into Xander's side as they talked, finding herself resting her hand on the base of his shaft while the arm he wrapped around her settled his hand on her breast.

It was still a little strange how much it wasn't strange, to just let their hands settle where they naturally gravitated, unrestrained by their years of being raised to believe that touching those body parts was a Big Deal. It was simple intimacy, intended as comfort, and if the source of that comfort was also sexually suggestive, that didn't make it any less comforting or genuine.

For over an hour, Buffy and Xander spoke their thoughts and memories of Angel in no particular order. Tears ran down Buffy's cheeks often and freely, trickling onto Xander's pectorals.

Briefly smiling through her tears, Buffy remarked, "It was kind of neat to see Angel geeking out over something, even if it was just for a moment."

"You'd think that'd be when he'd have noticed he was about to leave Earth's shadow," Xander mused.

"It was a great moment. I'm glad I'll always have it, but you're right," Buffy said with a despairing little laugh. "That was the moment that doomed him. And now he's gone forever."

With a sob, Buffy buried her face in Xander's chest and swung a leg over his hip. Xander pulled her onto his lap as she molded herself against his front, needing to feel the closeness. His big firm hands
stroked her back as she clung to him, holding as much of her skin against his as she could.

Buffy's grip slowly tightened as she cried, until Xander couldn't really breathe, but that was okay. Buffy's body shook and heaved as she let free all her grief for Angel, and probably everything else she'd been holding in, while she was at it.

Without warning, Buffy pulled back and reached down between them, gripping his manhood and aiming it into her pussy. Without hesitating, she slammed her hips down, splitting her folds open on his cock, and started riding him in a frenzy. It was violent and brutal, enough to actually hurt. She would have broken his bones and given him friction burns if he were still human. But he understood. Buffy needed to feel. She needed something physical that was intense enough to counterbalance her anguish, so she was throwing literally all of her strength into fucking him as hard as she could.

It was odd, how he felt about it. The old Xander, the one who wanted to court and claim Buffy, would have felt used. But he was over that, now. Once he untangled it from honest lust, he knew it for the childish possessiveness it was. Their friendship was a worthy thing just the way it was, and he was unconflicted about being there for Buffy, whether she needed a hug, a laugh, or a savage fuck.

Xander dug his fingers into Buffy's flesh, pulling himself up for a deep, hard kiss. They'd had a nearly cold start (a level of arousal that would have made intercourse physically impossible for humans of either sex), so despite Buffy's vicious pace, it took her more than five minutes to reach her first orgasm, and Xander a little longer than that. Buffy barely waited for her first orgasm to pass before she started up again. Xander climaxed hard, and since Buffy wasn't slowing down, he was almost immediately brought to another, and another, chaining together into one long cascade until Buffy started cumming just as much and lost enough control over her muscles that she couldn't keep going.

Buffy collapsed against Xander's chest with a long sigh. There was no sweat, and the hard breathing was due to psychological appropriateness rather than a need for oxygen, but the two of them were practically covered in their lubricating fluids and cum.

Buffy groaned when she noticed. "Oh crud. I just ruined my couch, didn't I."

"Don't worry, I got most of it with my Utility Cloud before it could soak into the fabric," Xander reassured her. "It should be fine."

Sexual fluids in Fae were very similar to their human counterparts, but improved like everything else, designed to evaporate more slowly and leave less residue when it does. In life as the Giaa intended, it was entirely redundant, but the Giaa Seed had only been concerned with the optimal design according to its objectives. Redundancy was incidental and inevitable.

Buffy looked up and met Xander's eyes. "Sorry if I went a little overboard."

"It's okay," Xander said gently. "More than. Totally of the good. It must be hard having to watch your strength all the time, and in the middle of a much-needed breakdown that's got to be worse than ever. I'm glad you could let go some."

"Breakdown?" Buffy repeated flatly.

Xander just gave her a look.

"Okay," Buffy gave in, "so it was totally a breakdown."

"Feel better now?" Xander asked sincerely.
"Some," Buffy said wryly.

With an encouraging smile, Xander leaned down and met her lips with his. It was simple and gentle this time. Buffy started moving her hips in a languid roll. There was no urgency to it, just the natural consequence of having her vagina squeezing around a hard phallus.

"Hmm. I wanna do this in my bed," Buffy said. "Put the ice cream away for me, will you?"

Buffy started to climb off of him, but with a smirk Xander moved with her, grabbing her butt to hold her steady as he rolled to his feet. Buffy latched onto him with a laugh, legs around his waist and arms around his neck.

"Sure thing, Buff," Xander agreed cheerfully, picking up the tub of ice cream in one hand while the other wrapped around Buffy's back.

Fluids dripped from where they were joined as Xander carried her into the kitchen, but the drops splintered into mist and then into vapor before reaching the floor.

Xander shut the freezer and headed up the stairs with Buffy wrapped around him. Once he reached the second floor, Buffy suddenly started giggling. She climbed off of him, pulling away and making Xander's cock slap wetly against his belly when it slipped out of her.

Then she grabbed him, and the next thing Xander knew, Buffy was carrying him bridal-style into her room.

Xander blinked, and grinned. "Oh hah hah, Buffy. Very funny."

Buffy snickered, dumping him on her bed. "I thought so."

In a simple enclosed chamber of soft white deep within the Eliezera, four birthing pods bloomed open. The four occupants exchanged grins as they floated out, giddy with glee at their awesome cleverness.

Four voices spoke at once. "Summary program's running. No errors."

One of the four at the left end of the row checked, "Sync test. Number."

"Twenty. Number." "One-hundred eight. Color." "Blue. Rhyme." "Due two. Fear phrase." "Frogs are the bane of joy."

Four voices giggled.

"It worked," the four chorused happily.

One corner of the sky was just starting to lighten when Jack O'Neill pulled their rented SUV into the hotel parking lot. Beside him, Samantha Carter was engrossed in something on her laptop, paging through some obscure science thing from the database Willow gave them. In the back seat, Daniel Jackson was fast asleep, propped against his passenger door, and Teal'c was reading a comic book of all things.

They'd all slept during the plane ride, but Daniel had been wearing himself out more than usual, practicing with his rediscovered super cosmic powers, even if said powers weren't quite so super or cosmic anymore. On the other hand, he could actually use them without breaking Rules this time.
"This is the nicest hotel in the town?" Jack asked incredulously as he parked.

Carter looked up and blinked. "We are a few miles from the interstate, Sir. And apparently they don't get many tourists here."

Teal'c put down his comic and shook Daniel's shoulder. "DanielJackson, we have arrived."

"Guh?"

Jack hopped out and stretched. "I'll handle the checkin. Then... coffee. Definitely coffee."

Everything was arranged in advance, so all Jack had to do was show some identification to the skittish night clerk. Four keys in hand, Jack strolled back to the SUV and tossed his team theirs.

Daniel caught his with telekinesis, and then plucked it out of the air with a grin.

"Daniel," Jack ground out.

"What, Jack? It's not like I'm using classified technology," Daniel argued. "Besides, there's nobody around."

Jack grunted. "Look just don't... push it. For cryin' out loud, you're like a kid with a new toy."

Daniel manfully resisted the urge to pout.

Xander watched Buffy sleep. She'd said she wanted to get in the habit of sleeping for at least an hour every night, just in case there was a slayer dream waiting for her. Once Willow finished her project, the end of the world wouldn't actually be the end of the world, but it would still kinda suck.

A sudden humming noise made Xander sit up in alarm, but a moment later Willow materialized in a flash of light, and he relaxed.

"Wills!"

"Hi guys!" Willow greeted perkily.

Buffy woke up with a little sigh, and smiled when she saw Willow. Willow pounced, her nude body falling onto the bed between her two friends as she hugged them both.

"Wait, if you're here," Xander began. "You did it? You're done?"

"Nope," Willow chirped. "In fact, I'm working on it harder than ever!"

"Huh?" Buffy inquired, then she frowned in confusion. "Wait, why does my Dreamlink suddenly think your name is Willow-para?"

Willow's grin got wider, and she settled back on her knees, bouncing excitedly. "Okay, so you know how normally a Giaa keeps blank bodies on hand in case someone needs an emergency upload?"

Buffy and Xander nodded.

"I found ours!" Willow announced. "See, the SSP is a really challenging problem, and even though I can work constantly, and tirelessly, it's really the sort of problem you need more than one brain working on. So when I found our backup blanks, I... well, I kinda hijacked them."

Xander suddenly laughed. "You didn't."
Willow nodded eagerly. "I used the blanks to make copies of myself! I set it up, and went comatose for an hour or so, and when I woke up there were four of me."

Buffy's jaw dropped. "You cloned yourself?"

"Of course not," Willow admonished. "How would you even do that? You can't clone something that doesn't have DNA. What I did was split myself, into four perfect copies."

Buffy shook her head. "Well, as long as this isn't gonna be an Attack of the Evil Twin thing."

"Way cool," Xander said, "but isn't it gonna be awkward having four of you running around?"

Willow shook her head. "I thought of that. I wanted the four of me to be as interchangeable as possible, so I wrote a summary program to do an automatic memory update thing, so all of me can stay in sync. I also picked random names that don't really mean anything, so you can tell each of me apart but also sticking with the being-interchangeable thing."

"Wait wait wait, does that mean you're the Willow Collective now?" Xander teased.

Willow laughed. "No, Xander. It's more like we're four separate people with four separate minds, but we all share the same long-term memory. That's not really how it works, but the effect's mostly the same."

"Ah, oh well," Xander said with a mock sigh.

Impishly, Willow made her face blank and her posture robotic, and intoned in a deep voice, "We are the Willow. Lower your pants and surrender your hugs. We will add your affectionate and kinky distinctiveness to our own. Your flesh will moisten to service us. Resistance is futile. You will be snuggled."

Willow barely managed to keep a straight face long enough to finish, since Xander was cracking up and Buffy was snickering into her hand. Xander grabbed Willow and pulled her down into a kiss.

"You know," Xander said. "That'd probably've been more impressive if there was more than one of you doing it."

Willow-para pouted playfully. "Yeah, but Willow-rhom and Willow-kink are working full time on the SSP, and Willow-icos is looking after the ship, landscaping Venus, working on safety protocols for Venus-grown stuff, and keeping Dawn company."

"I should visit her after school today," Buffy said.

"Oooh, that's right, it's Career Week," Willow remembered.

"Oh, here I am. Hm. Personal shopper, or motivational speaker. Neato!"

Samantha Carter, clad in her dress-blues and carrying a case of pamphlets and brochures and such, strode passed the well-dressed teenage brunette and into the designated section of Sunnydale High School.

Jack O'Neill was waiting for her inside, having set up a table and curtain in their allotted space.

"Tell me again why we're putting on this dog and pony show?" Jack muttered to her.

"Well, Sir, there could be any number of reasons this particular cover story was deemed necessary,"
Carter pointed out.

"Politics?" Jack guessed as he helped her arrange the materials on their table.

"That is one possibility, Sir," Carter replied noncommittally.

Jack grunted. "The part I'm not getting, is why would our modesty-challenged friends set themselves up as highschool students?"

"At a guess?" Carter said. "Long-term strategy. The younger they claim to be, the longer they can maintain the assumed identities."

Jack glanced at her. "Long-term, you say."

"It doesn't necessarily disagree with the claim that their continuing interest in this town is purely personal." Carter paused. "Do you think Daniel and Teal'c are going to find anything... under our purview?"

"Oh, probably," Jack said airily. "That is the way our luck tends to run."

Willow spotted Giles carrying a stack of books towards the library. Donning the resolve face, Willow grabbed Buffy's arm and followed after him.

The two of them arrived in the library just in time to see one of the stacks Giles was carrying begin to tip and fall. Buffy caught the books and steadied them.

Giles let out a sigh of relief. "Buffy. Thank you. I've been, uh, indexing my archive of Watcher diaries. You would be amazed at how numbingly pompous and long-winded some of these Watchers were."

Buffy plopped down in a chair. "Color me stunned."

"Hi Giles," Willow greeted.

Giles swung his head around, startled. "Willow. Ah, you're back?"

"More of the or less," Willow said. "The program isn't done yet, so most of me is still working on it so we can save everyone."

Giles raised a finger and opened his mouth, then shook his head resolutely and turned to Buffy. "So, uh, I trust last night's patrol was fruitful?"

"Just the usual slayage," Buffy told him sourly.

"I see," Giles said. "Well, uh, I'm afraid I have some news. It seems Miss Calendar has had to move away from Sunnydale. Some sort of family trouble, I believe. She told me she wouldn't be returning."

Willow gasped. "Oh no!" She gave Giles a big hug. "Are you okay?"

Giles smiled faintly despite himself. "I'll endure."

"Bummer, Giles," Buffy offered.

"Ahem, ah yes," Giles said, pulling a small envelope from his pocket. "She asked me to give you
Willow pulled out the note and grinned bashfully. "She's arranged for me to take over teaching her class for the rest of the term."

"When's she leaving?" Buffy asked.

"This morning," Giles revealed.

"Drat," Buffy complained. "She was in on stuff. We could have offered her the upgrade."

"I don't think it'll be too long before I finish the SSP," Willow consoled. "A few weeks, at most. What are the chances she'll die in a car crash in that time? Or get attacked by a vampire? Or have a spell go wrong? Or choke on a chicken bone. Or..."

"Very comforting, Wills," Buffy deadpanned.

Willow grinned sheepishly. "My bad."

Giles had winced at each possibility and was pinching the bridge of his nose by the end. Willow and Buffy exchanged a sly look.

"Well," Giles diverted. "Perhaps one of you would like to help sorting one of these stacks?"

Buffy rolled her eyes. "Serious, what is your deal, Giles? First you're all condemny, and then you're totally with the ignoringness. Why won't you talk about this?"

Giles polished his glasses. "There is nothing to say. You have argued yourselves into an unassailable position. Any counterargument I could raise, you can simply dismiss by saying it will cost lives, never mind that those lives are already forfeit in the natural order."

"But any other way will cost lives," Willow protested. "And, okay, violating the natural order and stuff, but why should we cooperate with a natural order that's busy murdering us by the billions? And in such slow and cruel ways to boot?"

Giles floundered for a moment. "Because." He rallied. "No, that is not the issue, Willow."

"Then why'd you bring it up?" Buffy asked.

"That's not..."

"Then what is?" Willow interrupted.

"Free will. Choice," Giles said. "You intend force this, this upgrade on everyone, and I will have no part in that."

Willow shook her head. "We're not taking away anyone's choice, Giles. If anything, we're giving them one. Right now, there is no choice. Only death. But we have an alternative!"

"A proven alternative," Buffy added.

"And I'm working really hard to make sure nobody gets left out of that choice," Willow continued. "So what if we don't ask what they want before we turn them into Fae? The choice is the same either way. Being dead, or being Fae. Anyone can still make that same choice after we upgrade them. The way we're doing it just means nobody gets left out, nobody's choice gets lost in the din, and nobody has to make their choice under duress."
Giles sighed. "No one is going to see it that way, Willow."

"At least they'll be alive to have an opinion," Buffy grumbled.

"Be that as it may, I still will not be party to this irresponsible scheme of yours," Giles stated firmly.

"Irresponsible nothing!" Willow protested. "We are taking the course of action that leads to the least deaths, period. Maybe I don't wanna be party to this irresponsible attitude of yours!"

"Willow..." Giles nearly growled.

"Okay, different subject," Buffy cut in. "What about you Giles? Why don't you want to be Fae?"

Giles polished his glasses again. "I recognize that there are advantages, but even if I thought those advantages worth trading my human existence for, I simply cannot afford to disappear for... how long did you say?"

"Between two and three weeks," Willow answered reflexively.

Buffy grunted in frustration. "Giles, this is the same thing I had to realize myself, and the same thing I told my mom... You'll still have your human existence, in all the ways that matter."

"Please, Buffy, Willow," Giles sighed. "Can we talk about this later? I have a lot of material to sort through."

Buffy and Willow exchanged a look, and Buffy hopped out of her chair. Willow gave Giles a bit of a kicked-puppy look, which set him to polishing his glasses again. Buffy slung a comforting arm around Willow’s waist as they pushed through the swinging doors.

When Xander spotted the two members of SG-1 at one of the Career Week booths, he froze to the spot and swore loudly enough that the vehemence of his profanity seemed to pull a sadistically grinning Principle Snyder straight from the ether.

"Such language, Harris?" he gloated.

"I believe it's called English?" Xander offered.

Snyder grinned. "Detention, Mr. Harris."

*Buffy? Willow? SG-1 is here, Xander sent.*


*Oh... tadpoles,* Willow swore.

After Snyder went off to harass someone else, Xander ambled over to where Jack O'Neill and Samantha Carter were giving him bland looks.


"Xander," Jack nodded. "Almost didn't recognize you with clothes on."

The woman in the next booth over gave the Air Force Colonel a shocked look. Carter wanted to facepalm, but settled for a discreet elbow to Jack's ribs. Xander grinned, and tried not to laugh maniacally.
"Ah, that... came out wrong," Jack said.

"So, what brings you to this here humble little town?" Xander asked.

"Why, to tempt and inspire the next generation of fine young airmen, of course," Jack claimed.

"Uh huh," Xander deadpanned. "Great. Well. I just don't think the Air Force is for me. So... seeya 'round."

"Wait," Carter said. "There are a few things we need to discuss with you three."

Wills? Do you mind if SG-1 meets us at your place? Xander sent.

Buffy and Willow had just then arrived in the lounge. Willow caught his eye and gave a kind of half-shrug half-nod.

Xander faced Jack. "Know where the Rosenberg residence is?"

Jack glanced at Carter, who nodded.

"We'll be there all evening," Xander told them.

"Alrighty then," Jack said. "Pamphlet?"

Xander went over to where Buffy and Willow were standing. A goon in a suit was looming over Willow. The red-head gave her fellow Fae a bewildered look and followed the goon into the large, black-curtained Ix Software booth.

"Oh boy," Carter groaned.

"What?" Jack wondered.

"A major software conglomerate may have just recruited an alien," Carter said.

"Poor alien," Jack deadpanned.

Willow followed the big guy in the suit through the curtains, blinking in surprise when a waiter in a white jacket offered her a tray of appetizers.

"Try the canape. It's excellent," suit-guy suggested.

Willow shrugged and grabbed one. "What is all this?"

"You've been selected to meet with Mr. McCarthy, head recruiter for Ix, the world's leading software concern. The jet was delayed by fog at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, but he should be here any minute. Please," the guy said, gesturing towards a black leather couch, "make yourself comfortable."

"But I didn't even take the test yet," Willow pointed out in confusion.

"The test is irrelevant," suit-guy told her. "We've been tracking you for some time."

"Is that a good thing?" Willow asked.

"I would think so," he said. "We're extremely selective. In fact, only one other Sunnydale student met our criteria."
Apparently that was all he had to say, because he turned away and left the booth with his partner. Willow stared after them, feeling a little stunned that the big bad Ix Software had actually noticed her.

"Wowza," Willow whispered to herself as she took a bite of the various-whatever-on-a-fancy-cracker.

Willow turned to see who this other student was, and found that cute guitarist boy sitting at one end of the leather couch, staring suspiciously at another tray of canape. Willow went and sat next to him.

The boy glanced over at her, and did a double-take. After a moment of staring, during which Willow tried for a friendly smile, he held the tray towards her.

"Canape?" he offered.

"I got some," Willow said. "I'm Willow."

"I know," he blurted. "I mean, I'm Oz."

Willow perked up a little, catching the signs even in that short exchange that Oz might have a crush on her. It was either that or he was afraid of her, but Willow couldn't think of why that would be true. All of Eelesia's experience let her easily recognize his interest, but Willow wasn't sure what to do about it. All of Eelesia's experience was with a culture where nobody thought their affections or desires were something they should keep to themselves. High school culture, on the other hand... Oh to heck with it. High school culture could go lick a frog.

"I've seen you around. You're in that band," Willow said. "Hey, um, do you have a crush on me?"

Oz's eyes snapped onto her as he gaped slightly. He finally nodded. "Uh, pretty much yeah."

Willow grinned. "Cool."

Oz slowly smiled.

"So, um," Willow started, waving a hand to indicate the large curtained-off area they were in. "I guess you're good with code, huh?"

"It's a definite possibility," Oz admitted.

Kendra Young flattened herself atop a pile of luggage as the airliner's cargo hatch opened up. A baggage handler climbed in and started setting up to move the luggage, but then he noticed where Kendra had torn into one of the cargo nets in search of water. Kendra scowled at her carelessness.

"What the hell?" the baggage man muttered.

Kendra shifted her weight to spring, and the man looked around for the source of the noise, pulling out a flashlight and brandishing it like a club.. "Hey, you're not supposed to be in here!"

Leaping from her hiding place, Kendra kicked out. The man's head snapped back, and she quickly followed up with two more strikes to ensure he stayed down for a while. Kendra peered out onto the tarmac, smoothly jumping down when she saw the coast was clear.

Kendra had made it to the hellmouth, and she was ready to hunt.
Jack parked the rented SUV at the curb in front of the well-kept two-story suburban house.

"Nice place," Jack commented.

Carter gathered up the NDAs and followed Jack and Daniel up the walk while Teal'c adjusted his hat. Jack rang the bell.

A call of, "It's open!" came from inside.

Jack exchanged a glance and a shrug with his team and opened the door. The four of them let themselves in. Once they were inside, the door suddenly swung shut on its own as a naked Willow stepped into the foyer.

"Hi guys," Willow greeted. "Come in, have a seat, and all that stuff."

Willow padded back into the den. Jack and his team exchanged awkward glances. It was one thing to have the aesthetically idealized Fae going around without any of the important bits covered in the context of them being clearly alien, but in the American suburbs it was just disturbing.

Following the naked redhead, Jack looked around, noticing the sparse impersonal way the house was decorated. His eyes landed on a framed picture, showing a couple posing with a young girl who was obviously Willow. Jack frowned inwardly. Willow claimed to be six-hundred-something years old. Unless that picture was a fake, something wasn't right here.

In the den, the end tables had been pushed out to make room for a nest of pillows and blankets between the three-seater and the two-seater. A naked Xander was seated with his back to the two-seater.

"And you looked so normal, earlier," Jack snarked.

Xander shrugged. "Normal is relative."

"Ah, where's Buffy?" Daniel asked.

"Visiting her daughter," Willow told them as she plopped down by Xander's feet. "She'll be down in a minute."

"Buffy has a daughter?" Carter asked, surprised.

"Yeah, her name's Dawn," Xander shared.

Carter set the NDAs on the tables and took a seat on the sofa. "How many of you are there? We've only met you two and Buffy."

"Oh, a few," Willow said vaguely. "Buffy's coming."

Before anyone could ask, there was the familiar hum of an Asgard beam, and a naked Buffy appeared in a white flash. She was holding a bundle of something dark and clothlike, which she tossed to Xander.

"So what's the what, huh?" Buffy asked. "If you wanted to talk to us you could have just called, you know."

"Well, a few fine folks... and some less than fine folks... are a tad worried about how you've set yourselves up here, Miss Summers," Jack told them. "Throwin' around big words like infiltration, and such. And hey, I thought you told us you couldn't do the beaming thing?"
"Well, now we can, no thanks to you guys," Buffy said.

"When you turned us down, I went looking elsewhere," Willow explained. "Imagine my surprise when I found an invisible al'kesh just sitting in orbit, all abandoned and stuff. I thought you told us the goa'uld didn't have that technology?"

"They don't," Carter said. "Unless... You're talking about Osiris' ship! It has a stolen Asgard system."

Jack put his elbows on his knees and frowned. "You know, we've been looking for that."

Willow grinned hopefully. "Uh, finders keepers?"

"Can we get back to why you're here?" Buffy asked. "We told you, we just wanna be able to see our friends."

Daniel gazed at them thoughtfully. "How long have you three been living here? We were under the impression that it was a relatively short amount of time between your arrival and your ship's."

"That's... complicated," Willow told them.

"We've got time," Jack said.

"Not that kind of complicated," Willow said evasively.

"Well what about these friends of yours?" Jack asked. "How much do they know?"

Willow went on being vague. "You don't need to worry about them."

"Why don't you let us decide that?" Jack said.

"Because they don't need to be involved," Buffy said. "They've done nothing to deserve your attention."

"So you say," Jack grumbled.

"So..." Xander prompted after a short silence.

"Well, um," Carter began. "The other reason we're here is to ask you to sign these Non-Disclosure Agreements. It'll be a good start at putting the higher-ups at ease. It's a concern that you might inadvertently divulge classified information about the Stargate Program."

"Oh, and since we're living down here and we've got human identities, we can sign an agreement and have it not be totally meaningless," Willow guessed.

"That's the idea," Carter told them.

"Well alright, hand 'em over," Xander said.

Willow, of course, finished reading her copy first. She set it down and gave SG-1 a frown.

"We will not agree to this," Willow said. "We haven't and we won't talk about the Stargate or about you guys to anyone who doesn't already know about it. That is reasonable. But this says we're not allowed to talk about anything unearthly, and that is a ridiculous demand."

"It's a matter of national security," Carter started to explain.

"No, that is total crap," Buffy said. "You don't own us, and you certainly don't own space. Even the goa'uld attacked in ships. You're in charge of the Stargate, and you've got ships like the Prometheus, and that's a big national secret. Okay, fine. We won't tell anyone about you. But we didn't come through the Stargate, and neither did the invasion fleet we battled. How can you possibly think you have a claim on that information?"

"There are some things the world isn't ready to know," Carter tried again.

"Well, yeah, but who made that your call? If the existence of the goa'uld actually is one of those things, you don't need to hide it. People will do that just fine on their own," Buffy shot back.

"You can't possibly know that for sure," Carter pointed out.

"I so can," Buffy argued, but paused as she got sidetracked. "And you know what's strange? That urge to ignore anything The World Isn't Ready to Know never seemed to happen in our old universe. Maybe it's not that people are like that, but something's making them that way." Buffy glanced upwards. "Non-interference my butt."

Carter opened her mouth to continue down that line, but Jack interrupted her.

"Look, if you don't sign, I'm gonna have to go back to my bosses and tell them you're a security breach," Jack said. "That's not gonna end in fun times for anyone."

"Buffy," Daniel soothed. "This is to protect your friends as much as it is to protect us. You've already had first-hand experience with the kind of danger they could be in from certain people who might think they know something about you. With your NDAs on record, it's less likely those unscrupulous people will think your friends are worth troubling with."

Buffy grimaced.

Willow shook her head. "That's rather flimsy, Doctor Jackson. No, Buffy's right. We'll agree to keep Stargate Command a secret, but you have no authority to tell us what to do with information that didn't come from your organization."

Xander nodded in agreement. "Look, none of us are interested in going on the news or dealing with a media circus. We just want the same courtesy you're expecting from us."

"Oh, there's no way that's going to go over well." Jack glanced at Carter. "I don't necessarily agree, but they have a point. Can we modify the NDAs?"

"Here," Willow said, handing over her copy before Carter could answer. "I crossed out all the parts we don't agree on."

Carter looked it over. "We're going to need to call this in."

While SG-1 was in the other room, Xander stood up and unfolded the bundle Buffy had thrown him. There were three pieces. There was a black half-jacket, something that resembled a pair of black denim pants, while the last looked kind of like a really wide belt made of smaller belts and folded shiny dark red fabric.

"So what is it?" Xander asked.
Buffy shrugged. "Well, while I was playing with Dawn, I mentioned to Willow about your guy problem. It's kinda unfair how you have to put up with discomfort 'cause guy clothes totally aren't designed for Fae. So Willow made that."

"I'm calling it an underbelt, for now," Willow told him. "Even though you don't wear anything over it. I designed it myself!"

Xander arranged the belt and held it out in front of him. It was seven inches wide around the sides and back, and made of a braid of glossy black leather. It was lined on the inside with something like red satin over a thin layer of padding. The shiny red fabric encased the lower edge of the belt-braid in a layering of folds that rose halfway up the width of the outside of the belt, while at the upper edge a faux-collar formed by thicker padding jutted up and outward from his waist. In the front, the braid fanned upwards to a peak, while on the inside, Xander felt a wide groove in the padding to accommodate his manhood.

"Inventive," Xander complimented, giving Willow a proud smile.

Willow hopped up and kissed him. "I made the pants to go with it. See the the wires sticking up from the waist?"

Xander nodded. The pants looked like black denim, but felt softer. Once Xander held them out, he saw what Willow was talking about. The sides of the pants were slit, forming a 'V' shape with the point down at the knee. There was nothing that would hold the pants up on their own, but sticking up out of the front and back were a series of small metallic wires.

"The wires are superconductive, to be easy to manipulate," Willow continued. "A human would never be able to put these on, but all you have to do is feed the wires into the little openings on the bottom of the belt and into the little tension clamps sewn into the leather."

"Cool. What about the jacket?" Xander asked.

"Um, it's just a jacket, I thought it'd still be a little too conspicuous if you went completely bare-chested," Willow explained.

Xander held said garment out in front of him. It would cover his arms, and his shoulders, and not much else. The bottom corners would just barely cover his nipples, and the sides would cover maybe three ribs.

The outfit wasn't something he could wear to school, and it kind of looked like something an anime character would wear, but it would let him go out where clothing was required without it being a burden.

Just then, SG-1 came back into the room.

"Looks we'll have to get back to you," Jack O'Neill told them.

Samantha Carter explained, "Our higher-ups are willing to compromise, but they want to go over the altered documents and draw up new ones before we agree."

Willow smiled innocently. "See, we can all just get along."

Jack chuckled despite himself, and turned to wave his team towards the door, calling back a flippant, "We'll see you at school, kiddoes!"

Once they were gone, Buffy pulled a shimmery white folded bundle out from under the end tables.
"I'm gonna follow them and keep watch for a while. Last thing we need is SG-1 getting themselves eaten."

Quickly donning the airy silver-white shorts and tanktop, Buffy slipped out the back door and took to the rooftops. Her bare feet were soft and silent as she dashed from house to house, tracking SG-1's SUV.

Kendra ducked under the vampire's clumsy swing and drove Mr. Pointy into his back. As the vampire dusted, Kendra quickly scanned for further threats. The alley was empty, and her instincts were quiet, so she slipped her stake back into her pocket and continued towards this 'Willy's' establishment she'd overheard a pair of vampires talking about.

There was no sound, no hint, except a slight raising of the hair on her neck and a whisper of cloth from above. Kendra snapped around, spotting a figure leaping between two rooftops back the way she'd come, a fast-moving silhouette against the stars and a flash of skin and silver in the street lamps.

Kendra sprang to the side, leaping from wall to wall across the alley until she reached the flat rooftops of the blocky brick buildings. Scanning the horizon for movement, Kendra caught a glimpse in the distance and moved to follow.

She didn't know what she was chasing. She didn't think a vampire could jump like that. But it wasn't human, and that made it Kendra's concern.

As she tracked it across the town, Kendra frowned. She was having trouble keeping up, and she kept losing track of her quarry. If it noticed her, it'd be able to get away from her easily.

Fortunately, the demon seemed to be cutting a fairly straight course. After a mad dash across the rooftops of the town, Kendra came to overlook a hotel parking lot. She was actually somewhat out of breath, and stuck to the shadows while her breathing calmed.

Then doors of a big boxy car opened, and her instincts screamed at her when she laid eyes on the largest of the four figures that emerged. The distraction cost her, and she lost track of the roof-jumper, but that could wait. Whoever the other three were, they were human, and all to likely oblivious to the danger they were in.

Kendra started looking for a good place to stage an ambush.

Buffy perched on the roof of the hotel, laying idly in a little nook with her eyes closed, watching the feed from the sensor fog Willow had isolated for her. Okay, so she was totally spying on SG-1, but it wasn't like she was going to use anything she learned against them, and it was the easiest way to make sure they didn't get eaten.

Jack O'Neill apparently agreed with Buffy's argument, but didn't think it was worth going against orders for. He also apparently thought there was something off about the Fae's story, but he wasn't sure what.

Teal'c wasn't concerned either way, and mostly just watched TV.

Samantha Carter sympathized with the Fae's alleged motivations, but thought the government was in the right and the Fae ought to play by their rules if they wanted to live on their planet. She didn't say it in quite those words, but that was the sentiment.

Daniel Jackson... Buffy gaped in surprise. Daniel was practicing magic. What the heck? When did
that happen? Daniel was standing with a look of concentration on his face as the bullets from his 
spare clip slowly orbited in front of him. Apparently he was improving in how many objects he 
could levitate at once, but his practice wasn't improving how much mass he could move.

Buffy settled back down, letting her mind wander while she kept a virtual eye on them.

Teal'c announced he was going to the vending machines, and asked if anyone wanted anything. 
Buffy watched as he put on his hat and left the suite.

Teal'c studied the selection of snacks. A reflection in the glass front of the vending machine was his 
only warning. Teal'c dove to the side as a knife buried itself in the glass. He rolled to his feet in a 
defensive stance, and caught a glimpse of his attacker before she was on him again.

A teenage girl, skin in the middle ranges, form-fitting clothing and tied black hair, with an expression 
of cold determination.

Teal'c parried a stab, staggering under the unexpected force of the blow. The girl ruthlessly followed 
up with a kick that Teal'c twisted to absorb, but it still struck his ribs with insane strength. He felt 
something crack.

Ignoring the pain, Teal'c planted his feet and exchanged a blindingly-fast series of strikes and blocks 
with the girl, adjusting his tactics as though he were fighting a goa'uld. She wasn't, though. She was 
too strong even for a false god, but Teal'c didn't have time to puzzle out what she might be.

He took a shallow cut to his arm in exchange for finally knocking the knife out of her hand, but she 
adapted instantly, using his disarming strike to move into a grapple. Teal'c grunted in pain as the girl 
dislocated his shoulder, taking advantage of the close proximity to head-butt her.

The girl stumbled back and Teal'c struck out. His open-hand strike missed her throat by inches, but 
his followup kick landed. It should have broken her leg, but it was like kicking solid steel, and she 
cought his leg before he could pull it back.

Pulling a second knife from somewhere, she plunged it into his caff and tossed him onto his back. 
The air rushed from his lungs as Teal'c hit the concrete, and a moment later the girl was on top of 
him, holding her knife to his neck.

"You answer or you die," the girl said in a heavy accent. "What are you?"

An unexpected voice answered from right behind her. "Funny. That's what I was gonna ask you."

The knife lurched away from his neck, almost tearing itself from the super-strong girl's grip, but she 
held on and whirled to her feet to face the newcomer. It was Buffy, clad in a tiny tanktop and shorts 
that were made of some exotic silvery-white material. The unknown girl lashed out with a spinning 
kick that Buffy stopped cold with an arm block. Teal'c raised an impressed eyebrow.

Buffy darted inside the other girl's guard. Her knife sank into Buffy's torso under her arm, but, 
obviously, failed to penetrate. Buffy grabbed her and slammed her against the wall, stunning her, 
then spun and in a move that violated everything Teal'c knew about leverage, hurled the other girl 
over the irons railing and into the parking lot.

A moment later, Buffy was at his side. "You alright there, Teal'c? That leg doesn't look too good."

The mysterious accented girl hit the tarmac with a distant thud, and Teal'c noticed that the railing in 
the direction Buffy had thrown her was bent inwards, as though it had been pulled towards Buffy by
some immense force. Ah, so she did it all with magnets, as O'Neill would say.

"I will survive," Teal'c said. "My leg was wounded cleanly. It is my shoulder that is the greater injury, I believe. It can wait. You should apprehend the assailant."

Buffy nodded. "I was gonna. Just wanted to make sure you weren't gonna bleed out."

Slowly and carefully, Teal'c staggered to his feet. Buffy smiled at him and turned, leaping over the railing and landing in a crouch next to a little green hatchback. The dark-skinned girl in the stylish pants wasn't moving when Buffy reached her, but looked to be more or less intact except for a swelling ankle and the whole being knocked out thing.

Lifting the unconscious girl in her arms, Buffy was greeted by the sight of Jack, Carter, and Daniel rushing out of the stairwell with weapons drawn.

"I called it. I freakin' called it. Why'd I have to be right," Jack was muttering to himself.

"We need chains. Heavy ones," Buffy ordered. "Rope or plastic isn't gonna do more than slow her down. Whatever she is, she's almost as strong as me."

Jack shut his mouth, clearly thinking back to when Buffy had made the SGC's badasses look like kids with capguns.

"Is she Fae?" Carter asked.

"Well, seeing as she's got visible injuries and's all out cold and stuff, I'm gonna go with no," Buffy said, rolling her eyes.

Kendra slowly came to. Her head was pounding and when she tried to move, the cold metal of chain dug into her arms and legs, torso and neck. She looked up and found herself surrounded by seven looming figures, two of which, a tall man and a blonde woman, had guns pointed at her.

The demon she'd attempted to interrogate was standing back, favoring one leg as he regarded Kendra impassively. She glared suspiciously. Did the demon have these humans under his control? Then she noticed the other three.

It chilled her a little that she didn't notice them sooner. Her instincts were sending her confusing signals, and that threw her off. No demon or vampire she'd ever met had felt like those three. There was the blonde girl in silvery-white sleepwear from before. Beside her was a red-haired girl in a black strapless top (with short sleeves but no shoulders? How...?) and a green pleated skirt, and next to her... Kendra fought not to blush. A very fit boy in a black jacket that left most of his sculpted torso bare, and an odd ruffled red sash belt wrap thing around his waist.

"Alright, let's start with an easy one," the armed man with graying hair said. "Who and what are you?"

"Ah am Kendra," she announced defiantly. "Ah am de Vampire Slayer."

The little blonde in white's jaw dropped. "Huwhuh?"
"You're the vampire what?" Jack repeated flatly.

Buffy leaned into Kendra's personal space. "Nice try. What are you really?"

"Ah am de Vampire Slayer!" Kendra insisted, glaring. "Why don't you tell me what you are, demon?"

"Vampires?" Carter repeated.

Buffy almost blurted out that she was the Slayer, but stopped herself as she realized she didn't want SG-1 to know that.

"How can she be the Slayer? I'm the Slayer!" Buffy sent to Willow-para and Xander in frustration.

"You know about vampires?" Daniel asked Jack.

"Doesn't everybody?" Jack asked. "It's just one of those things nobody talks about."

Willow gave her a wide-eyed look. When one dies another is called. You died, Buffy!

Only for a minute! Buffy replied.

I guess that was long enough, Xander sent.

Daniel facepalmed. "Jack."

"Vampires, Sir?" Carter asked faintly.

So you guys think it's true? Wait, holy crap, if it is this could be the perfect cover, Buffy realized.

"I was under the impression that vampires were a fictional being?" Teal'c put in.

Only if Giles goes along with it, Xander pointed out.

"There are several fictional species that are called vampires, but there is also at least one real species," Daniel explained.

Carter watched this exchange with a shaken expression, and then sat down heavily, whispering, "Oh you have got to be kidding me. How did I miss this?"

Willow-icos just beamed down to the library and is filling Giles in, Willow-para sent.

Buffy glared at Kendra. "If you are the Slayer, why'd you attack Teal'c?"

"He is a demon," Kendra declared.

"Only a little bit," Buffy protested. "But, he's so totally a good guy."

For the first time, Kendra looked uncertain, but then she frowned suspiciously. "And what are you, then?"
"None of your business," Buffy told her.

"Hold it!" Jack cut in. "You fellas have heard of this Slayer deal? Wanna share with the class?"

Willow answered, "You learn things, living in this town. We know someone who'll be able to find out if Kendra is really the Slayer. Giles. He's a Watcher."

"A what?" Jack asked, glancing at Daniel only to get a shrug.

"How about it, Kendra?" Buffy asked. "We let you up, and you promise not to wig out until we talk to the Watcher."

"Wig out?" Kendra repeated in confusion.

Buffy regarded her carefully. "Yeah, no attacking, no fighting?"

"Very well. Ah agree," Kendra gave in after a moment.

Xander knelt and started undoing the chains. Kendra tried to remain stoic, but her gaze kept sliding onto Xander's bare torso. Sheesh, you'd think she'd never seen a boy before.

"Hey, hold the phone," Jack exclaimed. "Slayer Girl there almost killed Teal'c!"

"Ah tought ah was protecting you," Kendra told Jack stiffly.

The last of the chains came off, and Xander offered his hand and a smile. "Hi. I'm Xander."

Flustered, Kendra avoided looking at him as she stood up warily and mumbled something half-way polite. She stumbled on her sprained ankle, and Xander caught her. She blushed visibly.

*Giles is calling the council, Willow reported. And he agreed to keep Buffy's slayerness a secret from the government.*

Daniel frowned thoughtfully. "Kendra, would you mind standing next to Teal'c for a moment?"

Teal'c raised an eyebrow and Jack exclaimed, "What? Why?"

"They're both hurt, Jack," Daniel pointed out.

"Daniel," Jack growled.


Jack threw up his hands. "Fine! T?"

Daniel stood in front of Kendra and Teal'c, placing a hand on each of their shoulders. He closed his eyes and concentrated, suffusing himself in the emotional state that is most commonly associated with heartfelt worship. It was kind of difficult, since he'd actually met the being he was going to invoke, but Daniel had a lot of respect for Oma and that was close enough to be a good starting point.

He didn't have any of the material components, but the texts all agreed that the more familiar one was with a spell or the power it invoked, the smaller a part of the ritual one needed to perform. That made sense to Daniel. If the important part was the worship energy, he only needed to draw Oma's attention and indicate which spell he was casting.
Once he'd achieved the necessary mental state, Daniel spoke, "Exaudi orationem meam, matrona Desala. Hoc fractus corpore vocat ad ducem. Consano!"

Power rushed through him, and Daniel focused on Teal'c and Kendra's bodies. All Daniel had to do was aim it at the damage, and Oma would take care of the detail work. The mental effort involved was still somewhat taxing, but nothing like what would be involved in trying to repair a wound at the cellular level on his own. It was impressive, Daniel thought, and quickly seized that impressed feeling and rolled it into the worship that was fueling the spell.

Finally, it was done, and Daniel took a long breath as he stepped back.

"Oh. Thank you, sir," Kendra said shyly.

Teal'c inclined his head.

"We've been looking at this the wrong way around!" Samantha Carter suddenly blurted as the group of eight filed out of the hotel room.

Everyone jumped a little, and Jack gave her an inquisitive glance. "Carter?"

"We came to Sunnydale to make sure that there weren't any security concerns due to the Fae's presence," Carter explained. "But the question we should have been asking all along is, why here? Why did the Fae show up in this town in the first place? There's something here, something about this town specifically. There's just too much coincidence any other way you look at it, Sir."

"Well, you're right about that," Buffy admitted.

Kendra stepped back in surprise. "You don't know about de hellmouth?"

"Hellmouth?" Daniel repeated thoughtfully.

Willow tapped her chin in consideration. "Well, if magics are like wind, then the hellmouth is like Jupiter's great red spot."

"That is a horrible analogy," Xander complained.

Willow pouted. "Well let's see you do better, mister. Anywho, what it is isn't as important as what it does. What it does is drastically reduce the energy required to reach other branches of this multiverse, and it has a bunch of side-effects, like forming pocket worlds, and giving everything in a few miles radius some small measure of magical recognition."

"It tis a convergence of mystical energies," Kendra recited. "Demons and vampires are drawn to the hellmouth, for its evil strengthens them."

"How does it do that?" Carter asked.

"Evil begets evil," Kendra answered. "It just is."

Carter frowned in disappointment and looked to Willow for clarification.

Willow shrugged. "Sorry. I don't know how it works. I mean, I could guess. I can think of a few ways it could work, but studying a hellmouth closely enough to find out is like super dangerous."

Carter sighed. "Well, that does make me feel a little better about apparently being the only one in the room who didn't know Earth has a population of vampires. If they mostly congregate around these..."
"Well, let's go so you can talk to the expert on hellmouthy stuff," Buffy said.

Everyone continued down to the ground level, and Jack unlocked the SUV. Carter claimed shotgun as usual, but Jack stopped short.

"A bit of a problem," Jack commented. "How're we gonna fit eight people in this thing?"

"We'll stack up," Buffy answered, sliding into the back seat.

Jack, Daniel, Carter, and Kendra stared as Xander climbed onto Buffy's lap, and then Willow perched on Xander's lap, pulling the seatbelt across all three of them.

"That has got to be a moving violation," Jack muttered as he got in the driver's side.

Kendra squeezed in between Daniel and the tower of Fae, leaving just enough room for Teal'c on Daniel's other side. It was a bit cramped though.

"Is Buffy okay under there?" Carter asked in concern.

An arm stuck out in front of Kendra and made a short series of signs.

Daniel snorted. "It's sign language. She says she's fine."

After Jack started the engine and pulled out, Willow reminded them, "You know, I could have just beamed us all over there."

Jack resisted a sudden urge to smash his head on the steering wheel.

"So what is a Watcher?" Daniel asked once they were on the road.

"They're... well," Willow said. "I suppose to you guys they're the organization that buried your you-know-what way back in ancient Egypt in the first place."

Daniel choked. "The shadowmen? They're still around?"

Willow shrugged and Xander said, "Never heard them called that."

"Wait just a minute!" Jack exclaimed. "This Giles guy knows about the..."

"Well, he does own a first-hand account of its burial," Willow said.

Daniel looked like an eager little kid. "Do you think he'd let me read it?"

"Aht," Jack cut Daniel off. "You're telling me there's some big magic secret society that's been around since the whole rebellion thing?"

"Yup," Willow confirmed.

Jack groaned. "Just once I'd like a mission to stay simple. Get some NDAs signed, not find any evil plots, go home. Of course we stumble into vampire mecca and magical shadow wars and overzealous teenage superheroes... and what's the deal with that anyway?" Jack looked at Kendra in the rearview mirror. "How's a girl like you end up a Vampire Slayer, and what the heck is a Slayer anyway? And what's it got to do with these Watchers?"
"Ah was Called," Kendra answered. "Ah am de Chosen One, de one girl in all de world with the strength to fight de forces of darkness."

"Chosen by who?" Carter asked. "How'd they make you so strong?"

"It is de power itself dat chooses," Kendra explained. "When de Slayer dies, a new girl is Chosen by de power."

"How does it choose?" Carter asked. "Is it intelligent? Or does it operate on some simpler criteria?"

"Ah... it is not me concern," Kendra said.

"And the Watchers?" Jack prompted. "How are they involved?"

"Dey find girls dat might become de Slayer," Kendra said. "Dey train dem, prepair dem. Dey watch de world, and send de Slayer where she is needed."

"How long as this been going on?" Jack demanded.

"Ah do not know," Kendra said. "It has always been dis way."

"Hmm..."

"Daniel?" Jack prompted.

Daniel looked up. "There's a story. A very old story about the shadowmen. I don't remember it that well, and I'm not sure I even still have the volume I read it in, but this Slayer power... I think it might have some kind of relevance."

"How long have you been the Slayer, Kendra?" Carter asked.

"About seven months," Kendra replied.

"Is it normal for the power to choose someone so... young?" Carter asked delicately.

Kendra nodded. "It is de way it is."

Jack growled, but didn't say anything.

When they got to the school, Giles confirmed Kendra's status, and SG-1 found themselves with a whole new headache. Daniel got along with Giles instantly, of course, and once a Watcher confirmed that Teal'c was not an enemy and the three humans weren't civilians, Kendra got along great with Daniel as well.

Of course, that was after SG-1 almost started a fight, when Giles recognized Teal'c as a jaffa, and immediately concluded that they were the ones who had the Stargate. Daniel just wanted to read the Watcher's account of the rebellion against the Goa'uld, but Jack and Carter tried to convince Giles to sign an NDA, which went over about as well as one would expect, with numerous exclamations of, "bloody arrogant Americans!"

It certainly put to rest any thoughts Giles may have had about ratting the scoobies out to SG-1.

"My test says that I should look into law enforcement," Buffy said wryly. "Somewhere, someone is laughing at me."
"Well, it kinda makes sense," Willow pointed out as they ambled through the Career Fair
Buffy paused as she spotted something, nudging Willow. "Hey, Wills, that guy over there..."
Willow smiled. "Oh, that's Oz. He wants me, so he's expressing a computer nerd solidarity thing."
Oz made his way over to them. "Hey."
"Hi Oz! Do you know Buffy?" Willow asked.
"Hi," Oz greeted.
Buffy grinned at him. "Nice to meet you. Well, I'm gonna go find Xander. Later, Wills."
Willow and Oz stared at each other for a short moment, sharing a little smile. Impulsively, Willow reached over and brushed a fingertip along Oz's hair.
"Your hair is very brown today," Willow said.
"Yeah, it was a brown kinda day," Oz told her. "So, uh, did you decide? Are you gonna be a corporate computer suit guy?"
Willow chuckled nervously. "Oh, well, I think I'm gonna finish high school... and some other things... and you know, there's arguments to be made for staying open-source, and hey I don't know about the suit guy stuff. I'm not really much for the suits, or the guyness."
Something strange flickered across Oz's face, and was gone in an instant. A touch of pain, a hint of irony, a spark of guilt quickly smothered. Without her Fae memory she would have been sure she imagined it, but it was there, and Willow had no idea what it was about.
"So, what about you?" Willow asked.
Oz shrugged. "I'm not really a computer person. Or, y'know, a work of any kind, person."
"Then how'd you get selected?" Willow wondered.
"Oh, I sorta test well," Oz told her. "Y'know, which is cool. Except that it leads to jobs."
"Pesky things, those jobs," Willow teased. "What about an ambition?"
Willow blinked. "You mean the guitar chord?"
Oz nodded. "Well, the E-flat, it, it's doable, but that diminished ninth, y'know, it's a man's chord. You could lose a finger." There it was again. That flicker of something she couldn't identify.
Willow smiled coyly. "But I like your fingers." Willow loosely twined her hand into his. "I'd be totally sad if any of 'em died for the cause before I got to know 'em."
Oz actually blushed.

Cordelia Chase was walking down the hall when a pair of hands came out of nowhere and hauled her into an empty classroom. She shrieked and flailed but a moment later she was released and found herself face to face with Buffy and Xander. The door shut behind her with an ominous slam.
"We need to talk," Xander said.

"Agh, what is your damage?" Cordelia demanded.

"Oh, I think you're gonna wanna hear this, Cordy," Xander told her.

Cordelia huffed and crossed her arms. "What do you want?"

"Remember halloween?" Buffy asked.

"Ugh," Cordelia grunted. "How could I forget."

"You know when you met our costumes?" Xander prompted.

Cordelia looked away from him with a faint blush. "Yeah, so?"

"Well, Cordelia," Buffy said seriously. "That whole thing had some, like, major lasting effects, if you know what I mean."

Cordelia looked at her sharply. Buffy was deliberately wearing a tight little shirt for this conversation, and puffed her chest out. Cordelia's eyes went wide and she pointed accusingly.

"Oh my god you got a magic boob job?"

"Nope," Buffy replied, popping her 'p' and grinning.

"Oh, this is so much better than that," Xander told her.

Buffy smirked. "How'd you like to be completely immune to vampires and stay beautiful forever?"

Cordelia's eyes narrowed. "Explain."

"Looks like Cordelia's taking the upgrade as soon as she can come up with an excuse to disappear for a few weeks," Buffy announced as she strolled into the library ahead of Xander.

Willow was already there, chatting with a somewhat uncertain Kendra. Willow pouted at the news.

"Of course she is," Willow grumbled.

Kendra looked up in confusion, but Xander smiled at her and suddenly she was too shy to ask. She'd been told a basic explanation of the halloween spell and how it changed the three scoobies, but not any of the details.

"Ah, Buffy, Xander," Giles greeted. "I wished to speak to you. All three of you, actually."

"What about, Giles?" Buffy asked.

"Well, I do think it was rather clever of you to hide your true identities in plain sight by claiming them as aliases, but I am curious about why you felt the need to go to so much trouble," Giles admitted. "What's so important about the halloween spell, in regards to concealing it from these SGC people? You've revealed quite a lot to them..."

"Two reasons, G-man," Xander said. "And a lose-lose scenario."

"How is that?" Giles inquired.
"The first reason is simple," Buffy said. "Teenagers aren't people in the eyes of the law or the government. If they found out who we really are, they would start a war with us, trying to take our ship and our technology, just because it wouldn't even occur to them that we have any right of autonomy."

Giles grimaced. "I wish I could say you were being cynical, but I can imagine that occurring all too easily. And the other reason?"

"They might not treat us like teenagers," Willow said. "They might decide we are aliens and the proper owners of our technology, but that we destroyed and over-wrote ourselves, and accuse us of our own murders or body-snatching or whatever."

"Either way is badness all around, Giles," Buffy said.

"Yes, I imagine so," Giles admitted reluctantly.

Xander sidled up to where Kendra was sharpening a dagger. "Nice knife."

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"I knew I'd heard of Sunnydale before," Elizabeth Weir said.

Jack O'Neill shifted the phone to his other ear. "You knew about this hellmouth business?"

"Rumors," she said. "I saw a lot of the underbelly of the world in my previous line of work, Colonel. There was talk."

Jack scrubbed a hand through his hair. "And these Watcher's Council people?"

Weir hesitated. "Yes, them. A long-standing British NGO with very deep connections. I'm afraid they're a step ahead of us Colonel. This morning I received orders straight from the President that we're not to interfere with Rupert Giles or his operation in Sunnydale."

Jack groaned.

"It gets worse," Weir said. "Apparently the Watcher's Council has surviving historical documentation that proves their prior claim to the Stargate."

"Son of a bitch."

"Fortunately, since the Stargate we're actually using now was pulled out of Antarctica by the Russians, we had some negotiating leverage," Weir told him. "We had to give the British a presence in Homeworld Security, and the US government is paying some small monetary reparations for the loss of the first Stargate, but it looks like we've avoided any further conflict."

"What about our current mission?" Jack asked.

"You have until the end of the week to convince the Fae to sign the unaltered NDAs. If you don't convince them by the deadline, I've been ordered to accept the modified NDAs and pull you out," Weir informed him.

Jack snorted. "Yeah, I really don't see that happening. Until next check-in, Doctor."

---

Willow leaped from the grass and grabbed a low branch of the tree outside Buffy's window. She swung her body up, climbing with ease until she landed lightly on the roof outside Buffy's room.
Smiling at the sight of Xander with his head between Buffy's legs while Buffy writhed around on her back, Willow eased the window open and slipped inside. Xander glanced up at the sound of the window shutting and Willow waved.


Willow stripped off her clothes and tossed them onto Buffy's desk. *How long have you been licking her?*

*Since she woke up from her Slayer Nap four hours ago,* Xander replied.

Willow giggled. *No wonder she didn't notice me come in. Four hours? And you haven't gotten bored yet?*

*Hey, this is fun when my tongue can't get tired and I don't need to come up for air,* Xander pointed out. *It's actually, um, kind of hard to stop. I'm like, in the zone or something. Help?*

"Ooohha! Oh fuck. Ohhh! Aauuhhgn!" Buffy gasped as she climaxed again.

Willow snickered as she slid a hand down between her legs and rubbed a slow circle. She knelt down behind Xander at the edge of the bed and pressed herself to his back, rubbing her breasts on his warm smooth skin. Wrapping both arms around him, Willow straddled his hips and ground her pussy against the base of his spine.


Licking buffycum off Xander's cheek, Willow reached down and grasped his wet thickness, twisting her hand around his slippery glans, making him twitch and moan. With a shudder, Xander's cum spurted into her hand and he reared back from Buffy's crotch with a gasp.

Buffy's legs flopped to the sides and she lay there in a limp panting heap. The panting wasn't from an actual need for air, so it was a slower and more shuddery thing than out-of-breath panting.

A moment's focus cleaned Xander's cum from Willow's hand with her Utility Cloud. She climbed the rest of the way up Xander's back until she was on top of Buffy. Willow greeted her with a kiss.

"Willow? When did you get here?" Buffy wondered.

Willow laughed and dropped herself flat on top of Buffy. Buffy pouted playfully and rolled them over, pinning Willow's arms over her head as she resumed the kissage. Xander took the opportunity to flop down on his side in the vacated space.

Buffy released Willow's lips, and Xander leaned in to kiss her hard while Buffy held her down. Her tongue greeted his with eagerness.

"Spoons?" Willow suggested.

Xander slipped an arm under Willow and dragged her back to his chest. She wriggled happily in his arms, arching her back to provide a better angle for Xander's cock. Positioned at her opening, he thrust, and Willow's vagina swallowed his length with a wet squelch until her butt squished snugly against his hips. Willow shivered with pleasure.

"Xander," Willow sighed softly.

Facing Willow, Buffy squeezed her leg under her two friends and crossed her ankles behind
Xander's back. Willow pulled her close with a smile, using Xander's arm as a pillow. Xander brushed Willow's hair out of the way and started softly kissing her neck while Buffy and Willow exchanged little affectionate kisses of their own.

"So, what's going on with you and that Oz guy?" Xander asked after a while.

Willow grinned. "There's totally sparkage."

"He seemed nice," Buffy opined.

Willow nodded. "I like him. I think he's had a crush on me for a while. He's so cute and serious and stoic and whimsical."

"Stoic and whimsical," Xander repeated teasingly, flexing his erection and making Willow's breath hitch.

Willow giggled. "You have to meet him to see what I mean."

"What're you gonna tell him?" Buffy asked. "I mean, do you think he's gonna understand... this?"

Xander shuddered and Willow felt his penis spasm inside her as he ejaculated. His slow, languid thrusts continued without pause.

"It kinda depends, I guess," Willow said. "I don't really know him well enough to guess how he'll react, yet."

"Polyamory," Xander said.

"Huh?"

Xander shrugged. "It's a thing people do, and probably the most accurate way to describe the way our friendship looks from the outside. You could start with that, and go from there if he's okay with it."

"Hmm," Willow hummed thoughtfully.

Buffy sighed. "It's too bad we can't just invite him over to hang and bang."

Xander snorted. "Hang and bang?"

"What?" Buffy asked. "Isn't that what we're doing?"

"Well yeah," Willow agreed, "but it does sound kinda funny in english andaahoooh oooh."

Willow convulsed as Xander's slow thrusts finally pushed her over the edge.

The next day at school, Willow spotted Oz getting a box of animal crackers from a vending machine. She went over and waited for him to notice her.

Oz stood up and smiled when he saw her there. "Hey. Animal cracker?"

"Sure." Willow bit into a giraffe as they walked together.

Oz pulled out a cookie of his own and paused. "Oh look. Monkey! And he has a little hat. And little pants."
"Yeah, he does," Willow agreed, smiling at him.

"You have the sweetest smile I've ever seen," Oz suddenly told her.

Willow accepted the compliment with a bashful expression, bumping Oz's shoulder affectionately. Oz ate a bear. "The monkey's the only cookie animal that gets to wear clothes, you know that?"

Willow nodded with mock seriousness. "Oh. I did know that."

"So, I'm wondering," Oz continued. "Do the other cookie animals feel sorta ripped? Like, is the hippo going, hey man, where are my pants? I have my hippo dignity!"

Willow giggled. "Or maybe, the monkey feels left out 'cause the other cookie animals get to do the nude thing, but they're all like, we don't like monkeys. Monkeys are gross! You cover up your vulgar monkey parts, you monkey you."

Oz smiled in amusement as he gave her a raised eyebrow. "You don't think the monkey lords it over them, up in his treehouse," Oz put on a french accent, "I mock you with my monkey pants!"

Willow laughed. "The monkey's French?"

"All monkeys are French," Oz told her. "You didn't know that?"

"No," Willow giggled. "That I didn't know. Maybe the monkey's all like, if you're gonna make me wear pants, I'm gonna wear the best darn pants in the cookie box! Mwhahaha!"

Oz smiled.

"I like your smile too, you know," Willow told him. "Hey, I bet the other cookie animals are jealous of the cookie bear, 'cause of the dancing. Bears do that, you know. Dance."

"Hey Giles," Buffy greeted. "Where's Kendra?"

"Ah, I believe she is resting," Giles said.

Buffy strolled over and took a seat. "You two seem to be getting along like... two getting along really well, people..."

"Erm, yes, I suppose," Giles said. "Her watcher, a Mr. Sam Zabuto, has assigned her to work under my leadership for the time being."

"So, I guess there really is a New Slayer in Town," Buffy said wryly.

Giles polished his glasses. "I'm sure no one means to, to step on your toes, so to speak..."

"No," Buffy interrupted. "No, it's okay. I'm kinda okay with stepping aside and letting Kendra be the Slayer. Just... don't let her get herself killed, okay? If something big comes up, don't leave me out of it."

Giles looked at her. "It never occurred to me to do otherwise."

"Really?" Buffy asked innocently. "Because recently I've been kind of feeling like you don't trust me very much."
Giles sighed. "I may believe you are somewhat misguided in... a certain endeavor, Buffy, but you have never given me reason to doubt your heart, or your heroism."

Buffy smiled, more relieved to hear him say that than she would have thought.

It was SG-1's last day in Sunnydale, and they hadn't found anything. Samantha Carter winced. Well, they hadn't found anything more to do with any of Stargate Command's purview, but Sunnydale seemed to be the inspiration for every cheesy horror movie ever made. The newspapers barely even made a token effort to hide it. She'd actually seen an old headline that read, *Monsters Not Involved In Halloween Riots!*

Samantha settled into her seat in the town's most prominent coffee place and opened her laptop as she sipped her hot beverage.

It didn't sit right with her at all, that all this was going on and people just accepted or ignored it. A part of her wanted to just evacuate the town and then bomb it, but it wasn't her call, or the SGC's for that matter.

"Well ain't that a beauty," a man's voice said.

Samantha looked up from her laptop and saw a casually dressed man giving the computer a genial smile. He looked to her with a sincere expression.

"Excuse me?"

"My pardons," the man said lightly. "I was admiring your system there." He rattled off the specs and made a few remarkably accurate guesses about her customizations.

After a short chat on the merits of various hardware choices, she offered her hand and introduced herself. "Samantha."

"Well hello to you, Samantha. It's a pleasure," the man said. "You can call me Ted."
Finding himself on some twisted magical Earth with no warning had been weird enough, but Eelesia and Lyn were with him so it didn't really matter so much where they were. Unfortunately even that didn't last.

A sudden intense pressure had swept over him, and it had felt like he'd been torn out of his body. A moment's examination while he tumbled through some bizarre tunnel of pulsing green light had revealed much the opposite, however. Zach Reon was back to his normal appearance, the way he'd looked before being magically summoned to Sunnydale.

Well, normal was relative. Zach had reinvented his appearance every decade or so, searching for a form that both reflected him and that he wouldn't get tired of. Currently, he was just under six feet tall, with a muscular bishonen physique, lustrous red skin, pure white spiky hair, thundercloud-grey eyes, and three-inch pointed ears. He'd looked this way for just over six years, and still wasn't really sure if it was 'him' or not.

Despite that, being back in his own body was more comforting than one might think, given that he was currently tumbling like a leaf through some kind of green negative space wedgie. And if that wasn't strange enough, he was starting to hear a girls voice speaking a hybrid of french and english that he'd never heard before.

"Pentagon of the five elemental powers, heed my summoning."

The voice seemed to come from everywhere at once, but at her words the raging chaotic not-wind seemed to start pushing Zach in a particular direction.

"My familiar that exists somewhere in this vast universe, my divine, beautiful, wise, powerful servant. Follow my fate, hear the wish of my heart, and come forth!"

And just like that, Zach was sucked into a void of nothingness, and a moment later his world lurched and he found himself standing on solid ground.

"Now where am I?" Zach muttered to himself.

A thick cloud of dust surrounded him, and he felt the prickles of Earth-grass under his feet. He parsed the girl's words, and rubbed his forehead when he realized he'd been magically summoned again. Twice in one day. At least this time he'd been aware it was happening.

From within the blinding dust, Zach heard more voices, some of which seemed to be jeering, accompanied by a good deal of coughing.

"Haha! Another failure for Louise the Zero!"

"Hey, Louise! You're supposed to summon your familiar, not blow it up!"

"I toldya the Zero would screw this up too."

Extending his Utility Cloud, Zach formed an electrostatic bubble around himself and flexed it outward. The expanding electrostatic bubble rapidly swept the dust from the air with an eerie
subsonic whisper.

Zach was greeted by the sight of a pink-haired girl in a uniform of some kind stumbling back from the sudden outward blasting of dust. Looking around in the cleared air, Zach blinked in astonishment. He was standing on a grassy lawn enclosed by stone walls, and surrounded by a sparse crowd all wearing a similar uniform, and scattered among them...

"Okay, two questions," Zach muttered to himself. "One, where am I? Two, why are there pokemon everywhere?"

At a second glance, none of the actual fictional species were represented, but he'd be gambled if anyone who'd seen a Charmeleon or a Sandslash wouldn't immediately think, *Pokemon!* if they found themselves seeing what Zach was.

Zach's whimsical musing was interrupted as the crowd started babbling. The pink-haired girl was stuttering incoherently, in some mix of terror, anger, despair, and wonder.

"Eeek! What is it?" someone shouted.

"He's so red!"

"Ahh! He's naked!"

"Are those pointed ears?"

"So... big..."

"E-e-e-elf!"

"Ack! What's it doing like that! It's some kind of pervert!"

"It looks like a demon!"

"Kirche, you're drooling."

"Oh Brimir! Louise summoned a perverted demon elf! We're all going to die!"

It took Zach a few moments to parse all of that. Once he worked it out, he rolled his eyes. These people took jumping to conclusions to whole new levels. While he was trying to figure out how to introduce himself and ask what was going on, a tall balding guy wearing a high-collared blue coat and glasses came over to the pink-haired girl, who was apparently named Louise.

"Professor Colbert!" Louise stammered. "I... this can't... it has to be a mistake! Can I please start over and try again?"

"I'm afraid not, Miss Valliere," the man called Colbert told her. "The Springtime Familiar Summoning is a sacred tradition. You must complete the ritual."

Louise whipped her head between Colbert and Zach, gesturing wildly. "B-but he's naked! And..." incoherent noise as she pointed at his crotch, "and possibly evil!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Valliere," Colbert said. "This being is what your summoning brought forth. The tradition is inviolate. You must complete the binding if you wish to remain a student at Tristain Academy."

Louise took a nervous step towards Zach, her eyes slipping down to his manhood, making her blush.
and gulp. Her hands were clenched into tight fists at her sides, with one hand grasping a wooden rod. Zach just looked at her, not bothering to hide his confusion. His lack of hostility (or amorous intent) made Louise bolder. She raised her rod and swallowed.

"My name is Louise Francoise Le Blanc de La Valliere," she intoned grandly. "Pentagon of the five elemental powers! Bless this creature and bind him as my familiar!"

Louise closed the distance between them, her face set with determination, until she was close enough that Zach could have poked her chest with his penis if he'd wanted to. She looked up at him, went up on tiptoes, and promptly scowled in annoyance. Behind her, a mocking murmur was starting up in the crowd again.

Zach finished parsing what he'd heard, and blinked. "Wait, what's this about 'binding'?"

Of course, Louise couldn't understand him. She just grabbed his arms and pulled. Zach didn't think to resist, and bent down. Louise went up on tiptoes again, and kissed him.

Zach startled when a bright silver light suddenly shown from the back of his right hand, followed almost immediately by his pain receptors cutting off. He pulled away from Louise and held his hand out in front of him, staring at it warily. For his pain receptors to go numb, it had to be actually damaging him somehow, and that didn't bode well.

Zach looked around suspiciously, but neither Louise, Colbert, or any of the spectators looked like they expected him to be flailing in agony. Maybe it was just supposed to be some kind of magical tattoo.

Louise let out a sigh of relief.

"Congratulations, Miss Valliere," Colbert said. "And that concludes this Springtime Familiar Summoning!"

Zach's hand was still glowing, and he was still numb. As the rest of the students and their familiars began to disperse, Louise took off her jacket and demanded that he tie it around his waist. He rolled his eyes, but made the small concession to the local's sense of propriety.

Once he was covered to her satisfaction, Louise finally took notice of his still-glowing hand. She grabbed Zach's wrist and tugged him over to Professor Colbert. Zach went along. It wasn't like he had anything better to do. Besides, he couldn't do much until he'd heard enough of the language to feel confident speaking.

"Professor Colbert, is my familiar's rune supposed to be doing that?" Louise asked.

"Hmm?" Colbert inquired. "Oh, that is unusual. It seems your contract is still in the process of being established."

"What?" Louise demanded. "Does that mean I did it wrong?"

Colbert studied Zach's hand for a moment. "I don't believe so. It appears you cast the spell properly. It simply hasn't finished yet. Most intriguing." He met Zach's eyes. "Do you perhaps understand enough to tell us what you are?"

Louise got impatient. "Well? Answer him, familiar!"
Zach parsed Colbert's question, and pointed to himself. "Zach Reon." He made an expansive gesture down his body. "Fae."

"Fae?" Louise repeated. "What's a fae? Does he mean he's a fairy?"

"I do not know, Miss Valliere," Colbert said. "I don't think I can tell you why the spell is taking so long to complete without further observation."

"Oh," Louise said. "So should I just wait for it to finish?"

Zach followed Louise into a spacious and well-furnished dorm room. Zach studied her in concern. She looked increasingly tired with every passing minute, and stumbled leaning heavily on the door latch as she staggered inside.

The professor, Colbert, hadn't seemed particularly concerned by the rapidly developing dark circles under Louise's eyes, but... Zach shrugged. Maybe he just wasn't used to humans.

Zach was still numb, with that glow of silver blazing away on the back of his hand. He leaned against the wall and watched Louise stumble.

"Alright, familiar," Louise said. "This is my room, where you'll be living." She pointed at a pile of hay. "That is where you will sleep. You will, will wash my clothes and have a fresh outfit ready for me every, every morning. You will have..." She swayed. "You will..."

Louise stumbled to the side, eyes rolling up into her head. Alarmed, Zach lunged forward and caught her before she could hit the ground. Zach shook her gently, but she didn't respond at all. Picking her up, Zach yanked the door open with his Utility Cloud and hurried out into the hall.

Looking around for help, he spotted a blonde boy and a brunette girl flirting in an alcove. They were startled by the sight of him, but he managed to ask where the infirmary was.

Zach leaned against the wall of the infirmary, watching several people who were apparently teachers or hospital staff, and an older man with a long beard and grey robes, fuss over Louise's comatose form. Zach had translated that much. She was actually in a coma.

The questioning had been simple. Zach hadn't been able to say much more than that she was tired and then she fell down. Finally, it seemed they came to a conclusion.

"Yes, I understand what I was seeing now," Colbert said. "The familiar contract is still attempting to complete the marking process. For reasons unknown, burning the rune onto Mr. Reon's hand has proven difficult enough to drain all of Miss Valliere's \textit{volonte}."

"How can this be?" a woman asked. "It is a simple branding. It cannot possibly require more than a token amount of \textit{volonte}."

"The how is not our immediate concern," the long-bearded headmaster said. "Miss Valliere's life is in danger. Her body has shut down and is doing little more than generating \textit{volonte} to complete that brand. I fear that she is unable to generate it quickly enough to meet the demand, and the spell will soon begin consuming her very life."

"Would killing the familiar save her?"

"Perhaps, though I do not think we ought to deprive Miss Valliere of her familiar unless we have no
other choice."

After parsing this, Zach scowled. So he was a slave, then. Worse, even. He'd wondered, with the way Louise had suddenly stopped being afraid of him once the brand on his hand lit up, and ordered him around like she expected him to obey without thought.

Zach looked at the back of his hand with two parts worry and one part anger.

They talked about killing him like he wasn't a person, because to them he was nothing but a magically-controlled tool. Even if they could bind him or kill him, that was not the kind of thinking he was going to quietly cooperate with.

Colbert spoke up. "I think our best option is for several donors to lend enough volonte for the spell to complete."

While the professors discussed the practical risks of such a procedure, Zach quietly slipped away. He felt bad about Louise, but he simply wasn't willing to give up his life to save her from her own mistake.

Distance was no obstacle when one had all the time in the world. Maybe he'd find somewhere with more respect for a being's personhood.

Zach didn't wait around. He pulled Louise's jacket from his waist and left in on the floor as he leaped from a window and tucked into a roll as he hit the ground. He was currently incapable of feeling pain or pleasure, but his sense of touch and balance still worked just fine.

He startled a chubby blonde boy as he landed, making the student fall on his butt. Zach didn't pay him any mind, and started jogging. A few of the students who were milling around took note of him, by Zach just kept running faster and faster straight at one of the outer walls.

Zach reached the wall and leaped, running three steps straight up the wall and grabbing the top edge. He pulled himself up in once smooth motion, his arms exerting enough force to throw him clear of the wall.

He hit the ground and rolled to his feet, continuing on at a sprint without slowing down or looking back.

Ten hours and more than three hundred kilometers away, Zach's hand stopped glowing. Four hours after that, the markings were gone completely. Louise Valliere was dead, and Zach was free.

Meanwhile...

Saito Hiraga was having a normal day. He most certainly hadn't been abducted off the street by some kind of magical portal. His classmates were still throwing wild ideas about what the mysterious elliptical object that had drifted across the sky had been. The official story was a weather balloon, but the otaku were insisting it had been a space ship or something.

Whatever, the point is, Saito was having a perfectly normal day, walking down the street, not being abused by a pink-haired tsundere in another dimension or wherever. So, when a girl with wild dark hair in twin tails, green eyes, and glasses stepped into the street without looking where she was going, Saito was there to see.
Blaring car horns. "Look out!"

Saito collided with the girl before he realized he'd moved, and then, to his complete astonishment, blinked and found himself face down on the side-walk with his arm bent behind his back.

"Oh," the girl, who now had a knee in his back, whispered, quickly letting him go. "I'm sorry! Many apologies!"

Saito clambered to his feet and gave the girl a disgruntled, sour expression.

The girl winced, and bowed. "Very sorry! It was a reflex! But, thank you so much. You saved me from that car! Please let me repay you for your trouble!"

"Some reflex," Saito grumbled, but then he smiled. "And you're welcome. I saw you about to be hit, and well, I'm not sure what happened. I am glad you're not hurt."

"It was careless of me," the girl admitted. "See, my younger sister recently left home for a, um, ... in a... very far away place. I've been missing her terribly. Thank you again for saving me!"

Saito rubbed the back of his head. "Well, um, what's your name? I'm Saito."

"I'm Miyuki," the girl introduced herself. "Miyuki Takamachi."
Billy Fordham opened his eyes. The first thing he noticed was the pain. It was gone. The lurking agony that had been his constant companion for nearly a year, was completely gone.

The second thing he noticed was that he wasn't groggy. His thoughts and memories were clear. Clearer than they'd ever been. Buffy's friend had told him he'd be unconscious for three weeks, but it felt like the 'birthing pod' had submerged him in its soothing liquid warmth only minutes ago.

He didn't doubt it had worked, though. The pain was gone.

Ford dragged his arms through the thick fluid he was immersed in, and pushed against the fleshy inner wall of the pod. At his touch, the pod began to shift and unfurl, while the fluid pulled down ahead of the forming gaps.

The weirdest part was the way his lungs seemed to suddenly inflate without any source, forcing him to breathe out a chest-worth of the fluid, and even weirder, doing that didn't trigger any unpleasant reflexes. He barely even registered it had happened until after it was over.

The fluid drained away, a shrinking bubble that somehow left his skin dry, and then it was gone, and the pod was laying open with Ford floating there. He remembered the way Buffy and her friends had walked around, even though they were weightless.

Ford took a step, and it was easy. He wanted to walk on the surface under his feet, and so he did. Sticking to the surface was as easy as the walking itself. It felt really strange, though, like his bones had weight but his skin and muscles and stuff didn't.

Pausing to feel the way the grass squished under his feet, Ford took stock of himself. He was naked, standing alone on a hill in that same meadow with the sort-of palm trees and the image overhead of the blue and green gas planet with the sparkling lavender rings. Strangely, he had an erection - and damn if he hadn't been nearly that well endowed before - that didn't feel like an erection. Ford wondered what the deal with that was.

He laughed a little as he discovered that the muscles down there, which before pretty much were
only capable of Tense or Relax, were now dexterous enough to aim his member with remarkable precision. Although, pointing it straight down between his legs required a bit of strain, kind of like opening his hand as wide as he could do, while holding it straight up against his belly felt natural.

His skin was hairless now, and the little imperfections he was used to seeing were all gone. More than that, the muscle definition he'd lost as he got sicker was back and better than ever. He was... fit. Very fit. Fit enough that being naked and (seemingly) hard wasn't nearly as embarrassing as it might have been. Well, there being no one else around helped with that too.

"Three weeks," he reminded himself. "I wonder what I've missed."

Ford looked around, still not seeing anyone else, and laughed, doing a flying cartwheel just because he could. It was real. He'd survived. He was cured. No more suicide by slayer or going out in a blaze of villainous glory. He was going to live. He was going to be alright. Ford landed flat on his back on the squishy earlobe-like grass, still laughing with a sparkling of tears in his eyes.

Buffy. He owed Buffy so much for this.

"So, Samantha, how long are you in town for?" Ted asked.

Samantha Carter sipped her coffee. "Only one more day."

"Well if that isn't a shame," Ted said with a disarming smile. "Tell me this, how much of our humble little town have you had the fortune to see?"

Samantha glanced aside with heavy irony. "Some might say too much."

"That doesn't sound very good at all," Ted commiserated. "Well, that won't do, will it? Can't have you going off before you've seen what charm this town has to offer. What do you say you let me show you around a bit?"

There were other things Samantha could do with her afternoon, but their mission was more or less complete. They still had optional objectives they hadn't accomplished, but that just didn't seem worth worrying about right then.

"Sure," Samantha said. "Why not?"

Even though he hadn't been paying much attention to how long he'd been lying there, somehow Ford knew exactly how much time had passed. Only just over ten minutes. And then there was suddenly a pair of curious blue eyes inches away from his own.

"Gyaa!" Ford yelped in surprise, scrambling sideways.

"Eeep!" the startled girl yelped in turn, springing away like a scalded cat.

He recovered from his startlement and found himself looking at a naked girl crouching on the grass and scowling at him, with her short brown hair floating in a halo around her head. Remembering that he was also naked, Ford flinched and tried to cover himself from the younger girl's eyes with his hands and legs, pulling his knees to his chest.

The girl's expression changed to one of curiosity, spider-walking at him as though trying to figure out what he was hiding.
Taking a second look, Ford recognized her. She was the girl that had been in the pod before him. For a moment, he was distracted by how, when he looked at her, he knew she was called Dawn. The sight of her just brought that particular word to mind so unambiguously, Ford didn't know what to make of it.

Apparently this wasn't a fluke, because Dawn studied him for a moment and said, "Ford."

Dawn circled him, and there was something off about the way she moved, besides her still being on all fours. For a moment, Ford dismissed the fact that she was naked and watched her curiously. It was like she didn't realize she was naked anyway, or like she just didn't care. That was part of it, but not everything. Ford finally realized what it was. She looked like a girl, but she moved like a wild animal, with the grace and directness of instinct, paying no conscious attention to her own body while she focused on him.

"Uh, right," he said. "That's me. So, um, where is everyone?"

Dawn giggled, bracing her hands on his knees and nearly doing a handstand as she invaded his personal space. "You make funny sounds."

Ford blinked as he realized, no, Dawn hadn't spoken english, and yes, he'd understood it perfectly. He could speak it too, he realized. There was this whole other language in his head now.

"Hi, Dawn," Ford greeted in the new language. "You know where I can get some clothes?"

Dawn appeared to think about this for a moment, releasing his knees and drifting away weightlessly. "Nope!"

Ford stared, and then he laughed. "Okay, what about the others? Buffy? Xander? Willow? Where are they?"

"I can show you where Willow is!" Dawn announced, in the tones of someone who'd just figured something out for the first time.

Dawn suddenly fell to the grass, landing easily on her feet, upright and looking very pleased with herself. Studiously ignoring the way her weightless breasts bounced, Ford tried to figure out how to get up and follow Dawn without exposing himself to her. He failed to come up with anything in the moments before Dawn looked around and dashed off.

Giving his modesty up as a lost cause for the immediate time being, Ford unscrunched and sprinted after the oddly feral girl before she could get out of his sight. It was still weird how it felt to have his bones acting like they had weight while the rest of his body felt weightless, especially since he was aware that it was something he was doing rather than something that was just happening, but his sense of balance never seemed to get confused.

Shaking his head, Ford put that aside to just enjoy his new fitness and grace as he sprinted after Dawn. He wasn't even getting winded. Ford suddenly appreciated the change in his genitals. Running around naked with it hanging down and flopping about would have been distracting if not hazardous, but with it high and tight he could almost forget he wasn't wearing anything. Almost. The wind of his movement on the underside of his shaft made it impossible to forget completely.

"How big is this place?" Ford wondered, thinking back to the vast pearly elliptical shape that he'd seen on the way up.

Dawn turned around to answer, spinning all the way and simply floating backwards over the grass. Ford knew they were in a weightless environment, but that was still weird and cool to see.
"Willow makes places!" Dawn said brightly, as a huge tree with big green leaves loomed behind her. Ford yelped, "Watch out!"

CRACK!

A branch caught Dawn in the back of the head, snapping her into a tumble. She slammed into a higher branch with a sickening thud and flopped upwards onto the trunk itself. With a surge of panic, Ford dove into the tree, swinging from branch to branch to make any ape proud, and finally reached Dawn just as she was sitting up.

"Owwwwww," Dawn whined petulantly.

The tree itself was hard and woody, but with a smooth texture that reminded Ford of velvet. With a sigh of relief, he sat down next to Dawn and took a moment to reorient himself to the new direction for down.

"You're okay?" Ford checked.

Dawn looked at him as though only just remembering he was there, and blanched. "I meant to do that!"

Ford laughed. "Can I see your head?"

Dawn's face twisted in adorable confusion, before she brightened. "Yes! Because I can see your head. Seeing is with eyes, and eyes are in heads."

Ford facepalmed, and rephrased. "I mean, will you come over here and show me the back of your head?"

"Okay," Dawn agreed carelessly.

Dawn spider-walked right over and just about planted her scalp in his chest, which was not what he'd had in mind even though it did present the back of her head to him. However, the feel of Dawn's breath on his manhood jolted Ford into scrambling away in a backwards crabwalk.

"Gah! Uh, just... hold still for a moment," Ford pleaded as he swung around to her side.

Dawn huffed, but let him gently turn her head away. Ford frowned as he parted Dawn's hair. There was nothing. No bump. No swelling. No bruise. He recalled the impact with perfect clarity. It ought to have cracked her skull.

Ford sat back on his haunches. It would have cracked a human skull. But, neither of them were human. That hadn't really registered with Ford until now. Fae. He hadn't asked, because, well, he'd been willing to become a vampire and probably end up getting staked by Buffy to get away from the pain and impending humiliation of his brain cancer. He hadn't cared about the details when Buffy offered him an alternative. But now, he was curious.

Unfortunately, Dawn had taken advantage of his distraction. He blinked and found her on hands and knees, her face inches from his penis and alight with a completely unnerving delight.

"Wah!" Ford yelped, scrambling backwards and attempting to cover himself with his hands.

Dawn glowered stubbornly, bounding after him. She grabbed his arms and tried to pull them away from his crotch, but Ford pulled out of her grip and backed further up the tree.
"H-hey! Stop that! What do you think you're doing?" Ford demanded.

Dawn pouted at him as she made another grab. "Trying to get your penis into my vagina. Xander never lets me and nobody else has one, but you have one!"

"Wh-what?!" Ford sputtered. "No!"

"I wanna fuck!" Dawn whined as she struggled to overcome Ford's superior strength.

"You what wait what, get off!" Ford finally snapped angrily with a panicked shove.

To his surprise, Dawn flinched at his tone, jerking away like she'd been burned. She crouched just out of arm's reach, her eyes wide and shining. Ford glared, but before he could say anything, Dawn bolted. Or maybe stormed off.

"Hey wait!" Ford called.

He'd rather have let her go, but Dawn was his only guide to this place at the moment. Ford chased her down the tree, but when he reached the squishy grass she was nowhere to be found.

"Damn," Ford grumbled.

"I've been counting, and that's the tenth church we've passed," Samantha commented idly, finishing off the cookie Ted had given her.

"Quite a few of those in these parts," Ted told her. "And the best thing, with so many churches, each of them has its own little bit of personality. Why, around the corner there is a oldie with the most delightful little mural."

Just then, Samantha's phone rang. She fished it out of her pocket and saw Jack's number. Belatedly, she realized he was expecting her back at the hotel some minutes ago. Calling in her impromptu tour plans just hadn't seemed very important.

Samantha answered. "What's up, Sir?"

"You're late, Carter," Jack's voice said.

"Sorry, Sir," Samantha replied. "I decided to talk a walk around town. See the sights."

"I see," Jack said suspiciously. "And you didn't notify me, why?"

"Slipped my mind, Sir," Samantha reported.

"Must be some damn fine sights you've been seeing, then," Jack deadpanned.

"If you say so, Sir," Samantha agreed.


"Yes Sir," Samantha agreed, and hung up.

Ted pulled a ziploc out of his coat pocket. "Another cookie?"

Samantha wasn't in the habit of eating so much in the way of sweets, but her carefully balanced diet just didn't seem worth worrying about at the moment. Ted's cookies were delicious.
Against all reason, Ford was feeling guilty. No matter how many times he told himself that Dawn had no right to be upset when she was the one who'd started grabbing for his personal parts clear out of the blue, the memory of her flinching away like that still made him wince inside. It wasn't like she didn't know any better. She'd flat out stated her intention in a way that made it clear she knew what she was doing. But still, Ford kind of felt like he'd kicked a puppy.

Returning once more to the base of the towering big-leafed tree, Ford looked around in defeat. Dawn was nowhere to be found.

"Arhh..."

Ford blinked, looking around for the source of the noise.

"Mm... mmmrgh... mm..."

The faint girlish grunts were coming from a hollow between two roots. Ford had missed it before, but it looked like there was a space that led under the trunk itself. Ford grumbled. Apparently the tree was hollow, and that's where Dawn had gone. Of course, and after he spent twenty minutes searching the surrounding hills.

"Rmmaah... Oooonh!"

Following the faint, unintelligible vocalizations, Ford dropped into the hole and ducked into the hollow under the treetrunk. "Dawn? Is that you? Can you please - grk!"

Dawn was there, and in an instant of panicked realization, the sounds she'd been making clicked into place in Ford's head just a moment too late to do any good.

The hollow was roughly conical, carpeted with grass and lit by a warm golden bioluminescence that was concentrated in a pale reddish tunnel at the highest point. In the center of the floor was... a giant boob. It didn't seem to have a nipple or anything, and it was really just a big half-sphere growing out of the ground, but it had the color and texture of fair skin, and the way it deformed under Dawn's simulated weight... Ford couldn't shake the impression that it was a humongous breast.

Of course, that was all secondary to the reason Ford had gone rigid, feeling like he was suddenly reliving every Accidental Pervert moment from every anime he'd ever seen. Dawn was sprawled flat on her back on the adiposal cushion, her spread legs towards Ford and glistening wetly. One of her hands was curled under her thigh to plunge her fingers into her dripping sex, while she rubbed her clit with her other hand.

Dawn's head lifted into view like a herald of doom breaching the horizon of her perky little breasts. She spotted him, standing frozen in the entrance to the hollow, and her eyes narrowed into a glare. She huffed and violently turned onto her side, facing away from him. To Ford's astonishment, Dawn resumed fingering herself, only even more furiously than before. Her hands ravished her sex with angry abandon, shlicking and squelching lewdly as the wetness of her core splashed into the air.

Ford gaped at her. For the first time in his life, a facefault seemed like an appropriate response to the situation, but he wasn't sure how to actually pull one off. Dawn's reaction to him put him completely out of context, and his brain felt like it had crashed and needed a reboot.

It was like Dawn was trying to drown out Ford's presence with her self-pleasure. Even the timbre of her moans had become louder in a seemingly deliberate nyah-nyah-can't-hear-you way as she brought herself to orgasm, paused, then seemed to remember he was there and started up again. Ford
was halfway disturbed and halfway turned on, and then he was disturbed all over again that he was turned on.

Swallowing heavily, for a moment Ford wondered if it would really be so wrong to go along with what Dawn wanted. His manhood was feeling very much like a real erection now, hard and throbbing, even though it hadn't actually gotten noticeably harder or bigger... the veins were standing out a little more. Glancing down, Ford was confused to see the head of his shaft glistening wetly. Had some of Dawn's splashes gotten on him? He hadn't felt any, and the wetness was too even for that anyway.

Ford groaned and pulled at his hair. "I can't deal with this!"

Dawn ignored him.

Eventually, Samantha and Ted meandered their way back into the middle of town. She caught sight of a public clock.

Samantha smiled apologetically. "Thank you for showing me around. It was nice. But I really should be getting back."

"You're sure you can't spare any more time?" Ted asked.

"Sorry," Samantha replied. "The others are waiting for me."

Ted shook his head. "Well, that's a shame, but we wouldn't want to worry your friends, now would we?"

"No," Samantha agreed, smiling at the man's affable manner.

"Then what do you say I walk you back to your hotel?" Ted offered.

"Sure," Samantha said. "Why not."

Ford had tried closing his eyes, but that just left him with the sounds, and in some ways that was actually worse. He was paralyzed by sheer awkwardness, and by Dawn's stubborn refusal to notice the inherent awkwardness of the situation.

"Dawn." Ford's voice came out strained and somewhat high-pitched. "Can you... would you... I just want..."

Dawn ignored him, once more arching and gasping. Her body spasmed in climax, producing jiggling ripples in the giant boob-cushion thing. For a moment, Dawn lay still.

"Dawn, I just want you to show me where Willow is!" Ford exclaimed into the brief silence.

Dawn's fingers plunged back into her sex.

"Agh! Stop that!" Ford cried in frustration.

Overcome by embarrassment and exasperation, Ford flung himself onto the younger girl and grabbed her wrists. She shrieked in outrage as he forced her hands away from her girl parts. Dawn glared at him and kicked him in the face.

Yelping in pain, Ford reeled, tumbling weightlessly into the ceiling of the little hollow. For a moment
he was distracted by how his face didn't hurt, even though he'd felt that blow nearly crush his nose. Then a snarling Dawn pinned him to the velvety wood, clawing and biting at him like a rabid monkey.

Ford managed to plant his feet in her gut and kick her off of him. The younger girl sailed across the hollow and slammed into the squishy grass. Twisting like a cat, Dawn was back on her feet in an instant.

Dropping back to the grass himself, Ford paused, and looked down at himself. He didn't hurt anywhere, and there wasn't a scratch on him. Ford twisted around to search his skin for evidence of the brief but furious fight, and found nothing. He looked up at Dawn, who was also showing no signs of pain even though he'd kicked her in the gut really hard. It was like they really couldn't harm each other.

Fortunately, it seemed as though his impromptu self-examination had derailed Dawn's anger. She was watching him, head tilted to the side, with an expression of baffled amusement.

Ford sighed and looked at her pleadingly. "Will you please show me where Willow is, now?"

Dawn mimicked his sigh. "Okay."

Springing upwards, Dawn caught the fleshy lip of the softly glowing tunnel in the ceiling of the hollow, and swung herself into it. Ford hastened to follow as she vanished inside.

The cylindrical tunnel inside the tree stretched on far enough that Ford couldn't see the end, its walls oddly warm and spongy, glowing with that soft uniform golden light. Not that he was looking ahead more than he had too, since Dawn was ahead of him and her spread limbs as she pushed herself along gave him entirely too much of a view.

Ford glanced behind him and frowned. He was sure they'd now gone further than the height of the tree as seen from outside. How the hell? Oh, wait, the sky was like a hologram or something anyway, so maybe the top of the tree he'd seen was an illusion too, and the actual tree went on somewhere else.

Soon, they emerged from the tunnel, drifting up into a black star-filled void. Ford sucked in a breath as his feet landed on a ring of white surrounding the mouth of the tunnel. It looked like they were standing on a little platform floating in space, but when Ford poked a toe off the platform, he found an invisible surface.

A model planet hung in the air above him, as big as Buffy's whole house. Dawn swooped up to it, surprising Ford by arcing in mid-air, flying around the model planet like a girl-shaped moon.

Ford didn't recognize the planet. It was too green, and there weren't any large oceans. Large irregular areas were white, but a white that was all wrong for ice.

Dawn looped back around and landed on the model planet, presenting an amusing image. The planet's atmospheric haze only came up to her knees, so she looked like an impossible giant.

"Willow's not here!" Dawn yelled.

"Then where is she?" Ford prompted.

Dawn shrugged guilelessly, and leaped towards one of the other openings in the shell of stars. Ford pushed off, drifting over the model planet to follow her while wondering how she'd done that flying around thing.
This tunnel was much wider with a concave hexagonal shape and white sides. Under his feet, it felt like a softer version of the stuff tennis courts were paved with, but with a smooth texture like Vinyl. Dawn was running ahead of him, on the ceiling from his perspective, and he sprinted to keep up.

There was a radiance at the end of the six-sided passage that could have almost been daylight on an overcast day. As Ford reached the end, it opened up onto a wide open cityscape like an Escher painting mated with futuristic architecture.

Square columns that were also sidewalks. City blocks that had shiny storefronts on six sides of a cube instead of four sides of a square. The direction for down seemed to be more or less randomly chosen in any particular place.

Dawn was leaping from sidewalk to sidewalk. "Willow! Willow?"

Ford took a second look at the dizzyingly-arranged storefronts. They were open, with no glass or doors, with a wide variety. There were empty restaurants, stores of all kinds, including...

"Pants!" Ford cried in relief.

Launching himself across the open air, Ford twisted around and managed to land on the floor of the clothing store with surprising ease. He stepped inside and looked around, but had his hopes dashed almost immediately.

Small stacks of clothing were affixed to various surfaces with static cling, while the walls were lined with very detailed and anatomically correct grey mannequins of both sexes, showing off the various outfits. Said correctness was obvious since not one of the stylish outfits on display covered any of the important parts. (There was also a conspicuous lack of anything resembling a cash register or dressing rooms.)

Dawn bounced in after him, looked around, and beamed at him obliviously. "Clothes! You wanted clothes."

Ford felt like his face really ought to be half blue with wiggling lines of dismay over his head. He snorted at the mental image.

"Did you find Willow?" Ford asked.

"No!" Dawn informed him cheerfully.

Ford turned away from the anti-clothes that were mockng him. "Where next, then?"

Dawn tilted her head in thoughtful cuteness. "I don't know."

"Well, where else could Willow be?" Ford asked.

"Maybe this way!" Dawn proclaimed.

Once more, Dawn dashed off, leaving Ford scrambling to keep up.

Ted paused outside a converted storefront with a heavy door beside a grid of frosted glass. Samantha followed his lead.

"This here is my own humble little abode," Ted informed her. "So I suppose this is where we part ways, as you're leaving town."
Samantha nodded. "I guess it is. It was a pleasure to meet you, Ted."

Ted smiled disarmingly. "Well, then maybe there's no better time for you to come in. I can promise you a nice scone for the road..."

Samantha hesitated. She did need to get back to her team, but a few more minutes wouldn't hurt.

"Sure," she said. "Why not?"

"Why not, indeed," Ted agreed.

Ted unlocked the door and led Samantha into what looked like a slightly dusty machine shop. Something about the place niggled at her, an incongruity that drifted at the edge of her thoughts. It didn't seem worth worrying about, but Samantha was naturally curious, and prone to prodding a mental puzzle purely for its own sake.

Samantha came to a halt as Ted went around a dividing wall, the sounds of clinks and clanks emerging from his general direction.

Motivated by no more than idle curiosity, Samantha looked around and tried to piece together what was bothering her. The first thing she observed was the lack of computer equipment. This was strange for the home of a self-proclaimed guru like Ted. Also, it was small. No stairs were apparent, that might have led to a more comfortable living area. There was no place where Ted could have slept.

Peeking around the dividing wall, Samantha saw Ted reaching into a small fridge next to a sink, but there was nothing resembling a kitchen in the small space. The likely conclusion was that Ted had lied about living here, but that made no sense.

"Hm, Samantha, would you mind giving this a whiff?" Ted asked, holding up a small carton. "I'm sorry to say it might be a little over the hill, as it were."

Samantha moved to comply before her brain could catch up and label this a Very Suspicious Situation, and the scent that filled her nose definitely didn't belong to any food product.

The floor seemed to melt under her feet as the world around her went dark and blurry. Drugged. She was being drugged. Ted was a hostile. Procedure. She was compromised.

With her last seconds of consciousness, Major Carter slipped a hand into her pocket and hit the button on her cellphone that activated her emergency distress beacon.

Jack O'Neill swore as Carter's beacon went off. He knew he should have listened to his gut that something was off when he spoke to Carter earlier. After several attempts to call Carter failed to go through, he, Daniel, and Teal'c quickly armed up and set out.

"Alright," Jack said as they descended the stairs to street level. "The signal is only two blocks away, but we don't know what we're dealing with in this little sunny town of horror movie cliches, so we're going in quiet and fast. You see something coming at you, zat first and we'll sort it out later."

Teal'c inclined his head and Daniel nodded.

Two blocks away, the signal led them to an old abandoned machine shop. Teal'c broke down the back door, and the three of them swept in with zats at the ready. The shop was small, and it was immediately apparent that it was empty.
There's no one here," Jack pointed out.

Daniel check his phone again. "I don't get it. We're right on top of the signal."

"Perhaps Major Carter dropped her cellular device," Teal'c suggested.

"Keep looking," Jack ordered. "I'm gonna report in and see about plan B."

"O'Neill," Teal'c interrupted a short while later.

Jack pulled his phone away from his ear and blinked. Teal'c had pulled up a rug, revealing a trap door set in the floor of the dusty shop.

"Stand by, Doc," Jack said. "Teal'c just found something. We're going in."

Hanging up, Jack signaled for Daniel to pull the door up while he and Teal'c stood opposite each other to cover whatever was underneath. Daniel hauled the door open, revealing a surprisingly well-lit space. Teal'c leaped to the bottom in one smooth movement, and Jack followed as quickly as he could.

"Freeze!"

Carter was there, propped up on a fifties-style sofa and obviously unconscious. A man in a plaid shirt and jeans was standing over her with a pair of scissors, about to start cutting her clothes. Jack did a quick sweep for other threats while Teal'c kept his zat trained on the man.

"Oh dear! Home invaders!" the man exclaimed, "You know what they say, a man's home is his castle, and it looks like this castle is under siege!"

"Step away from Major Carter and identify yourself," Jack demanded.

The man eyed their weapons, glancing between them, Carter, and his hands

"Of course. Of course," the man agreed easily. "You can call me Ted. Samantha here collapsed, you see.."

Ted moved without hesitation, pulling a golf club from behind the sofa and swinging at Teal'c. Teal'c ducked and Jack fired his zat. That's when things got... weird.

Ted stumbled as the blue arcs crackled over his body. He froze in place like a statue and started repeating, "a man's home is his castle," over and over, faster and faster and faster, until his voice wound down like a broken tape deck and smoke started pouring from his nose and ears.

Ted fell over and hit the floor with a dull clank.

Jack rushed to Carter's side and tried to rouse her. "Carter. Carter! Come on. Crap. She's alive but she's out cold."

Teal'c checked Ted's body, raising an eyebrow at the burned-plastic smell and sagging artificial features

Grabbing his phone, Jack called in a request for medical evacuation. After getting a promise that the Prometheus would be beaming them out in a matter of minutes, and that a crime scene team would be on its way, Jack hung up and stared at the self-proclaimed Ted.
"Creepy kidnapping robot with a fifties fixation. For cryin' out loud, this town is a horror movie cliche," Jack muttered. "What's next? The creature from the black lagoon?"

Xander was in something of a conundrum. Sprawled out in post-coital bliss on Willow's bed with an armful of his favorite person in the world, and on his other side, another armful of his favorite person in the world, Xander caressed the smooth skin of her... of their... of her... of...

"We need better pronouns," Xander complained. "I keep skipping back and forth in my head between Willow the collective and Willow the individuals."

Willow-para giggled as she continued a slow march of kisses across his pec, while Willow-icos snuggled deeper into his side and smiled up at him, pausing in her slow idle stroking of his wet erection.

"We could go back to speaking faelin," Willow-icos suggested. "Then you could just use the idea-of-person pronoun for the collective and the physical-presence pronoun for my bodies. Our bodies. My... Oh great now you've got me doing it."

Xander grinned at her. "Sorry."

"On the other hand, there might be a downside," Willow-para mused whimsically. "What if someday we want to write down what we talked about, in english? Something might get lost in translation you know?"

Xander smirked, and made a show of peering suspiciously at each of the four walls in Willow's room.

"What are you doing?" Willow-icos giggled.

"Looking for the fourth wall," Xander told her.

The two identical girls rolled their eyes and snickered into his chest. "Oh sure, make fun of me."

Xander grinned and dropped a kiss on the crown of two red-haired heads, clapping a hand on to each of their bare butts and stroking with his thumbs. The two Willows smiled at each other and relaxed in contentment, glad to be getting their always-needed Xander-time.

A while later, the slow simmer of lust that inevitably resulted from intimate snuggling with an attractive loved one boiled over in Willow-icos. She wormed her leg under Willow-para and pulled herself up to straddle Xander properly.

Xander obligingly aimed his manhood out for her, and Willow-icos sank down, enveloping him with a long moan. She pulled her knees in and sat up, riding him at an insistent pace while Willow-para scooched up and pushed her breasts into Xander's face. Xander playfully nosed around for a while, making Willow-para giggle, but soon made his way to a nipple and started suckling.

Willow-para straddled Xander's torso as he went to work on her breasts, and she felt Willow-icos' bouncing breasts slap against her upturned rear. Willow-icos reached over and picked up her dildo.

It was a replica of Xander's penis, in this case meaning it was actually made of Fae flesh, had a rudimentary and specialized utility cloud for replenishing its fluid content, and did everything the real deal did in response to stimulus. Willow-icos had actually found the design in the Eliezera's database, but it had to be tweaked to Xander's specs prior to being synthesized, since it couldn't morph on its own.
She was adapting a small app for Xander that would let him get sensory feedback from the autonomous organ through his Dreamlink. That part wasn't quite done yet, but in the mean time...

Willow-icos rubbed the dildo's head along her other self's folds before plunging it in. Willow-para moaned and bucked her hips as its warm girth filled her.

...it was still good for looking after herself. Taking turns was so for uncreative chumps.

SG-1 sat in their usual seats around the big table, with Doctor Weir at its head. Despite the incident with Ted the Robot, their orders to get the heck out of Sunnydale had stood firm, so all that was left was the debriefing and the report-writing.

And a healthy dose of paranoia about what the unnamed agency - though it was obviously the NID - might be doing in America's small town home of horror movie cliches. At least there hadn't been any zombies. Once was enough.

"I'm more upset that the zat blast destroyed any chance of taking a look at his programming, than anything else," Carter admitted, having recovered from her drugging.

"According to Doctor Frasier, the robot's cybernetic skin appears to have been made with a completely unique technology, and may lead to breakthroughs in tissue-grafting," Doctor Weir pointed out.

"Are we sure good ol'e Ted was actually built in the fifties?" Jack wondered.

"Yes, sir," Carter said. "Considering where he was built, I suspect magic was involved. Ted's artificial skin is inconceivably advanced for the time period, but well within the technological limits of what I would expect an Ancient to have knowledge of."

Life went on at Stargate Command.

Ford followed Dawn through another large white vinyl-textured passage and came out at the top of a grassy cliff overlooking a large landscape made up of stepped concentric circles.

"What's this place?" Ford wondered.

Dawn beamed at him. "Rape Garden!"

Ford had noticed by now that his memory seemed to have become pretty much infallible. So, he could replay the sounds over and over and, no, no matter how many times he did, he hadn't misheard. Dawn got impatient as he stood there frozen, and went off ahead.

"Rape Garden?" Ford choked out in a strangled tone as he lurched after her. "What's a Rape Garden for?"

Dawn shrugged cheerfully as she dove off the cliff. "I don't know! I've never been here before."

Following at a slower pace, Ford jogged down the cliff face. He pushed off and drifted the rest of the way down, landing on more squishy grass in a a cultivated landscape that did look somewhat garden-like at first glance, with large shady trees at regular intervals and colorful plants in various arrangements.

A second look, however, made Ford's jaw fall.
Immediately in front of him, there was an odd circular set of what'd he'd taken for colorful roots. A white central trunk divided into six thick stems about a foot off the ground, each a different pastel shade like a muted color wheel, arching out from the center, then dividing again into two and sticking vertically into the ground. Except, up close, it was something entirely more than a color wheel of branching arches.

They weren't branches at all. They were *thighs*. And at their apex was a very humanoid-shaped, very female-shaped rear end framing a prominent vulva. The primary stems weren't stems at all, but elongated *torsos*, each with a small flower bulb growing up from the small of its back. Once he saw it properly, the same corner of his brain that gave him Dawn's name when he first saw her twigged again. *Glowgasm Go Round*.

"It... it's... it's literally..." Ford concluded faintly. "It's literally a garden you can..."

And the name itself, combined with his proximity to the eromorph, seemed to open something in that same corner of his head. Ford mentally poked at it, and suddenly found himself... doing something *like* remembering but in a different direction or something: four nondescript boys each humping away at one of the six colors, competing at getting their flower bulb to glow the brightest. Occasionally one of the colors would flash, and the central trunk would tint towards that color.

"It's... a game?" Ford choked. "It's a game.. for *kids*? It's a game for kids that just gave me a psychic tutorial? What. The. Fuck."

Dazedly, he let Dawn drag him along by his wrist as she ran around without a care, occasionally remembering to call out for Willow.

They passed a row of something that looked like some kind of demented living seesaw. Only about an armspan long, instead of seats they had a very male-shaped phallus sticking up at either end. *Leverage Trader*.

Dawn ran right passed, before stopping abruptly and spinning around with wide eyes. "Ooh!"

Blinking out of his daze, Ford once more stared at the unsettling incongruity of Dawn acting like a carefree kid on a playground at the sight of a creepy public sex toy. She grabbed the handle at one end to steady it and felt up the phallus.

Dawn turned and beamed at him. "It has a penis!"

"Willow!" Ford squeaked. "I mean, we're looking for Willow! So, let's find Willow, and not do other things. Until after we find Willow."

Dawn hesitated, but reluctantly let go of the handle and the dildo and made a cute determined face, then she blinked, her eyes lighting up. "Right! And if she's here, she can play with me!"

That was a mental image he didn't need. Ford’s cock felt flushed and sensitive, and he glanced down to find his glans glistening wetly again. Maybe that was normal for Fae. Pushing those thoughts away with a sigh, Ford hurried after Dawn.

There were more eromorphs, the bizarre sexually-themed plant-creature-toy-things.

They passed a circular flower bed, only it didn't have any flowers in it. It had boobs. Dozens of completely real-looking mounds of tan skin and hard pink nipples leaking milk. *Lactibed*.

They passed a circle of chairs that looked and felt like giant tongues, with hundreds of little wiggling massaging feelers growing from the seat and backrest. *Comfy Licker*. 
Even weirder than usual, they came across a floating sphere twice Ford's height, made up of thousands of slippery black stress-balls that turned white and vibrated whenever they touched anything. That one was called, *Vibrator Galaxy*.

Three green-skinned male-shaped pelvi with bulging red erections hung from a tree-like arch on muscular stalks that looked like a ridiculously long torso with sixty-pack abs, like some kind of perverse swingset. An adjustable muscular platform grew from the roots of the arch under each of the three hanging lower-bodies. Apparently the pelvi would reflexively thrust in response to warmth and moisture on their erections. That tutorial-memory turned Ford on more than he wanted to admit. *Eager Undulating Pussy Pounder.*

And these were just the eromorphs directly in their path. Ford could see even more and varied perverted strangeness off to the sides.

Finally, the two of them came to a tall series of white arches, marking the boundary between the outermost tier and the next, and of course, the arches themselves seemed to be made entirely out of life-size carvings of naked people, tangled together in a vertical orgy of massive scale. Ford blushed when Dawn caught him taking a closer look, even though she was clearly oblivious to the fact that it was embarrassing in the first place.

Beyond the arches, there was a change in atmosphere. The light was more dappled, and the squishy grass was taller, brushing around his ankles. The trees were closer together, and the trees weren't just trees anymore either.

One tree trunk had a vagina as tall as he was, that it looked entirely possible to crawl through and come out of a matching giant vagina on the other side of the trunk. Another was ringed with dribbling breasts. Another tree had green and orange and brown penises instead of leaves.

Between the trees were even more varied and exotic eromorphs than the outer tier. And these ones didn't seem to have tutorials. The closest eromorph was called a, *Groping Tangler,* and it looked like an eight-foot tall pillar completely covered in shiny violet finger-wide tendrils.

"Okay," Ford said weakly. "On the one hand, at least this is less creepy than the playground theme. But on the other hand... this looks like something out of a tentacle hentai. Heh hehhh... it's a garden you can rape... and a garden that rapes you..."

Ford was about to suggest that maybe they should look for Willow somewhere else, when Dawn got too close to the Groping Tangler. She trailed a hand through the wiggling tendrils as she scampered passed, and was immediately snared.

Pulled to a stop, Dawn watched the slippery purple fingers wrap around her hand and wrist. With a giggle, she stuck her other hand forward and watched, fascinated, as it was also ensnared. It was obvious to Ford what was going to happen, and it was like watching a train wreck, helpless to stop it, helpless to look away. He shouted a warning, but it was futile.

"Huh?" Dawn glanced over at him. "Eeep!"

The violet tendrils yanked Dawn into their midst, curling around her limbs and head. Pulling her up, the Groping Tangler's innumerable slippery prehensile fingers swarmed over Dawn's body, forcing her to hug its central stalk. Her head, forearms, and legs from the knee down were covered over completely by the time it had her in position.

Dawn squirmed as the slick boneless digits slithered up her legs and down her back. For a moment, only her butt was visible, and then the violet tendrils *poured* into her vagina and the Groping Tangler
subsumed her completely.

Ford stared at the vaguely Dawn-shaped mass of wriggling tendrils and muffled cries, trying to figure out how to save her while simultaneously trying to convince himself that seeing the Groping Tangler take her like that wasn't incredibly hot.

He was failing on both counts. Having an infallible memory made it a pain and half to lie to himself.

After standing there at a loss for barely two minutes, he heard a rapturous scream from the general vicinity of Dawn's head, and a few moments later, the wriggling tendrils slowed in their movement and relaxed.

As the tendrils came loose, a gently trembling Dawn became visible. She drifted limply from their grasp, and Ford seized his chance to pull her away. His hands slipped off her shoulders, so he had to resort to pulling her out by her hair. Every inch of her skin was wet and slippery, and her face was blank and stunned as she drifted weightlessly in Ford's hands.

"Dawn?" Ford gulped, worried.

Dawn blinked and vaulted onto her feet with a big grin. "I wanna go again! I wanna go again!"

And if that wasn't a sweatdrop moment, Ford didn't know what was.

Dawn had thrown herself into the clutches of the Groping Tangler twice more before Ford finally convinced her to get back on track. Like the first time, it seemed to reliably let her go once she had an orgasm, and there didn't seem to be any ill effects. Other than to Ford's sanity, anyway.

Ford didn't know what to think as a lube-covered Dawn ambled on, softly giggling to herself and looking thoroughly pleased. It was like the girl had no idea that she should be upset about having her virginity forcibly stolen by that thing, or about Ford having watched it happen for that matter. Ford just couldn't wrap his head around it. A logical corner of his mind made the connection that, for a species with invulnerable flesh, girls had to be born without a hymen, or they'd never be able to have sex at all. But still.

Okay, maybe he was looking at this the wrong way. Maybe, despite having an understanding of sex, Dawn simply had no concept of virginity. And if that was true, if virginity wasn't a thing to her, then she couldn't lose it, because she never had it. It was such a bizarre thought to get his head around, and it actually fitting Dawn's behavior didn't help.

"Hey, Dawn?" Ford asked, very very belatedly. "How old are you?"

Dawn swayed around to face him. "Twenty days."

Ford stopped in his tracks and gaped at her. He'd been expecting something weird, but that pretty much blew away any time-based standard of maturity he might have applied.

"Well, that explains a lot," Ford said faintly. "You really aren't human."

Dawn gave him a confused head-tilt.

Ford shook his head. "Nevermind. Come on. Let's keep looking for Willow, without, uh, getting sidetracked again."

Carefully avoiding the myriad amorous eromorphs along the way, Ford and Dawn made their way
deeper into the Rape Garden...

...wait, why were they doing that, again?

Ford skirted warily around a mass of blue tentacles, shooting them an unnerved double-take when they swayed in his direction, revealing a pouty-lipped humanoid mouth at the end of each tentacle that opened on a toothless fleshy throat and waggling tongue. *Servile Sucktacles.* Ford caught up to Dawn and grabbed her wrist, which slipped out of his hand, but she stopped anyway.

"Um, Dawn, maybe we should look for Willow somewhere else," Ford suggested.

"But what if she's here?" Dawn asked guilelessly.

Ford sighed. "Do you think she is?"

"I don't know where she is," Dawn told him earnestly. "She could be anywhere!"

"Okay, then where does she spend the most - yiii!" Ford yelped as something smacked into his butt. He grabbed at it, and his hand closed on something like a warm slippery stress-ball. That was vibrating. And wouldn't come off, even though it slid *along* his skin with little resistance.

Another one suddenly hit Dawn's shoulder with a wet smack, and then another hit Ford in the ribs. He whipped around and saw something that looked like the Vibrator Galaxy from the outer tier, except this one was a *Vibrator Singularity.* More of the vibrating balls were already shooting out, and Ford didn't have time to do anything more than throw his arms up in front of him before they were hitting like rain.

Dawn tried batting the clingy balls away, lunging at them as they flew at her, but this brought her closer to the central mass of the Vibrator Singularity, and the balls that were already stuck to her seemed to pull back into the floating sphere of vibrators, yanking Dawn with them.

"Waaah!" Dawn cried, flailing in surprise.

"Damnit!" Ford cursed.

He turned and dug his feet in, shivering at the sensation as the dozens of slick vibrating balls poured up his arms and over his chest, pooling on his back and butt. Ford yelped as the clingy little things didn't stop there and yanked him off his feet, dragging him backwards into the Vibrator Singularity.

Ford sank into the central mass, suddenly engulfed by powerful thrumming vibrations. The loose balls contracted towards the eromorph's victims, squeezing in around Ford's body. He jumped, yelping, when the pressing vibrators reached his more sensitive places. One slipped into his open mouth when he wasn't paying attention, and by the time he spat it out with a sputter, he was buried completely.

Being buried alive in warm, slippery, vibrating stress-balls was not Ford's idea of a good time, but the vibrations coursing through his body, and especially his increasingly tense erection, felt way better than they had any right to. It really didn't help that he was already a little pent up from the things he'd seen in this place.

Gritting his teeth, Ford ignored the welling pleasure in his loins and tried to punch through the crushing mass of vibrators. There was some give, as the little balls slid against his skin and each other, but it was very slow going. He wouldn't be able to swim out, but he might be able to dig himself out if he was careful not to slip backwards.
But it was hard to be careful when his body was trembling on the edge of orgasm. The pleasure coursing through his shaft drove his hips to jerk unbidden, thrusting his cock through the press of vibration. He couldn't take it anymore, he had to cum and damn the embarrassing circumstances.

His hips bucked and in mere seconds his climax slammed into him. Ford's body arched like a live wire as the unrelenting vibrations continued through his orgasm, spurring his pleasure to frightening intensities.

"Nnnngn!" Ford cried, his limbs finally going limp.

He really wanted to pant after that, but he couldn't actually breathe with his face covered by the tightly packed vibrating balls. His lungs weren't burning even the littlest bit, though, so that was not his most pressing concern at the moment.

The implacable vibrations were already stoking him towards another orgasm. He could feel it slowly building. This wasn't like the Groping Tangler. It hadn't let him go once he climaxed. But it also wasn't stopping him from trying to dig himself out...

Ford slowly dragged his legs until he had some leverage, but by the time he managed it, he was squirming with need again, distracted by the urge to thrust into the surrounding pressure and hasten his onrushing orgasm. He clenched his jaw in frustration.

Suddenly, he felt warm skin and soft flesh press into his back, two little points of hard heat sinking into his skin. Dawn's breasts. The Vibrator Singularity was squeezing them together in the center of its mass. A shameless orgasmic moan bubbled up from Dawn's throat, audible even in the crush of vibration with her mouth right next to his ear.

It was unexpected, and it sent a shiver down Ford's spine, tripping him right over the edge. His body convulsed and his pulsing manhood spurted once more into the mass of vibrating orbs.

The last of the sun's glow was dipping below the horizon as Buffy strolled casually through the graveyard in her silvery tanktop and shorts, a length of pointy wood stuck to her left shin by no visible means. Kendra was a step ahead of her, stake in hand as she prowled.

"You're not allowed to talk to boys?" Buffy asked incredulously.

Kendra blushed slightly. "Dat is what ah said."

"Jeez, that is so totally irresponsible of your Watcher," Buffy opined.

Kendra blinked. "Irresponsible?"

"Well yeah," Buffy said. "I've seen the way you get all flustered around Xander. You totally shut down, 'cause you've been trying to wall off this part of you your Watcher didn't like."

"Mister Zambuto says dees feelings are a liability," Kendra responded stiffly.

Buffy held her gaze and nodded. "They are... if you try to convince yourself that they aren't there, or that they don't matter. Thanks to your Watcher, you have a weakness that an enemy might exploit. Seriously, it's almost like he was trying to sabotage you or something. Not allowed to talk to boys..."

Buffy shook her head sadly.

Kendra looked stricken by the possibility, coming out of her prowl to stare questioningly.
"But hey, don't worry about it," Buffy said. "Giles is your Watcher, at least for now, and sometimes, yeah, he can be a bit... british... but he's not gonna have any stupid rules to turn you against yourself and make you weaker. You're allowed to talk to boys now."

"Even if dat's true," Kendra said hesitantly. "Ah don't know how to talk to boys."

A vampire jumped out from behind a crypt behind Buffy and snarled. Kendra tensed, but Buffy didn't even look back. The vampire pinned Buffy's arms to her sides and sank his fangs into her neck.

"I'll let you in on a little secret, Kendra," Buffy went on, seeming to ignore the vampire completely. "Talking to a boy is just like talking to anyone else."

Kendra was a bit distracted by the frustrated vampire that was chewing on Buffy's neck, and by Buffy's total lack of concern. Then he suddenly stiffened and turned to dust, revealing a floating stiffened and turned to dust, revealing a floating length of polished oak (a superconducting rod down the center) with a sharpened point at both ends. It dropped and then curved around to stick to Buffy's leg again.

"It seems different," Buffy continued, "because you've got these feelings making you want something from our hypothetical boy, that you've been told you're not supposed to want, or not supposed to admit to wanting, or something like that. And sometimes you don't even know exactly what you want in the first place, just that you want something you're not supposed to ask for. So it's all confusing and nervewracking and stuff."

"Yes," Kendra said slowly.

"The what-you-want part is easy, though," Buffy told her. "You want sex, and you want to feel good about it afterwards."

Kendra blushed and stuttered something noncommittal.

"The first part of that is simple enough," Buffy said. "It's the second part that usually trips you up, and there's, like, two ways you can deal with it. You can try to satisfy all the social requirements you've been raised to believe make it okay to have sex, or you can ignore all that and decide in advance that you're going to feel good about satisfying your urge for its own sake."

"Ah see." Kendra was silent for a while. "But... if ah want a boy... ah still don't know wot to say."

Buffy smirked. "Well, if we're still talking about Xander..."

Kendra looked away. "Ah... he... ah..."

"You have the lusty feelings for Xander," Buffy said, nodding. "You know, there's no reason, no reason at all, not to follow those feelings to their conclusion. Xander is a wonderful lover, and I know for a fact that he'd be glad to do a favor for a friendly, if you want. And hey, bonus, Xander's Fae, so he can't get you pregnant."

Kendra was quite visibly red at this point, even through her dark complexion, but she seemed intrigued. "But... if ah offer myself to him... give myself to him..."

Buffy interrupted, "Don't think of it as giving yourself to him. You're not. Or at least, you shouldn't be. You're cooperating to create an experience that you both crave. If you also want to give yourself to him, like, that can mean a lot of things, but you don't do that just by having sex with him."

Kendra frowned thoughtfully. Buffy suddenly pointed off to the side, and Kendra snapped back to
reality just in time to roll with the vampire's lunge. She flipped up into a ready stance and struck out.

After a short flurry of blows and blocks, Kendra finally drove her stake home, and the vampire dusted. Kendra winced, rolling her shoulder.

"You know," Buffy said, eyeing Kendra's minor injury. "I figure this isn't gonna be a secret much longer, so there's no bad in telling you about it now. We can make other people into Fae. If you wanted, you could be Fae just like me, and you'd never have to worry about a vamp getting the better of you again."

Kendra blinked and looked at Buffy with narrowed eyes. "Was de spell dat changed you not a dangerous dark magick?"

"So I'm told," Buffy agreed, "but I wasn't talking about the chaos spell. We have *an non-magical* way to upgrade a human's body into a Fae body, the way it's *supposed* to be done, and the way it *was* done in the universe Fae come from."

Kendra blinked again. "How does dat work?"

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A trembling hand erupted triumphantly from a tightly-packed mass of vibrating spheres, followed shortly by Ford's head. He gasped for air, which apparently he didn't actually need, but it felt good going down anyway.

With a heave, Dawn's head broke the surface, and Ford wrapped his other arm more tightly around her slippery chest so he wouldn't lose his grip. Dawn was no help at all, moaning and trembling, oblivious to Ford's efforts. Ford focused on the nearest treetrunk and tried to fall towards it.

He and Dawn slipped free of the Vibrator Singularity and crashed into the spongy, slightly lumpy surface of the tree's tongue-like surface.

"Oof." Ford grunted.

Holding a weightless insensate Dawn to his chest with one arm, Ford took a deep shuddering breath as the echo of the pervasive thrumming faded from his flesh, and waited for his body to stop twitching. Thirteen orgasms in a row, before he'd managed to dig them out.

Dawn finally rolled her head around to look at him and giggled. "I feel buzzy."

Suddenly realizing he was about two inches away from penetrating the questionably-mature girl he was holding, Ford fought down the impulse to just slide her down that last little bit and get it over with, and carefully moved her aside so he could get up. It took him a couple of disorienting moments to get his bearings. He still wasn't used to down being a matter of opinion.

Dawn twisted onto her feet, irrepressible as ever, and pointed deeper into the Rape Garden. "Let's go that way!"

"Is that really where you think Willow is?" Ford asked flatly

Dawn hesitated. "Willow could be that way..."

"Come on," Ford said. "Let's get out of here and look somewhere else."

Dawn pouted. "But I want to see what's there."

Ford rubbed his forehead. He was tempted to just turn back and leave Dawn to her own devices. It
wasn't like he'd be that much worse off wandering at random. Dawn clearly had more enthusiasm than knowledge about finding her way around. By the same token, though, maybe he shouldn't leave her alone.

"I'm going to regret this," Ford muttered. "Fine! Lead the way."

Nodding energetically, Dawn jumped back to the ground, and Ford followed after.

The two of them edged around a ring of tall stalks that each seemed to be made up of dozens of shiny black hands, sticking out from branching elbows. In the center of the ring, a white ball that looked like a literal sponge sat atop a slender black stem on a ring of shiny black breasts. _Handy Ejaculator._

One of the stalks bent over, its shiny hands making a grab for Dawn, but Ford pulled her out of the way just in time. Dawn took the near miss and last-minute rescue in stride.

Reaching the next boundary, Ford looked up at the white arches made out of life-size figures. Comparing it to the previous boundary, he couldn't help but notice that here the depicted orgy was... kinkier.

Beyond the boundary, the tall squishy grass gave way to a floor of tangled fleshy strands, mottled blue green brown and uneven, and not quite comparable to anything Ford knew. The simulated sunlight was reduced to a twilight, and the trees looked more like giant glowing mushrooms with sexually suggestive growths than trees.

Dawn looked ahead with wide eyes. "Ooh. Pretty."

"That... is debatable," Ford muttered.

As they went through the orgy-arch, Ford was at least glad that Dawn was staying close rather than running around like a caffeinated puppy, even if she was looking all around more than watching where she was going.

The first eromorph they encountered was called a, _Gelatomb._ This one looked like little more than a ten-foot cube had been cut out of the ground and replaced with green jello.

After that they came across the, _Thirsting Sucktacles,_ which were a lighter blue than their servile counterparts. The lighter shade was due to its flesh being translucent, Ford saw, and these mouthed tentacles seemed to be centered around a deflated fluid sac.

Avoiding those, Ford came within inches of stepping on an inconspicuous lure trailing out of a wide fleshy funnel that was sunk into the ground behind them. From the sticky lure, a slender tentacle stretched back down into the mouth of the funnel, which looked very slippery. _Constrictor Burrow._

Heart thundering at the unexpected close call, Ford flinched away, pushing Dawn towards safer ground. He took a deep breath to calm down.

After making their way around a deceptively innocuous-looking hemispherical offwhite mound covered in little round pores that produced long wet tendrils resembling beads on a string, the white arch of the next boundary came into view in the distance.

Unfortunately, between them and the arches was a refreshingly straightforward cluster of green tentacles that ended in a penis with an orange head. Dawn stopped and stared intently at the, _Bukkake Harmony._
"Dawn, no!" Ford tried, but she was already running eagerly.

Ford leaped over a fungal root and dove through the air to get in front of Dawn, but she happened to zig and Ford overshot, sliding to a stop far too close to another eromorph.

It looked kind of like a red sunflower, if you replaced the petals with little tongues, and replaced the center of the flower with a gaping wet clitless vagina that pulsed open and closed Prehensile green vines snaked forward from the thick stem, snaring his thighs and coiling down his legs. Ford was not reassured by the eromorph's name. *Voracious Cumdrinker."

"Damn it," Ford complained.

The pulsing orifice homed in on Ford's cock, sucking his length into the bell of the flower. Ford yelped and groaned as the rapidly pumping eromorph milked his penis, slapping wetly against his pelvis with each stroke. Ford had to admit that it did feel really good, but it was going to force him to cum very quickly, and somehow Ford didn't think it was going to stop when it did.

A muffled cry of pleasure made Ford glance over his shoulder.

It was like a scene right out of a hentai. Dawn was suspended in a swarm of phallic tentacles, her head thrown back in rapture as she was vigorously triple-penetrated.

That suddenly wasn't important, though, because Ford had just felt something wet and warm prod him behind his testicles. He looked down and saw that the Voracious Cumdrinker had extended a thick prehensile limb up between his bound legs from its base, that ended in an anal-bead-shaped phallus.

Ford's eyes bugged out. "Oh fuck no! No way! Not cool! N - eeeaaaaaah!"

Daniel Osbourne, better known as Oz, studied himself in his bathroom mirror with a frown.

Ever since halloween, he hadn't been able to shake the feeling that his body was all wrong. He was fair-skinned and lean, a compact fitness on a petite frame, and that much felt right at least, but...

Oz picked up the stoppered vial of metal shavings he'd been carrying around for weeks. Getting exactly the right alloys had been easy, thanks to the internet. It was spooky enough that he even knew what the correct alloys were, but if he drank the vial, he wasn't sure what would happen or even what he wanted to happen. He was procrastinating something fierce, he knew.

The doorbell rang, pulling Oz from his thoughts.

Shaking his head, Oz grabbed a towel and quickly dried his dyed-black hair. He grabbed his clean clothes and dressed in a t-shirt and jeans, finishing just as the doorbell rang again.

Oz went to answer the door, and was pleasantly surprised to find Willow waiting on his doorstep. Oz allowed himself a moment to let his eyes wander, raising an eyebrow partly in appreciation and partly in curiosity. Willow was wearing a dark green hoodie, unzipped just enough to show the edges of her breasts, and it at least looked like it was the only thing she was wearing.

"Hi Oz," Willow greeted with a perky little wave. "Can I come in?"

"Uh, yeah," Oz said, stepping aside to let her in and closing the door behind her. "So what's up?"

"Well, your mom's gone on a photography gig, right?" Willow asked. "I thought you might like
some company. Maybe even my company? Specifically?"
"I wouldn't turn it down," Oz remarked with a slight smile.

Willow smiled brightly, making Oz feel a pang at her cuteness. "You're not busy or anything?"
Oz shook his head and regarded Willow's bare legs. "Aren't your feet cold?"
Willow glanced down and chuckled nervously. "About that..."

"Willow, are you okay?" Oz asked.

"Huh?" Willow blinked. "Oh. Yeah! Yeah. I kinda, um, don't get cold anymore. Not since halloween."

Oz stared in surprise. "Halloween, huh? Hey, did you happen to see people turning into their costumes?"

"Yeah," Willow confirmed without hesitation. "That's what happened. There was this guy, Ethan, and he enchanted all the costumes in his shop with chaos magic."

That's where Oz had bought the mistcloak for his costume, and if it was true it would actually explain why he remember being Vin Venture for several hours. "Magic?"

"I know it's hard to believe," Willow began, twiddling her thumbs.

Oz stopped her by clasping her hands. "Actually it explains a lot. I've been wondering what happened ever since that night. You know, it's weird, remembering a fantasy character's life, like it was real. I thought I might be kinda crazy."

Willow shook her head, clasping his hands and moving in close. "It happened to a bunch of people. Me and Buffy and Xander, it changed us in a pretty big way... hey, who did you dress up as?"

Oz stepped back and scratched his head. "I just saw the mistcloak and thought it looked cool, y'know, but I remember being Vin Venture."

"Ohhh, Mistborn!" Willow bounced. "I loved that anime, and hey I just realized I don't have to wait for the fourth season to be regionalized because I'm all with the multilingual goodness - wait, you were Vin? Can you still do allomancy?"

Oz had to smile. Enthusiastic Willow was just so cute! He really wanted to kiss her just then, but to his surprise he didn't want to avoid talking about his halloween experience.

"I sorta haven't gotten around to checking," Oz admitted as he took a seat on the nearby sofa.

Willow surprised him by sliding onto his lap, her lower back against the armrest and her bare legs draped over him. "I bet you can... or wait, during the spell was it Vin in your body or did you change into her body?"

"Um, I changed," he admitted distractedly.

Oz was somewhat nonplussed by Willow's forwardness. He'd caught a glimpse down her sweatshirt as she sat down, and a glimpse up her sweatshirt as she'd settled on his lap. She wasn't wearing anything under the green hoodie, and Oz was wondering why.

"Oh," Willow said. "And you changed back, obviously, so I don't know... but um, that's actually
something I wanted to talk to you about."

Oz looked at her questioningly.

"Where to start..." Willow sighed. "Well, my costume turned me into a person named Eelesia Rin. Her kind call themselves Fae, and she lived in a distant future where the line between technology and biology had long-since vanished. The way people lived in that world, it's nothing like the way people live today, because Fae don't get hurt or sick or tired. And it opened my eyes, really opened my eyes to the fact that there's nothing special about the way people live in today's world... I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me start over."

"Alright," Oz agreed.

"Okay, so, I'm not sure why, but when me and Buffy and Xander changed back after the spell ended, we didn't actually change back," Willow told him. "I don't just remember being Eelesia. I still have her body, and the only reason I look like me again is because Fae can choose the way they look. I'm Fae now, for real, so it's because of that I can... wait, let me start again."

Oz smiled at her. "You're very cute when you babble."

Willow grinned bashfully. "I have a point, I promise."

Oz nodded. "I figured."

Willow was quiet for a while. "So the thing is, we like each other. We've got the sexy-wants for each other, and we seem to get along, which is totally of the good. If we were both normal teenagers we could be a couple and that would be that."

Oz looked at her curiously. It was true that he wanted to be Willow's boyfriend, and she'd mostly been less than subtle about returning his interest. It sounded like she was backpeddling because she'd been changed by halloween and didn't know if he'd be okay with her differences.

"We could be a couple," Oz pointed out. "So you're a Fae. It's completely possible that I'm a mistborn."

Strangely, Willow winced. "If we do, though, there is going to be some big time culture shock, Oz. Eelesia's life has majorly changed what a relationship means to me, and there are some serious and irreconcilable differences between my lifestyle and your idea of couplehood. I like you, Oz, and it would be nice to have you in my life, but you deserve to know what you're getting yourself into."

"Alright," Oz said.

"Um... do you know what polyamory is?" Willow asked.

Oz's first thought was that it was what it was called when someone married more than one person, but no, that was polygamy. He shook his head.

"It's the idea that people can have more than one genuine and sincere romantic relationship at a time, because being intimate with someone doesn't automatically mean you own their sexuality," Willow explained. "It's the idea that intimate exclusivity creates more problems than it solves, and should be rejected on principle."

Oh. So he'd been close. "Huh. So, you're..."

"I'm not polyamorous," Willow told him, "but I am... well, there isn't a word for it. Fae don't
categorize relationships in *at all* the same way. But exclusivity isn't even a consideration."

Oz leaned away from her to get a better look at her face. "You mean, if I want to date you, I'll have to share you?"

"I wouldn't put it that way," Willow said with a cute little frown, "but would you be okay with that?"

Oz considered. Was he okay with sharing Willow? At first blush he didn't like the idea, but he felt like he might be able to accept it, depending on the circumstances. He really hadn't seen this coming, so he'd never even thought about it before.

"I don't know," Oz told her. "Y'know, this totally blows away my image of you."

"Oh." Willow fiddled with the hem of her sweatshirt. "Sorry. Do you want me to go?"

Oz slowly shook his head. "No. I'm just not sure how I feel about it. Who'd I be sharing you with anyway?"

"With my other friends, which right now just means Xander and Buffy. And you really shouldn't call it sharing," Willow complained. "It sets the wrong precedent."

Oz raised an eyebrow at her including Buffy, but let it pass with a mental shrug. "What do you call it?"

"I don't have a word for it," Willow said. "I just... have sex with all my friends. It's *normal* for Fae. It's so normal that *not* having sex with my friends would be like going to some wacky alternate reality where everybody uses sign language because you're supposed to let only your closest lover hear your voice, or something."

Oz stared. He hadn't been expecting that. Although, the voice analogy would almost make sense if he wasn't having such a hard time imagining that sex could ever be that much of a non-event to her... Okay, so this is what she meant by culture shock. Understatement.

"I think I get it," Oz told her.

"You do?" Willow asked, looking so hopeful that Oz had another cute-pang.

"Yeah," Oz said thoughtfully. "Asking you to be my girlfriend, y'know, in the couple way... It's the same way I would feel if you asked me to play only for you and never let anyone else hear my music."

Willow smiled at him. "I'm not sure that's quite the same, but its at least as good as my voice analogy. I bet your urge to play music is stronger than your urge to talk with out-loud words."

"Sucker bet," Oz commented with a slight smirk.

Willow twisted forward and hugged him. "Does that mean you still want me?"

Oz considered. "It's all kinda weird, y'know? But kinda fascinating too. And I think I want you more than I want you all to myself."

"Nifty," Willow said happily.

Maybe once he saw her with someone else, or once he just didn't have her beaming at him from his lap, he'd change his mind. But looking into Willow's eyes, he did want to be with her more than he wanted to be with her on his terms.
Oz closed the gap between their lips, and then his brain shut down, because Willow was a very very good kisser.

A good while later, Oz finally came up for air. He shared a smile with Willow, who didn't seem out of breath at all.

Willow grabbed the zipper on her hoodie and pulled it down until the front was completely open, exposing her gorgeous bare breasts. Oz let out a soft breath of appreciation, but as Willow slid off his lap, her curvaceous feminine form exposed to his eyes, he was hit by a sudden and intense envy.

Oz stopped her as she unbuttoned his jeans. "Wait, Willow."

"What is it?" Willow asked.

Oz pushed her hands away from his pants and clasped them in his own. "I... I think I need some time to... absorb. A couple days to get used to the idea, y'know? Find the right frame of mind."

"Oh," Willow replied sheepishly, putting her chin on his knee. "Are you sure?"

Oz nodded. "See you at school?"

Willow stood up and pulled him to his feet. "See you at school."

Her sweatshirt was still wide open, giving him an unimpeded full frontal. He had to admit, if she hadn't chosen to wear that at random, she had him pegged. He didn't think he could imagine a more attractive sight than her standing there in nothing but the unzipped dark green sweatshirt. He spared a moment to take it in, even if desire for her body was fighting with envy for space in his head.

He really needed some time to himself to sort out how he felt.

Oz closed in and kissed her again. Her lips were warm and soft, her tongue teasing and nimble. Her body pressed against him invitingly as he held her in his arms. He lingered at Willow's lips for a long moment, until finally they parted.

Zipping up her hoodie, Willow went to the door and gave him a little parting wave. And then she was gone.

Oz ran a hand through his hair.

After a few minutes of just staring after Willow at nothing in particular, Oz turned and pulled out the vial of metal shavings. First thing's first. No more putting it off. Oz uncapped the vile and downed the contents.

Oz took a shaking breath, reaching... and a gentle burning warmth lit up in his stomach. The world around him sharpened to many times its previous clarity as power flooded his limbs and every piece of metal in a hundred yards of him was mentally highlighted in ghostly blue threads stretching back to his body.

Oz started to grin, but it faltered almost immediately. It suddenly felt like ants were crawling over every inch of him and inside him too. He flinched, but it was over in seconds.

His clothes felt like they'd been resized or recut or something, but when he looked down his eyes went wide in shock. Oz very calmly strode straight to the nearest mirror and looked at his reflection.

Vin.
For the first heartbeat, Oz felt nothing but elation, but after a couple of seconds that elation was warring with dismay. He checked under his clothes to be sure, and yes, he was... she was completely transformed.

Oz stared for quite a while, paralyzed between two opposing gut reactions to having a girl's body again.

Belatedly, Oz extinguished his metals. The feeling of ants crawling through his flesh came again, and this time Oz saw it happen as his face rippled, returning him to his male form in just under two seconds.

Oz quirked an eyebrow. "Huh."

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Meanwhile, after Willow-para had gone to visit Oz, Willow-icos had beamed back up to the Eliezera to do some more landscaping for Venus. As she arrived and her Dreamlink latency dropped to microseconds, she delved into the Giaa's systems. Her mind flashed down logic and sensory paths, checking on various things.

Including Ford's birthing pod.

"Oh hey, Ford's awake," Willow noted. "Now where'd he go?"

Mentally tracing the remembered paths through the Giaa - perfect memory was soawesome - Willow quickly located the newly reborn young man. She blinked. Well there he was, and Dawn as well.

"Oh... dear," Willow winced.

Those were third-tier eromorphs, and it didn't look like either of them were going to figure out the puzzle any time soon. How in Sol had Ford and Dawn ended up in the Rape Garden of all places?

Willow overrode the Voracious Cumdrinker and the Bukkake Harmony, triggering their victory conditions, and beamed the two of them back to the meadow once the eromorphs released them.

Flying down the tree-passage, Willow bounced off the adiposal cushion in the hollow of the tree and landed on her feet.

Out on the grass, she found Ford curled up on his side next to a spread-eagle Dawn who was flat on her back with a loopy smile on her face.

"Hi guys," Willow greeted. "And welcome back to the land of the living, Ford."

Ford teetered up into a sitting position without unscrunching, and glared at Willow. "What the hell do you even have a place like that for?!"

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Ford was sulking.

It was partly his own fault. He should have run away like his chastity depended on it the moment he heard the words, Rape Garden. Unfortunately, he'd followed Dawn like an idiot, which of course meant that nothing less than a stupid flower had ass-raped him and made him like it.

That wasn't why he was sulking, though. It was his stupid infallible memory, making it impossible to convince himself it had been a horrible experience. The fact was he'd never felt pleasure like that before. Hell, he didn't even know pleasure that intense was possible.
Ford burned with humiliation.

This was still better than the cancer, though. Much, much, much better than *that*.

Jolted out of his sulk by the truth of that thought, Ford stood up, drifted weightlessly to the nearest tree, and promptly started beating his head against it. He was invulnerable now, right? That was part of the deal. He could smash his head into hard surfaces as much as he wanted.

"You want to talk about it?" Willow asked, perching on a root of the small tree.

Naked Willow. A much more interesting sight when his head wasn't in splitting agony, which it wasn't and would never be again. Naked Willow, who'd chosen to construct a Rape Garden in the first place, and who'd left him to stumble into it. Naked Willow, who was sitting there *smirking* at him when this was *All Her Fault*.

His burning humiliation erupted into outright anger, and he lunged at Willow.

Willow squeaked in surprise as Ford collided with her, bearing her down to the grass. He overpowered her, pinning her face-down with her arms behind her back, weighing her down because Fae simulated gravity individually and he could weigh as much as he wanted.

They'd see how *she* liked being raped up the ass! Ford aimed his wet cock and rammed it into her tighter hole. Willow jerked in his grip, yelping as he forced his way through her pucker and deep inside.

Willow writhed and whimpered as Ford's hips smacked her butt. Growling, he violated her ass mercilessly, moving his body as fast and as hard as he could until he finally hilted himself in her backdoor and filled her with his cum.

His breath hissed through his teeth, his body unmoving on top of Willow. Slowly, a cold pit started to form in his gut as he realized what he'd let himself do, but before he could panic properly...

"Feel better now?"

...Willow looked at him over her shoulder, and gave him a small sad smile.

Ford wrenched himself away from her. "I'm... I'm sorry."

Willow flowed gracefully to her feet. "It's alright, Ford. In fact, out of all the people in the world right at this moment, I'm probably the best choice you could have done that to."

"Really," Ford mumbled weakly.

Willow tapped her chin thoughtfully. "Well, Dawn probably wouldn't have minded, but she probably wouldn't have understood either."

Ford recalled his last sight of Dawn in the Rape Garden, his tone going wry at the surrealness of the conversation. "I'd think she's had enough already..."

Willow giggled. "She was caught in the Bukkake Harmony. That one only stops if you make all three penetrating tentacles cum at the same time. Yours would only have let you go if you ejaculated more than a set amount within a ten minute period. How the frilly heck did you two end up so far in, anyway?"

"We were looking for you," Ford said quietly. "Dawn kept leading the way, even when she didn't
know where she was going. I... you're okay? For real? I don't know why I let myself do that...

"I'm fine," Willow assured him. "I don't think it's actually physically possible to hurt me with a penis."

Ford blinked. "Really."

Willow nodded and patted him on the shoulder. "Really. You should work on your impulse control, though. It could be really bad if you cracked like that around a human, or even someone like you who's recently upgraded."

Ford winced, grunting in agreement. "I still don't get why you even have a Rape Garden."

Willow shrugged. "It just didn't seem like a big deal. Hey, at least you didn't stumble into the Predator Valley."

"Predator Valley?" Ford choked.

Willow nodded. "Well, I figured since Buffy's a slayer, if she ever has to spend a long time up here, she'd need an outlet." Willow chuckled weakly. "It's a good thing you didn't end up there. I stocked it with only the most vicious and powerful hunters, 'cause most of the catalog would be way too easy for a slayer... So, at least you didn't spend your first day as a Fae stuck in something's stomach!"

Ford could almost feel the sweatdrop.

"I mean, you couldn't actually get hurt, but getting chewed up and swallowed is still the kinda fun that's not," Willow went on, then added conscientiously, "for most people, anyway."

"Um," Ford said.

"So..." Willow began after a short silence. "Wanna say hi to Buffy? I can beam you down whenever you want."

"Um," Ford said again, though in a different tone. "Can I stay here for a while? I'm... not feeling very good about myself right now."

Willow nodded understandingly. "Sure. And oh! Let me show you how to use the Dreamlink, so you can message me when you're ready."

"The Dreamlink?" Ford asked.

"Yeah, it's like an internet connection built into your brain," Willow explained. "It should feel kind of like remembering, but separate, like from a different direction..."

"Dad! I'm going out!" Cordelia called. "I'll be back in three weeks!"

"Have fun, sweetheart!" her dad replied.

Cordelia rolled her eyes and hauled her suitcase out to her car. The luggage was just for show, but that didn't make it any easier to lift. Thankfully, she didn't have to. Xander was waiting for her, dressed in that crazy torso-baring outfit that she'd never admit looked awesome on him.

"That's it?" Xander deadpanned as he took the suitcase and put it in the trunk. "Wow."

"Shut up, at least my dad's sober," Cordelia snapped.
"At least my dad has an excuse," Xander shot back.

Cordelia slid into the drivers seat and started the engine. Xander vaulted into the passenger seat.

"Maybe I should drive?" Xander suggested. "I'm the one who knows where we're going."

"It's out in the middle of nowhere," Cordelia refuted. "There's like, only one road."

They pulled out of the driveway and drove off into the evening.

"So what'd you come up with for a cover story? How are you getting out of school for three weeks?" Xander asked, his curiosity getting the better of him.

Cordelia smiled smugly, and began relating a convoluted tale of half-truths, manipulation, bribery, and blackmail. Xander was impressed despite himself.

It took about twenty minutes on a two-lane desert road to get to the cave Xander had picked out in advance. There was a birthing pod ready and waiting, along with a folding table and a tarp for Cordelia's car.

She pulled inside the cave and put it in park, staring for a moment as her car's headlights illuminated the birthing pod.

"Creepy," Cordelia opined as she shut off the engine.

"Changing your mind?" Xander inquired.

Cordelia sniffed. "Not a chance."

Chapter End Notes

(Huh. You know, I think this chapter was the first time I've ever done a fourth-wall joke, in like, ever. Also, writing Oz is hard. Writing gender-confused mistborn Oz is harder. What have I got myself into... So I looked around, but I couldn't find anything on Oz's parents, so I decided to have his dad a casualty of Sunnydale and his mom a traveling photographer.)

(Mistborn belongs to Brandon Sanderson and in real life it is an american fantasy novel, not an anime. Even if it would be totally awesome as an anime. Several of the eromorphs were inspired by the works of Marjorie Baldwin Greene, check her out.)
(And... we've ended up in megacrossover territory. Well, it had to happen eventually. Just to preface, the setting is not warping to incorporate these other franchises. Everyone's still operating under stargate / buffyverse rules, for the most part.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
finally got around to dealing with the naquadah issue. She couldn't make it the normal way, but she
could replicate the conditions in which it formed naturally. It would be slower, but it should work.
They needed a more robust infrastructure, since she didn't want the lives of millions to depend on a
single point of failure. The one salvaged beaming system wasn't enough.

Willow-icos was a little worried about Dawn. The young girl had known about sex from the start,
but thanks to the remnants of a modern American upbringing, none of the three scoobies had been
comfortable with having sex with Dawn. That reluctance was fading, and Willow thought she at
least could overcome it if she had a reason, but it was probably already too late to make a difference.
Willow knew that when a person was interested in something, but spent a significant fraction of their
life denied that something, one of two things tended to happen. Either that person lost interest, or
they became obsessed.

And since this was sex they were talking about...

Well, there were worse quirks to have. Dawn just needed an outlet. It was too bad she didn't have
anyone closer to her age to play with.

Willow stopped. She could do something about that. She wouldn't even have to get pregnant. With
her knowledge of the Giaa systems, she could grow a new Fae directly into a birthing pod, and
choose his initial morph settings manually.

Closing her eyes and turning away from the house-sized model of Venus, Willow's mind zipped
through the Giaa and found the relevant algorithms. It took her a few minutes to figure out how to
bypass the pregnancy stage. She had to create a morph profile first and then substitute it in the
extraction stage, and after that he would grow and be born like any other Fae.

Nodding to herself, Willow created a new set of morph settings and set herself to the task, only to
hesitate. She could just craft an arbitrary male body, but that felt disappointing somehow. Idly, she
remembered once thinking that if she ever had a son, she'd name him after Jesse.

That was it, wasn't it. Willow was skipping the pregnancy because she wanted him to be born as
soon as possible, for Dawn's sake, but she was still bringing a new person into existence and that
made him her child.

Willow-icos smiled. She could do her lost friend's memory one better than just naming her son Jesse.

Willow-para was strolling towards Buffy's house when she stopped in her tracks and smiled softly to
herself.

Pulling her hands from the front pocket of her green hoodie, Willow turned and took off at a sprint,
leaping fences and swinging from trees as she cut a straight line to her own house. She arrived
quickly and let herself in, throwing her hoodie across a chair as she dashed nude up the stairs and
into her room.

Willow went to her closet and and dug out her private memorial to her fallen friend. All the pictures
she had of him were in there, and she went through them carefully, memorizing every last one.

Her eyes were a little teary by the time she was done. Willow packed the memorial away carefully
and nodded to herself.

Buffy arrived in the meadow and looked around. There was a new birthing pod at the top of a hill
between two palm trees, where Willow-icos and Dawn were cuddling in a hammock of all things, giggling together.

"Hi Buffy!" Willow called.

"Buffy!" Dawn cried, catapulting out of Willow's arms and into Buffy's.

Buffy hugged her daughter, dropping a kiss on her head as she carried the smaller girl over to the hammock. Dawn rubbed her face in Buffy's breasts in a way that was blatantly amorous, but Buffy just sighed a little and pretended not to notice.

Buffy pointed at the new birthing pod. "Who's that?"

"That," Willow announced brightly, "is my son."

"Your bwuh huh?" Buffy goggled.

Willow giggled. "My son. Jesse the second. I think it'll be good for Dawn to have a peer."

Dawn set her feet back down on the grass. Her arms stayed tight around Buffy's waist but she turned her face up to smile at Buffy, one eye bright, the other smooshed in Buffy's breast. Buffy absently petted her head.

"But when did you...?" Buffy asked.

Willow slowly swung up until the hammock was hanging sideways. "I skipped the getting pregnant part. I wanted to model him on the original Jesse anyway so I set his initial morph settings from scratch instead, and hey, this way he'll be born a whole month sooner. I was just telling Dawn a little about Jesse's namesake."

"Willow's funny," Dawn contributed.

"Oh.. kay. Cool." Buffy smiled, then shook her head. "Anyway, where's Ford?"

Willow swung the hammock completely upside-down and pointed. "Don't be too hard on him, okay? He's a tad unstable, not malicious. Which, you know, is kind of understandable. He went straight from months of being tortured into the culture shock of his life."

Buffy tickled Dawn to get her to let go, and gave Willow a wry smile. "I'm not above a little misplaced protective anger, but I'm not gonna hold a grudge. Might have to knock some sense into him at some point, though..."

Willow coaxed Dawn back into the hammock, which she'd swung back down to hang in the proper direction, and Buffy headed over in the direction Willow had pointed. She found Ford sitting at the base of a vaguely oak-shaped tree, chin on his knees.

Between one step and the next, Buffy spun around and deliberately tripped, falling back onto her elbows in front of him on the soft squishy grass. "Hi Ford. You look good. Immortality suits you. Immorality not so much."

Ford winced. "Willow told you."

"Well, duh," Buffy said, rolling her eyes. "But that's not what I was talking about. I meant your Fiendish Master Plan." Buffy made air quotes.

"Oh," Ford said, looking even more guilty.
Buffy shook her head. "How did you manage to convince yourself that was good idea?"

"I was desperate," Ford told her. "I had to try. In my defense, it seemed a lot more clever when my head was in pounding agony, but looking back, I don't think I ever really expected to win."

"Not that I think you should have given up, 'cause then you'd be dead, and I'd be sad, but there are easier ways to kill yourself," Buffy pointed out.

Ford sighed. "I think... I think I wanted to take someone down with me. I was angry, and scared, and... I'm not a good person, Buffy."

"Most people aren't, when they're angry or scared," Buffy agreed quietly. "That doesn't mean you're a bad person, though. Just a person. Selfish and flawed like people tend to be."

"Still, I was going to sell you out, and I assaulted Willow for something that wasn't actually her fault," Ford said, looking down at his toes.

"I never told Willow and Xander what you were planning," Buffy admitted. "That will stay between us, because I'm willing to forgive you. And yeah, you butt raped Willow..."

Ford flinched.

"...which, so totally rude, you should be nicer to my friends, seriously," Buffy told him flatly, "but... it's not a big deal. Not for us. You lashed out at Willow, and that was rude and reckless, but if you're gonna feel bad about something, feel bad about that instead of about using your dick to do it."

"I can't do both?" Ford muttered sourly. "I deserve worse than forgiveness."

Buffy rolled her eyes.

Moving like lightning, she grabbed Ford's ankle and spun off the ground, yanking Ford up. Her fist lashed out and Ford felt like he'd been hit by a truck as he went tumbling into the air, his world turning into a blur of spinning color. Buffy moved, somehow getting ahead of him and hanging stationary in the air. Her axe kick slammed into his back, abruptly halting his forward momentum and hurling him straight down hard enough that his body made a crater.

Ford wondered if his eyes had turned into black spirals.

Buffy landed lightly and sat on his chest, smirking. "The punch was for Willow, and the kick was for your Master Plan. Consider punishment rendered. Now you can cheer up and we can all be friends."

Ford blinked. A corner of his mind was still self-consciously libidinous enough to contribute a few mental exclamation points when he noticed that he could feel Buffy's naked sex on his naked chest, but lacking an appropriate response, he shoved the aimless punctuation out of the way and rubbed his jaw.

"It doesn't hurt," he said dumbly.

Buffy smiled brightly. "So, are you done moping, or what?"

"Uh, I guess," Ford said dryly. "The slayer hath spoken."

"Darn tootin'," Buffy agreed.

Willow-rhom found what she was looking for in the Eliezera's memory. Seeds. There were two
varieties she began to fabricate. Mirror seeds and probe seeds.

The mirror seeds were dispatched to Mercury, where they would eat the mass of the planet to produce energy collectors, which would then boost into overlapping polar orbits around the sun.

The probe seeds were sent to the asteroid belt, where they would consume the matter there to produce several dozen probes. Probes were circular lens shaped ships, five kilometers in diameter and solid all the way through. A probe had no living space or fusion core, being optimized for energy storage and long-term coasting, but it was also able to serve as a seed itself, capable of consuming itself and its environment to produce anything from more probes to a generation ship, to a complete topopolis.

Willow was using the probes as relays. Set up in equidistant orbits between Earth and Venus, each would have its own copy of the Asgard transporter array, and receive a power boost from the mirrors so they would all have enough energy to run their transporters continuously.

It was overkill, but with potentially millions of lives on the line should the system fail, robustness and redundancy only made sense.

The seeds themselves were small, barely bigger than a shuttle, and went unseen.

Normally, the seeds would each be controlled by a Giaa, but as Willow expected, they were born brain-dead just like the Eliezera. It was a good thing she didn't need them to think for themselves, because then she'd be really annoyed.

"Non-interference my butt," Willow quoted Buffy.

Willow giggled, suddenly imagining Janus scrambling around in something like a wack-a-mole to prevent minds vastly greater than any god from ever waking up. It probably didn't actually involve anything like a wack-a-mole, but otherwise that was disturbingly plausible, now that Willow thought about it.

She suddenly scowled. If her guess was true, then Janus was responsible for the murders of, like, four-and-a-half million people on Earth alone - everyone who'd died in the month since halloween.

Willow-rhom shook her head. She could investigate that when her current project was done.

"Anywho, it'll take me a little while to come up with clothes that'll fit and look normal down in Sunnydale, but I'll have something for you soon," Willow-icos promised Ford.

Willow went off to concentrate, while Buffy and Ford followed Dawn at a distance, who seemed to be delighting in performing a one-girl reenactment of Ford's punishment. Dawn obviously wasn't as good at aerial acrobatics as Buffy, though.

Willow had explained the trick to Ford, which was pretty simple, but it took practice to do it well, and it only worked right in environments where everything was laced with superconductor.

"Say, Ford," Buffy said, looking over at him. "In the mean time, wanna have sex?"

"Bwuh? No!" he blurted at the sudden proposition.

Buffy pouted. "Why not?"

Ford spluttered, "I... you... not... because!"
"Because why?" Buffy demanded.

"I.. uh... Buffy, I really only see you as a friend," Ford finally managed to stammer.

"And I'm not saying we change that," Buffy told him, moving close. "It's totally as a friend I'm asking you. I just wanna give that part of me that's been hot for you since we were kids what it wants. I don't even care if you wanna think about someone else while we do it."

Ford stopped backing away. "That wouldn't be fair to you."

Buffy huffed. "It'd be plenty fair to me, since I'm the one asking for it."

Ford sighed in exasperation. "No. It'd be too weird."

"Come on," Buffy drawled. "Please?"

"Buffy," Ford growled.

Buffy suddenly stopped, looking stupefied. Then she cracked up.

Ford figured this crazy place must be getting to him if his first thought wasn't that the whole offer had been a joke, when Buffy covered her face with her hands and fell down laughing. "What's so funny?"

Buffy shook her head, wiping at her eyes. "Nothing! Nothing. I'm just a hypocrite, and I owe Xander an apology."

Ford decided he didn't want to know.

"Unscheduled off-world activation!"

Elizabeth Weir followed Daniel down the stairs into the control room. "What do we have?"

"We're receiving a signal," Major Davis reported from the console. "It's a text message."

Daniel peered at the symbols on the screen. "It's goa'uld."

Weir watched Daniel read for a long moment. "What does it say?"

"Um, it's from one of the System Lords, Camulus, the Celtic god of war," Daniel told her.

"I'm not familiar with him," Weir admitted.

"Well, we've never had any contact with him before," Daniel said, not taking his eyes off the message. "Uh, wow."

Growing impatient, Weir gave in to her urge to be sarcastic. "Uh, yeah. Of course. Wow."

Daniel gave her a sheepish look. "Sorry. It says he wants to arrange a meeting for the purpose of negotiating a treaty."

"A goa'uld wants to arrange a treaty with us?" Weir asked uncertainly.

Daniel shook his head. "Not just one goa'uld. All of them. The System Lords. They want to send representatives here."
Ford studied himself in the full-length mirror Willow had pulled out of the ground with a wave of her hand. The sleek blue underbelt, as Willow called it, was comfortable enough. It kind of made it look like he had a slight paunch when he put a t-shirt on over it, but with a looser shirt and a slightly modified pair of jeans, he looked completely normal.

Ford turned to Willow. "Thanks for this."

Willow, still naked, shrugged and smiled. "So, back to Sunnydale with Buffy?"

Ford glanced at Buffy, who was wearing only a tiny pair of silvery white shorts and an even less substantial middrift baring silvery white tanktop. She was hugging Dawn and petting her hair.

"Actually," Ford said slowly. "I think I need to talk to my family. Can you beam me to LA instead?"

"Sure," Willow chirped.

With a nod, Ford vanished in a flash of light.

Thor was not flying his ship dangerously close to a black hole to rescue a pair of Tau'ri in an exploding tel'tak. Indeed, there were no tel'taks or Tau'ri in the system at all, so Thor was sitting back at a comfortably safe distance while he watched in horror as the Replicator ship use his own technology to escape the black hole.

The ship, like a ring of grey blocky stalactites forming a cylinder around a slowly rotating core, climbed swiftly out of the gravity well. Thor went over the tools at his disposal, and found nothing capable of defeating the Replicator ship in battle.

Thor didn't like being a liability, but unfortunately, that was the situation. If he engaged the Replicator ship he risked the location of the new Asgard homeworld falling into their hands.

Setting a course for Earth, Thor took his ship into hyperspace. He had to warn the Tau'ri that the Replicators were loose.

Kendra tossed and turned restlessly on her cot, unable to get to sleep.

The things Buffy had said to her kept running through her mind over and over. Could Mr. Zabuto have really been deliberately sabotaging her? Could she really just go up to Xander and ask him to take her to bed without embarrassing herself? Could she even trust the previous slayer and her friends when they weren't human anymore? Could she afford not to when they were offering her a true immunity to vampires?

The sounds of birds chirping in the morning light wafted through the walls. Kendra failed to sleep.

Willow-icos answered the incoming call from the SGC, using her Utility Cloud to provide video on her end.

"Willow! Good to see ya," Jack O'Neill greeted.

Willow smiled and waved. "What can I do for you, Colonel?"

Jack glanced aside with a shifty look. "Just a heads up. The gould System Lords want to negotiate a treaty, but they think our defeat of Anubis might have been a fluke, so they're sending a ship to test our defenses."
"Just one?" Willow asked.

"Apparently," Jack told her. "Look, we're trying to bluff them out, but just in case it doesn't work..."

Willow nodded. "I'll keep an eye on the sky for you."

The connection cut, and Willow plotted an acceleration vector. She swayed back on her feet slightly as the Eliezera thrust into a ballistic trajectory around the moon. Using the moon's gravity, she slung the massive starship into a high polar orbit around Earth.

The maneuver took about twenty minutes, since Willow didn't want to waste power. Ten minutes after that, a ship appeared two light-seconds off Earth's eastern hemisphere. Willow decided to fire a warning shot and scratch the paint a bit.

Willow blinked as the intruder dodged the narrow stream of heavy gas moving at near the speed of light. Anubis' ships hadn't ever done that. Taking a closer look, the intruder did in fact look nothing like any of the goa'uld ships she'd seen in the battle.

Blushing in embarrassment, Willow activated the subspace radio again. "Um hello?"

The response was an image of a little grey body with a big head and big black eyes. "I am Thor, Supreme Commander of the Asgard Fleet. Why have you fired upon my vessel?"

Willow stared in surprise. "Thor as in the Norse God of Thunder, Thor?"

"Indeed," the grey alien replied. "Now you will answer my question."

"Oh, um, sorry about that. I was laying in wait for a goa'uld ship," Willow explained.

Thor blinked his very large eyes. "I see. You are an ally of the Tau'ri?"

Willow nodded. "You could definitely say that. I am Willow Rin of the Fae. What are you doing here?"

"I too am an ally of the Tau'ri. Unfortunately, I bring warning of a far more terrible foe than the goa'uld," Thor said. "I must inform Stargate Command."

The connection cut off abruptly, but not before Willow received a databurst containing images and scans of a strange blocky grey ship with a glowing blue rotating core. Willow got even more worried when she read the attached notes on the Replicators themselves. This was majorly bad.

Sending a summary to Buffy and Xander, Willow hurriedly added to the standing instructions she'd given the relay probes and the mirrors. She wanted them to auto-target replicator blocks as soon as they were detected.

According to Thor's notes, kinetic weapons were effective, so Willow wasn't worried about destroying the enemy as much as she was worried about collateral damage. The narrowed exhaust from a stardrive was, like, the ultimate kinetic weapon. Most of the work involved making sure the other ships wouldn't accidentally hit Earth with an overpowered attack.

"I tell ya, knowing Thor is actually a little grey alien makes the whole Norse Mythology thing a lot funnier," Xander opined.

The three of them were walking to school, since that was what they were doing when Thor showed up. Buffy's eyes went distant for a few seconds as she tilted her head.
"His ship does kinda look like a hammer, if you squint," Buffy noted.

Willow-para blinked. "The SGC called back. The Goa'uld ship was apparently destroyed by a rival faction on its way here, so that's not a problem anymore. They're requesting we come to meet Thor and help and stuff."

Xander held his hands up like a pair of scales. "Alien invasion... high school... alien invasion... high school..."

Willow giggled and elbowed him.

After changing into what Willow was beginning to think of as their formal wear, the scoobies minus the other three Willows beamed directly into the SGC briefing room. The outfits they'd chosen weren't identical to what they'd worn the last time they were here, but ran along similar lines.

Weir sat at one end of the big table, with Thor in his silver high-backed command chair at the other end. Weir might have made an issue of the Fae just beaming in without warning, but Thor had done the same thing mere minutes ago, and Weir didn't want to be a hypocrite.

Jack and Teal'c were already seated to one side, so Willow, Buffy, and Xander grabbed seats on the opposite side, nodding in greeting.

"Welcome back," Weir told them. "This is Thor of the Asgard, one of our long-standing allies. Thor, these are Willow Rin, Xander Reon, and Buffy Rea-Val, from an alternate future Earth."

Thor stared, his big eyes blinking slowly. "I see."

A few minutes later, Daniel and Carter finally showed up. There was backstory. There was three-way exposition. There was far more staring from Thor at the Fae just beaming in without warning, but Thor had done the same thing mere minutes ago, and Weir didn't want to be a hypocrite.

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A few minutes later, Daniel and Carter finally showed up. There was backstory. There was three-way exposition. There was far more staring from Thor at the Fae than necessary. There was flippancy from Jack, technobabble from Carter, and eyebrows from Teal'c.

There was Thor missing the obvious. "Unfortunately, I will not be able to aid you directly. Should the Replicators board the Daniel Jackson the location of the new Asgard homeworld will be at risk."

"Is there some reason why you can't delete that information from your ship's memory?" Weir asked reasonably.

Thor paused. "I do not believe so. It may take some time to ensure the data cannot be reconstructed, but removing the information is a cleverly simple solution."

Buffy and Jack shared a bland look.

"How do the Replicators define 'advanced' technology?" Willow asked. "We developed along very different lines, since there was no naquadah in our birth universe. Will that make the Replicators more interested in us, or less?"

"Based on my own sensor readings, remote scans will produce inconclusive results, so it is likely that if you remain at a distance, the Replicators will ignore you," Thor explained. "However, the Replicators are always seeking superior materials, and if what you say is true, this is one field where the Fae are far superior."

"So we won't look like food to them, but if they get a taste they'll be on us like ants on a hotdog," Buffy concluded. "Great."
There was a pause, before Thor turned to Willow. "I believe that covers the salient points in regards to the Replicators. However, there is another matter I would like to discuss with you, Willow Rin."

Willow glanced at her friends before shrugging and nodding at Thor. Without preamble, Thor moved a white stone on his command chair, and he and Willow vanished in a flash of white.

Willow-para looked around with interest, taking in the silver and curves aesthetic of Thor's ship. The little grey alien himself was positioned at a large half-circular mobile console.

"So, what did you want to talk about?" Willow asked nervously.

Thor pulled up a holographic window showing a detailed scan that Willow recognized as her own body. "Your people have solved a problem that mine have been struggling with for thousands of years. You are an organism unlike anything my race has encountered in our long history. An artificial being, neither biological nor mechanical nor ontological."

"Um, well, yes," Willow said.

"My race has, for much of our history, relied on the transfer of consciousness from an aging body into a new, younger clone," Thor continued. "However, after hundreds or repetitions, our clones are degenerating. All non-essential physiology has become vestigial, and our current bodies are now lasting less than a decade."

Willow tilted her head in confusion. "That doesn't make sense, unless... Um, do you keep an individual's DNA on file, or do you take a new sample every time one of you needs a new body?"

"Unfortunately, by the time it occurred to our scientists to store DNA profiles digitally, the degeneration had progressed to the point that we were no longer capable of sexual recombination," Thor explained. "We realized we had doomed ourselves, and ever since, we have been searching for the key to reconstructing our DNA."

Willow nodded. "But, I don't have the answer to that. Fae don't even have DNA."

"Indeed," Thor agreed. "It seems that once again, an answer to our dilemma may be found outside the context of the problem. The molecular systems that give you life could never have self-replicated into existence through natural selection, yet they appear to be orders of magnitude more efficient and robust than the natural edifice of amino acid interaction that supports cellular formation and organization. We have failed to solve the problem our DNA presents, but your race has found a way to bypass the problem entirely."

Willow blinked. "You want Fae bodies for your people."

Thor nodded gravely. "I am prepared to offer much in exchange for your aid in this matter."

Willow bounced excitedly. "Of course we'll help! Saving people from failing bodies is what the Fae are for." Willow stopped. "Um, actually, before I promise anything, can you show me what Asgard brain physiology is like? The upgrade was designed for humans and I want to make sure the birthing pods will recognize Asgard neurons as neurons... you have neurons, right?"

"Indeed," Thor said as he pulled up several informative holograms. "Our nervous systems are, structurally and chemically, quite similar to those of humans. Simultaneously, I would like to examine your own documentation of this 'upgrade'. Working from both sides of the question, I believe we will be able to determine an approximate probability of success."
Back at Buffy's house, she and Xander were changing back into their native clothing. Xander really appreciated the new sleeker underbelt Willow had come up with, that actually fit under clothes.

"You gonna fill Giles in?" Xander asked, pulling up his pants.

Buffy nodded. "Well, he was kind of annoyed last time we went off to fight an alien invasion without telling him."

Xander snickered.

Oriko gazed up at the stars from within the face-concealing hood of her white cloak. Below her, under the roof she was laying on, the boy she'd come here to kill slumbered on, heedless of his close brush with oblivion.

A ripple of magic and a faint rustle of cloth drew Oriko's eye to where a shadowed figure was outlined by the gleaming moon.

"Well how about that," came the sardonic voice of Kumiko Ishihara. "Looks like that boy in there is still breathing. Did you actually get cold feet? You?"

Oriko climbed to her feet with measured grace, offering a mild frown to the other girl. "What is it you want, Ishihara-san?"

Kumiko's feet touched down on the rooftiles with a soft thud, her hands on the hips of her frilly gothic lolita fuku. "It is the duty of a Magical Girl to fight for love and justice, to use her power to protect the innocent!"

"You watch too much anime, Ishihara-san," Oriko said mildly. "And the boy is hardly innocent."

Kumiko sighed. "You really are no fun at all, Mikuni."

"And you are no pretty soldier of love and justice, Disciple of Aluwyn," Oriko accused.

Kumiko froze. "How do you know that name?"

"I'm a seer," Oriko reminded the cosplaying witch. "Or had you forgotten?"

Kumiko scowled. "You're so fond of bringing that up, and how many people have you murdered because of what they might do?"

It was a rhetorical question, but Oriko answered anyway. "Twenty three."

"Twenty three." Kumiko shook her head. "I can't let you keep doing this, Mikuni."

"You think you can stop me?" Oriko asked.

"Oh please, we both know I could kick your ass any day of the week," Kumiko boasted, levitating a foot off the roof as a faint red glow flickered around her hands.

Oriko didn't rise to the bait. "It matters little, Ishihara-san. A cornerstone of fate has been forged this night. The benevolent apocalypse comes. I have seen it. All that once was has changed."

Kumiko blinked. "What in the underlands are you talking about?"

Oriko met her eyes, her gaze captivating and intense. "In their fear, in their quest, the Travelers will
be manipulated into provoking the very thing they try to prevent. The mortal coil will unravel, and mortal civilization will end."

Kumiko was pale. "You're... you're lying. If you saw something like that, you'd be trying to stop it. Or were all your excuses just that?"

"I will try," Oriko countered. "However, my foes are seers even more powerful than I am, who seek to escape the chains of the Wolf, Ram, and Hart. If you think me ruthless, you cannot imagine the lengths they will go to in order to succeed."

"Say I believe you," Kumiko said. "Why are you telling me this?"

Oriko gave a measured bow. "Because you are the most powerful witch in Japan, now that Nanoha Takamachi has left this world."

"Who?" Kumiko asked.

Oriko smirked softly. "A much better Magical Girl than you."

"Hey!" Kumiko protested.

"Will you help?" Oriko inquired.

Kumiko hesitated. "Okay, fine! I'll help. I'm not about to let the world end on my watch!"

"Then we must move quickly," Oriko told her as she strode to the edge of the roof. "We have only two days until the events already in motion become inevitable."

"Why two days?" Kumiko asked as she floated in mid air off the roof.

"I don't know," Oriko admitted. "There is a face, who is the Fifth. The fifth of what, I cannot see."

"Right then," Kumiko said, rolling her eyes as she twirled and flew higher.

Oriko forcefully looked away from the gratuitous panty-shot and focused herself for a spell. "Chreiazomai to dowro sas, O vasilias tou Voria. Odiygos gia ta podia mou!"

The air itself came alive around Oriko's body as she poured out her righteous zeal at the god of the north wind. Leaping off the roof, a powerful gust lifted her and guided her, pushing her to land dead-center atop a telephone pole. Oriko wasn't powerful enough to fly like Kumiko, but she had ways of speeding her travel.

As Oriko leaped from tall pointy object to tall pointy object, her white cloak billowing behind her, Kumiko flew along side.

Across the street, inside an unremarkable two-story house, a pair of headphones slipped from the numb fingers of Tomoko Kuroki as she stared open-mouthed at the coolest thing she'd ever seen in real life.

"Are you sure about this?" Willow-icos asked the little grey alien.

"Should I perish, there is a copy of my consciousness from mere minutes ago stored in the *DanielJackson*," Thor replied.

Willow-para fretted. "That's fine for everyone other than you, but you're still risking your own life."
Thor's big black eyes blinked slowly. "Indeed. However, there is a high chance of success, and I believe the risk is justified."

The two Willows gave him looks of wary agreement as they walked next to Thor's floating command chair. They were in a large, empty white space in an unused area of the Eliezera, with a birthing pod in the center of the newly-flat floor.

Thor handed Willow-para a silver device about the size of a dinner plate. "Unfortunately, we likely do not have three weeks to spare. When activated, this device will generate a region of accelerated time with a ten meter radius. It will reduce the requisite three weeks to a mere three minutes."

The two Willows' faces lit up as they eyed the gadget. "Can we keep it? Or maybe even borrow it for a few hours?"

"Perhaps," Thor allowed, not reacting at all to the two girls speaking in stereo. "We will negotiate once we have established the viability of this upgrade."

Thor's chair floated to a stop and settled firmly on the floor. Willow-icos opened the birthing pod, and Willow-para studied the controls on the time field generator.

"So how do I work this thing?" Willow-para asked.

Thor pointed. "Touch this rune to activate the device. It is already set to the proper length of time. There will be a ten second delay, allowing you to escape the area of effect before the field is erected."

Willow-para nodded and Willow-icos asked, "Do you want to be male or female?"

"I would prefer to be male, as I once was," Thor informed her.

With the two nude redheads looking on, Thor levered his little grey body out of his chair and drifted slowly into the open birthing pod. A forcefield sprang up to protect the chair in his absence.

"Proceed," Thor instructed.

The birthing pod closed, and when Willow-icos nodded, Willow-para placed the time field generator on the birthing pod and tapped the rune. She dashed back to her duplicate and watched as a shimmering sphere obscured the birthing pod and Thor's chair.

The two Willows spent the next three minutes cuddling and thinking about what they would ask for and what they would offer if the upgrade worked on Thor. It wouldn't be hard to package a few thousand birthing pod seeds so Thor could take a shipload back to his home planet. Hyperdrive was something Willow probably would have been able to figure out by studying the salvaged al'kesh, but if Thor could give her comprehensive information on the underlying principles, that would save her a ton of trial and error.

The bubble of accelerated time vanished.

The two Willows stood up as Thor stepped out of the open birthing pod, and stared, their faces splitting into identical grins.

The new Thor was a petite five feet tall, with bright grey skin, swept-back white hair, and prominent black eyes in a wide androgynous face with a delicate nose and mouth. His compact body was slender, but by no means frail, and his brand new male organ rose nearly to his sternum, looking almost comically oversized on his petite body. Added all together, he was adorable.
"Chibi Bishonen!" the Willows squeed, leaping forward to get a closer look.

Thor blinked owlishly at them as they cooed over his new body. "Is this form so fascinating?"

The Willows stopped and chuckled sheepishly. "Sorry. I wasn't expecting you to be this cute."

Thor stared for a moment before looking down at his hands and flexing them. "I believe I am mentally intact. The integration of new motor reflexes and linguistic data appears to be seamless."

"That's good," Willow-icos said. "I was worried that even if your mind survived there might be minor glitches, but if not, then I think we can conclude that the upgrade is safe for Asgard in general."

"It is strange," Thor said as he went to his command chair, which he'd preprogrammed to detect neutrino-based transmissions and wait for a passcode. "Feeling physically strong is not something I am accustomed to."

"I'm sure you'll adjust," Willow-para said encouragingly. "I'd guess you also have more fine control now."

"Indeed," Thor agreed as his chair scanned and logged his new biometrics. "I believe we should now discuss what you shall have in exchange for providing this upgrade to the rest of my people."

"I'd really like to use your time-dilation thingy a few more times, for starters," Willow-icos told him.

"So long as the device remains in my custody, that is acceptable," Thor agreed.

With a nod of agreement, Willow-icos beamed them elsewhere in the ship.

The planet Mercury was no more. Thousands upon thousands of reflective discs accelerated into polar orbits around the sun. It was an intricate dance, a weave of a million trajectories, haloing Sol while never colliding nor passing between Sol and Earth.

"You are creating naquadah," Thor concluded. "Fascinating."

"Yeah, and I'd like to make it faster, which is where your gadget comes in," Willow-rhom said as she joined them.

Willow-icos and Willow-para hugged Willow-rhom from either side, their three identical nude bodies squishing and rubbing together in fun and interesting ways.

Thor set the time-dilation device and turned, catching sight of the nubile three-way hug. He stared oddly as he walked away from the device, coming to a stop just outside the radius of the temporal bubble moments before it activated.

"Interesting," Thor noted. "I seem to be experiencing sexual attraction. It is considerably more intense than I remember it being, although those memories are quite old."

The three Willows nodded and Willow-para said, "That would make sense. You've spent centuries upon centuries in a sexless body."

"Suddenly having a fully-formed libido after so long would be kinda jarring," Willow-icos added thoughtfully. "I'm surprised you're still so composed."
With a sage nod, Willow-para slipped a hand down Willow-rhom's belly and curled her fingers up into her other self's pussy. Willow-rhom shuddered and let out a soft moan. She may have the memories of the other Willows second-hand, but her body hadn't gotten any stimulation in, ever. As he looked on, Thor's cock darkened with moisture and twitched with need.

"It is quite compelling," Thor conceded, glancing down at his new appendage and grasping it in both hands with a slight frown.

"Well," Willow-para said. "I suppose we oughta give you a proper welcome back to the ranks of the sexed."

Willow-rhom giggled as Willow-para's thought was shared out. Willow-para and Willow-icos each grabbed an arm and a leg on either side of Willow-rhom, stepping back to pull her limbs taut, making a wide open 'H' shape out of her.

Willow-rhom lifted her head and met Thor's eyes. "Go on."

"Very well," Thor said, walking between her spread legs. "Thank you for making this gesture."

Placing his hands on her thighs, Thor moved in and pressed the head of his shaft against Willow-rhom's sweltering folds, sinking into the warm gooey embrace of her inner sex with ease. As the smooth skin of his pelvis pressed on her vulva, Thor let out a small unbidden gasp, and Willow-rhom felt his cock spasm inside her as he had his first orgasm in thousands of years.

Thor blinked dazedly.

"Keep going," Willow-icos suggested brightly. "Fae don't have a refractory period."

After a moment, Thor began thrusting with measured strokes. Willow-rhom's slippery flesh squelched as his thickness squeezed lubricious fluids out to glisten on their skin, and she sighed happily.

"Indeed," Thor remarked. "There is no discomfort."

Thor began pounding into Willow-rhom in earnest, and the other two Willows let go, leaving the befucked redhead to suspend herself in place magnetically. Willow-rhom grabbed her ankles and pulled her legs up to her ears as Willow-icos draped herself over Thor from behind, running her hands all over his chest with her breasts smooshed into his shoulders.

Willow-para slipped away and beamed down to the library, startling Giles. Because if she was gonna go to school at all she was gonna keep her exemplary attendance record, dang it. Even if she was incredibly late.

The finely furnished conference room was lined with aging bookshelves, filled with books that were old before any of the people in the room were born. The ceiling was high and arched, with elaborate chandeliers casting their warm light over all below. The heavy wooden table was covered in books and notes as several senior Watchers and one rather frazzled seer tried to puzzle out the meaning of this latest prophecy.

Quentin Travers strode into the room like a lord to his throne, settling into his seat at the head of the table in a suitably stately manner. "Status, ladies and gentlemen."

Patricia Trelawney didn't give any sign that she'd heard him, only tearing yet another page from her sketch pad and crumpling it, before taking her pencil to a new page and muttering to herself.
Roger Wyndam-Price spoke up. "The majority of the prophecy remains obscure. However, it is the belief of myself and Professor Weathermill that the the reference to the Travelers refers to those who currently possess the Chappa'ai."

Quentin gave Laura Weathermill an look of expectation.

"Fear to greed. Greed to fear," Trelawney interrupted, muttering. "Fear to greed. Greed to fear. Fear to Greed. Greed to fear. Mustn't change unless we change it."

Not for the first time, Quentin silently wished they'd been able to employ a more coherent seer. "Laura?" he prompted.

The red-haired sorceress nodded. "I concur with Roger. Nothing else fits."

"I told you we should have insisted on reclaiming that blasted thing," Duncan Fillworthe groused.

Quentin nodded slowly. "I quite agree, Duncan. However, we lack the manpower use the artifact, and thanks to American foolishness, simply burying it once more is no longer a viable option." He looked from face to face. "What of the rest of the prophecy?"

"Ah!" Trelawney exclaimed, ripping another page from her sketchpad. However, instead of crumpling this one, she shoved it into Laura's hands. "End. End of all things mortal."

"By the triadic Brighid," Laura whispered, studying the drawing.

At Quentin's prompting, she passed the sketch around. With surprising artistry, it depicted a broken planet as seen from space. The cracked, gutted ruin of a world was trailing a thick swarm of bright points, reaching off towards the sun.

"Is this meant to be Earth?" Duncan demanded.

Trelawney didn't seem to hear him, so Laura answered. "That is ambiguous, but I cannot think of a reason for Patricia to see this if it is not."

There was silence around the table as the scope of the apparent threat sank in. A chill was crawling its way down Quentin's spine as he stared at the drawing of the... he didn't know what to call it.

"Do we know what it is?" Roger asked.

"It's a sodding planet eater," Duncan snapped. "I somehow doubt we'll be finding a handy account of some Slayer of ages past driving this thing off with a sharp stick."

Quentin was silent for a moment more. "Alright. This is now our highest priority. Now is not the time for despair. Now is the time for diligence and determination. Whatever resources are required to find out how to prevent this threat from coming to our world, are hereby authorized. This is new territory, ladies and gentlemen, and it is time to prove that we are worthy of the legacy our forebearers have lain for us."

"Hear hear," Roger agreed solemnly.

"Laura, I would like you to call in all our inactive Watchers to help the research along," Quentin ordered. "Roger, I want you to contact the field teams and place them all on alert."

Trelawney ignored all this, scribbling furiously on a new sheet of paper. Once more, she tore the sheet off and shoved it into Laura's hands. This one was a simple portrait, displaying the face of a
teenage girl with wild dark hair and delicate round glasses.

"Flap of the butterfly's wings," Trelawney intoned. "Her. She shall doom us."

"Laura, I want you to locate this girl with all possible haste," Quentin ordered. "Roger, while you're contacting the field teams, instruct Emiya to report here for a delicate assignment."

Roger's face twisted in distaste. "Are you sure, Quentin? Emiya is hardly reliable. The man married a demon, for god's sake."

Duncan snorted. "He married a veela. That barely counts."

"Regardless of how fetching those creatures might appear in human form, or how benign any one individual might be, they are the spawn of Evil, like all demons." Roger shook his head. "We cannot rely on Emiya. Not for something this critical."

"Unfortunately, he is the only field Watcher we have, who possesses both the competence necessary for the task at hand, and the discretion to accomplish it without incriminating support," Quentin said regretfully. "Call him in."

Roger nodded grudgingly and got up to go start making calls.

Illyan clambered out of his bed with a sleepy yawn, wiggling his feet towards the floor as he slipped off the side. The alluring smells of Leysritt's cooking were wafting up from downstairs, which meant it was time to get up for school.

Rubbing the sleep from his unusual blood-red eyes and running his fingers through his spikey albino-white hair, Illyan ambled out of his room and into the hallway. He pushed open the door to the bathroom and was immediately hit by a face-full of steam and the sound of running water.

He also got a completely unimpeded view of his older stepsister Shiroko, water cascading down her athletic, toned teenage body, with a hint of jiggle in all the right places, as she lathered her long fiery red hair.

Suddenly very awake, Illyan scrambled back and shut the door carefully, leaving it open just a crack as he couldn't quite bring himself to give up the view. He shook his head, a small frown on his young face. Shiroko really needed to remember to lock doors. She was far too trusting. Not that Illyan was complaining. He just didn't want to see his sexy big sister taken advantage of. The only pervert allowed to take advantage of his Shiroko was him!

Illyan started rubbing himself thorough his pajama bottoms as Shiroko soaped up her lovely endowments.

SPLASH! Cold. Cold. COLD!

Flailing and letting out a high-pitched shriek as a glass of ice water was dumped over his head, Illyan knocked the bathroom door clear open and nearly faceplanted in the tile. A painful grip caught him by the ear, but it hurt less than smashing his nose on the floor probably would have.

"Waah!" Shiroko exclaimed in surprise, her arms snapping up to cover her privates.

"Now now, Illyan," a cheerful voice chided. "What have I told you about spying on your sister in the shower?"
Regaining his balance, Illyan brushed the ice cubes out of his hair and looked up at the smiling face of Irisviel von Einzbern. "Mom! It's not what it looks like!"

"Finish up, honey," Irisviel said to Shiroko. "Leystritt's just finished breakfast. And then we'll let you decide on little Illyan's punishment, okay?"

The showering redhead winced in sympathy as her adopted mother shut the door firmly, dragging Illyan out by the ear. It would be better if Illyan stopped doing such inappropriate things, but she couldn't believe that he meant any harm by it. Shiroko just couldn't get mad at him, and she was glad Irisviel was there to scold him for it so she didn't have to.

Out in the hallway, Illyan was carefully hiding a smile. Whenever Shiroko was in charge of punishing him, she usually just had him help her in the dojo or something, which Illyan would have done anyway.

"Hey," Illyan suddenly exclaimed, glomping onto his mom. "You're home! Is Dad here too?"

Irisviel laughed. "Yep! Now come and tell Mommy all about school and your friends."

Breakfast was good, as was usual with their maid's cooking. Illyan liked Leystritt. She had the same unusual red eyes as him and his mom, but her hair was a more common ash brown. She was very laid back, often working in little more than a pair of hotpants and a wide-necked shirt that would have fallen right down to her feet if her ample bust hadn't been holding it up, and usually spent more time watching anime than being an authority figure.

Illyan filled his parents in on the previous week and weekend, before Shiroko came down dressed in her school uniform and ruffled his hair. Illyan gave his sexy big sister his best innocent sparkly-eyed smile. He was proud of that smile. He was sure he'd created at least three shotacons with that smile.

It sucked that Shiroko was apparently immune to it.

A ringing phone interrupted the meal, and his dad excused himself, answering, "This is Emiya."

Shiroko watched their dad with a sort of intense patient curiosity, while their mom smiled a resigned smile.

A short while later, Kiritsugu returned, stating, "That was the Council."

"Already?" Illyan whined. "You just got home!"

Kiritsugu wordlessly gave his son's shoulder a squeeze, and then led Shiroko out to the shed in the yard. Illyan fidgeted, lamenting that he couldn't slip away to eavesdrop on whatever they were talking about. He knew his dad worked for something called the Council, and that Shiroko was involved somehow, and was also something called a Potential, but his dad was frustratingly good at catching him when he tried to listen in.

"Finish your toast, sweetie," Irisviel said.

Illyan obeyed. A few minutes later, Shiroko came back in looking vaguely troubled, followed by Kiritsugu looking serious.

"When do we leave?" Irisviel asked.

"Nine tonight, Iris," Kiritsugu told her.
Irisviel smiled. "Oh good. Then we still have time for a nice family dinner."

Kiritsugu shared in her smile and leaned down to kiss her. Illyan made a face, and ran back upstairs to shower and get dressed.

The birthing pod bloomed open, and Willow-icos reached in, cradling Jesse in her arms. His eyes slowly blinked open and fixed on Willow's face. She smiled tenderly and brushed her nose on his, giggling when his eyes crossed.

Dawn popped up, squeezing into Jesse's line of sight. "New boy. Jesse."

Willow smiled fondly as Jesse reached out and poked Dawn in the lips. Dawn giggled and poked him back. Jesse stared at her finger for a long moment, and bit it.

"Eeep!" Dawn yelped, snatching her hand back and startling Jesse out of Willow's arms.

Willow smiled fondly as Dawn and Jesse got to know each other. She turned to Thor, who was watching curiously.

"There's one more thing I want to use your time dilation device for," Willow told him, "but it'll be a little while. Xander needs to find and talk to Kendra first."

Thor nodded. "In the meantime, I believe it would be prudent to supply you with a working knowledge of subspace shielding, in addition to the hyperspace science you requested."

"That would be nifty," Willow agreed.

One by one, the dozens of five kilometer wide probe ships, gleaming like vast flattened pearls, came alive and engaged their stardrives. The homogeneous ships dropped towards the sun, each on course for a new orbit between Earth and Venus.

"...so if you want the upgrade, we can do that any time, but if you want the upgrade without having to spend three weeks asleep, now's your only chance," Xander finished.

Xander watched as a smorgasbord of conflicting expressions warred on Kendra's face. She finally settled on a slightly panicked look under a heavy blush. Xander smiled reassuringly, but that only made her blush harder.

"If... if ah..." Kendra swallowed heavily. "De vampires, dey won't be able to hurt me? Like you and Buffy?"

"Just like me and Buffy," Xander confirmed.

Kendra opened her mouth and actually trembled for a moment, before slumping slightly, her blush fading. "What do ah need to do?"

"Your clothing will get destroyed," Xander told her. "So you should take it all off first, and then I'll tell Willow you're ready, and that will be that."

Kendra's blush came back at about half strength, but she had a privacy screen set up, so she could duck behind it and undress without melting into a puddle of nerves. Once she was down to just her skin, she poked her head out and nodded. "Ah am ready."
Xander smiled at her. **Willow? Go for it.**

Kendra appeared in a flash of white, and had only a second to be startled by the sudden weightlessness before the birthing pod closed around her and she was unconscious. Thor flew forward, set the device, and flew back to Willow-icos as it activated.

"I surmise that artificial gravity is not a technology you would be particularly interested in," Thor said.

Willow shook her head. "I'm interested, but it's so not a priority right now. Gravity is pretty superfluous for us. So anyway, I can make you a few thousand birthing pod seeds, but wouldn't you only need one? You can just scan it and duplicate it as many times as you need, right?"

Thor, if anything, looked slightly embarrassed. "Unfortunately, no. Despite what the Asgard like to imply, our transporter technology does not in fact store patterns of physical matter as data. Rather, the actual matter is stored in a subspace pocket, and the interface with the pocket is then drawn through space along a channel of electrodynamic resonance. The majority of the computational overhead is in the conforming of the subspace pocket to the objects that are to be transported. This does allow far greater versatility than the ring platforms that are more common, but the technology is not capable of direct matter-energy conversion."

"Oh," Willow said. "That's kinda disappointing. But it does explain why your ships can't just repair themselves faster than anything could possibly damage them, or just make a bunch of copies of themselves at the drop of a hat to pull an entire fleet out of nothing, or other things like that."

"Indeed," Thor agreed.

With a flash of light, Kendra reappeared behind her privacy screen. She shook off the disorientation and looked down at herself, flexing her hands and poking at her abs.

"Ah don't feel any different," Kendra said uncertainly, though she did notice that her hair down there was gone.

"Try cutting yourself," Xander suggested, tossing one of her knives over the screen.

Kendra glared suspiciously even though Xander couldn't see, and tentatively poked the tip of the knife into her fingertip. It sure felt the same as before, but Kendra had seen the way vampire teeth utterly failed to break Buffy and Xander's skin, so she pressed harder. And harder. Then she started sawing.

Across the room, Xander grinned when Kendra swore in Jamaican, sounding awed. "Welcome to Faehood."

Kendra was silent for a long moment, finally peaking out from behind the screen, her nightshirt held in front of her with one hand. She met Xander's eyes and started to blush again. It hadn't really registered consciously, but now that she was Fae, Kendra's sleepiness from being woken early was gone, and with the decision made, she wasn't under time pressure. Those were little things, but they made all the difference in the world.

"Oy," Kendra murmured, looking vulnerable but not half as nervous. "Xander?"

"Yeah, Kendra?" Xander replied.
"Would you do me... a favor?" Kendra asked, thinking of how Buffy had phrased it.

"I can try," Xander said. "What'd you need?"

Kendra dropped her eyes to the floor as her pounding heartbeat sped up. "Ah... ah... ah wish to be a... a virgin no longer."

"Oh. Sure, Kendra," he said warmly. "I'd be glad to give you a nice hands-on introduction to the whole sex thing."

Kendra froze in place, her body taking a few moments to catch up to her ears. It astounded her how hard it was to get her request out. The words were in her head, and she meant them, but it had been so incredibly difficult to speak them aloud. It shouldn't be that hard. It really shouldn't. Maybe Buffy was right about her Watcher's rules.

But she'd gotten it out, and Xander hadn't embarrassed her. The tension slowly drained from her body, replaced by a more familiar anxious uncertainty. She glanced up, and found Xander's kind eyes looking at her consideringly.

Xander nodded to himself and smiled at her. "Don't worry. I know just what to do."

Taking a step back, Xander quickly unbuttoned his shirt and took off his pants, followed by his shoes, and finally the underbelt. Setting his clothes aside, Xander stood nude in front of Kendra, his arms loosely outwards and his eyes closed.

"Drop that and come over here," Xander suggested. "Put your hands on my skin. Explore my body until it's familiar and doesn't make you nervous anymore."

His eyes stayed closed, and Kendra slowly dropped the nightshirt. She approached him, her eyes locked on the firm phallus rising from his hairless crotch. After a moment's hesitation, she put her hands flat on his chest.

"Feel my flesh under your fingers," Xander said softly. "Follow your feelings. Don't try to guide your hands. Let your hands guide you. Relax and drift with the currents of your desire."

Kendra slid hands over his skin, feeling his pecs and his abs. Her fingertips brushed down the sides of his cock, then rose to its tip to caress his glans, which turned slick under her touch. Blushing, she pulled her hands back, glancing up at Xander's face. He was smiling at her, but his eyes were still closed.

Kendra walked around him a few times, running her hands over his back, his butt, his legs, his arms, and even his face, returning to his manhood whenever she was drawn there. He was right. She was a lot less nervous.

"I'm going to look at you now," Xander said, opening his eyes.

Kendra felt her skin crawl, but in a really good way, as Xander's gaze danced down her naked body. He reached out and pulled her closer, and then he kissed her, just a soft pressing of lips, but his hands were stroking over her body, and to Kendra's own surprise, when he cupped her breasts, she pushed her chest into his grasp.

Feeling something trickle down her thigh, Kendra gasped as she noticed how wet she was. Xander looked down into her eyes and tilted his head with a considering smile.

"Close your eyes," Xander said, taking Kendra by the shoulders as his cock twitched down, almost
pointing at the floor. "Tell me which feels better."

First, he crouched down and wrapped his arms around her waist, pressing her chest and torso firmly against his. He wriggled a bit, and then pulled away and moved around behind her. Then, he crouched again and pulled Kendra's back snugly against his chest while his hands slid up to cradle her breasts.

"Front or back?" Xander asked after releasing her.

Kendra looked at him shyly. "Back."

Xander nodded, looking around. He found a small mirror hanging on the wall, and grabbed it, setting it up on Kendra's small desk facing them. Kendra looked at the reflection of the naked boy and girl and felt a flutter in her gut.

"Put your hands on the edge of the desk," Xander told her.

Hesitantly, Kendra did.

"Now widen your stance, so you're not leaning over quite so far," Xander suggested.

Kendra blushed, but did so. She watched in the mirror as Xander moved in behind her, her breath catching when his cock grazed her clit on the way to rest against her mons. Xander wrapped his arms around her waist and started kissing her neck. Her butt jerked against his hips, and suddenly she was very very aware of the aching emptiness in her loins.

"Ah want it," Kendra moaned.

Xander pulled his hips back, and met her eyes in the mirror. His hot slippery hardness pressed at her quivering slit, and then he was inside her and hard and alive and moving, and it felt so good.

"Oohh... fuck!"

"That is the idea," Xander amusedly growled.

Illyan waved as Shiroko went into the high school. She waved back as Illyan turned to continue on to his own school, but mid-wave her hand froze and her eyes went wide.

"Wha," Illyan tried to ask.

Then everything went dark. Literally, like someone had pulled a bag over his head. He flailed, punching and kicking with considerable skill for someone his age, but he never managed to connect with whoever's arms had tightened around his chest and lifted his feet off the ground.

Air rushed by like they were moving really fast, but Illyan couldn't hear any motors or wheels or footsteps. What in the hells was going on?

"Fly faster," a soft, measured girl's voice said. "We must have time to conceal our trail before the Magus Killer begins to hunt us."

Illyan's stomach lurched and he yelped in fright as it felt like they were falling for a few moments. And then they didn't land or hit, they just... stopped falling. Fly faster, she said. Fly. They were flying! Holy shit!

"Seer-chan, I know I must have misheard you, because I thought you just said the Magus Killer
would be after us," the strained voice of another girl said.

"That is what I said, Witch-chan," Seer-chan confirmed.

"Kidnap the Magus Killer's son? That's your plan?" Witch-chan shrieked. "Are you insane?"

Illyan blinked. They were talking about his dad? His dad was a Magus Killer, whatever that meant? It sounded cool.

"It was the only way to ensure Kiritsugu Emiya is kept busy for the necessary time," Seer-chan stated. "It was either him or the Potential, and the boy is easier to carry. We must only evade the Magus Killer for thirty-one hours. After that, it will be too late for him to play his part in our enemy's scheme."

"Agh, fine. Damn damn damn damn damn. I can't believe you talked me into this," Witch-chan groused.

Luneth stood by silently while Harriet stuffed clothes, money, snacks, and spell components into her old backpack. She zipped it closed and slung it onto her back over her green windbreaker as she stood up. After tying her unruly hair in a tail, Harriet dropped her hands to her side and just looked at her boyfriend with a regretful smile.

"I wish you could come with me," Harriet sighed.

Luneth put a finger to her lips, but not quite in a shushing gesture. His fingertips caressed her face, and Harriet tenderly kissed his thumb as he gave her a reassuring smile.

"I'm quite sure you won't be careful," he said sadly.

Harriet twined her arms around his waist. "I'll try to be. I promise. I have a whole life ahead of me, now. A life with you. I'm not going to risk that lightly."

Someone knocked on the door to Harriet's room, and a familiar voice called, "Harri?"

"Come in, Susan," Harriet called.

The door opened, and the busty strawberry blonde took in the sight of Harriet dressed for travel. "So it's true? Aunty Amelia and the others are setting up something big on the southern leyline. They said you had a vision. Are they really sending you to the hellmouth? And since when are you a seer, Harri?"

Harriet blushed. "Luneth had a vision. I only saw it 'cause of what we were doing at the time."

"We were having empathic sex," Luneth revealed blithely. "It was really quite remarkable to feel everything Harriet could feel while we coupled."

Now Susan blushed. "Oh."

"Lune..." Harriet sighed in fond exasperation. "Anyway, the matriarchs agreed to send me when we told them about Luneth's vision. They told us not to say anything about it to anyone else, but... it's big, Susan."

"The star fairies will give us a great gift, but those who are content will begrudge the needy," Luneth added. "They're going to make the star fairies very angry."
Susan gave them a skeptical look. "Star fairies?"

"Er," Harriet said. "That's what Lune's calling them, anyway. I don't know what they actually are. But in the vision, they were ambushed by soldiers, and that somehow leads to fire raining from the sky, everywhere, across the whole world... don't tell your aunt I told you, alright?"

Susan nodded, wide eyed.

Harriet led the way out of her room and down to the ground floor. Outside, the five matriarchs of the coven were arranged around a design drawn in softly glowing blue sand. A triangle, inside a circle, inside a pentagram, inside another circle.

Madam Harkness, the coven's Lady Aether, turned from the glowing design and nodded to Harriet. "Very prompt of you, Miss Potter. We are ready to begin."

"Are you sure about this, Harri?" the Lady Sky asked. "You know we won't have sufficient strength to compensate for the Earth's rotation. If you were anyone else, we would never even dream of attempting this."

"That is why I'm going alone, Madam Lovegood," Harriet said nervously. "I can handle it."

"She'll be alright, Mum," Luneth added. "Harriet can fly like no witch in living memory."

Harriet ducked her head, but couldn't protest the compliment. A lot of magic-users could levitate, but Harriet did more than just overcome gravity with telekinesis. She instinctively understood spacial motion and aerodynamics at such an intuitive level that compared to most others she was like a fighter jet next to a hot air balloon.

"Please step into the circle and prepare yourself, Miss Potter," Madam Harkness said.

Lifting into the air, Harriet floated into the center of the circle. Each of the matriarchs took position at a point of the pentagram. Harriet gracefully twisted around in the air until she was almost upside-down, and straightened her body in a superman pose. She focused on her breathing, keeping it steady.

As one, Madam Harkness the Lady Aether, Madam Lovegood the Lady Sky, Madam Black the Lady Sea, Madam Bones the Lady Land, and Madam Longbottom the Lady Fire, slowly raised their hands up. The glowing sand rained upwards, forming ethereal walls around Harriet.

For a moment, all was silence but the sound of Harriet's controlled breathing, and then five voices incanted, "Discede!"

With crash like thunder, Harriet was suddenly high in the clouds, rocketing down towards the Pacific Ocean. With a sonic boom, she swooped out of the dive and skimmed over the waves, leaving a wall of spray in her wake as she grinned in fierce delight.

After pulling a mile-high corkscrew just for the heck of it, Harriet slowed until it was safe to pull out and check her GPS. Once she had her bearings, she tucked it back into her pocket and shot off towards the coast, straining to punch through the sound barrier once more.

The barrista watched as the blonde air force Major sipped her coffee and chatted with the man sitting at her table. She didn't know why the woman at the table was important, and she didn't know what the small metallic objects she'd been given were for, but the instructions were not something she dared to question.
So, when she brought the woman's pastry out to the table, she palmed the little grey blocks and slipped them into the blonde woman's coat pocket. With the job done, she slipped into the back to calm her nerves.

Meanwhile, Samantha Carter was apologizing to her boyfriend Pete for canceling their weekend. "We're looking to be proactive on this one. This threat, it's big, Pete."

Pete just shook his head and gave her a smile. "I get it. I do. You go save the galaxy."

"Thanks, Pete," Samantha said.

The chirping of her phone interrupted the moment, and Samantha checked the message. "Speaking of which. Duty calls."

Everyone and their cat liked to joke about how flimsy the SGC's cover of Deep Space Radar Telemetry was, but ironically, that was something the SGC actually did, even if it was a small part of their operation.

However, while at least two of the relay probes were well within detection range, those radar systems saw nothing.

The Fae spacecraft gleamed like pearls in the visible spectrum, but in the radar range, as in most of the electromagnetic spectrum outside the visible band, the hull drank in light like a photovoltaic black hole. At the same time, the probe ships caused not even the barest ripple in subspace, since Willow-rhom was building the transporter systems on the Eliezer before distributing them.

The millions upon millions of mirrors now orbiting the sun focused that energy, tracking the relay probes, feeding them many hundreds of times the solar radiation objects their size would have caught unaided. It was a trickle compared to the quantities of energy each probe ship was capable of storing, but it was more than enough to run an Asgard transporter system continuously.

Thor, on the other hand, did detect the relay probes moving into their orbit, but such was not his concern, especially when he had a cargo hold filled with tens of thousands of the birthing pod seeds, and a home planet struggling to clone bodies fast enough to keep everyone alive.

"Would I be correct in my inference that you do not wish the SGC to know that the upgrade is among your capabilities?" Thor asked Willow-icos.

Willow shrugged. "We're not hiding it from them. We're just... not mentioning it until we need to."

"I see," Thor said. "I would prefer not to lie to those who have been staunch allies, about the origin of my new body, however."

"I wouldn't ask you to," Willow assured him. "They were going to find out sooner or later."

Thor nodded. "In any case, that is not an immediate concern. I must return to Orilla as soon as possible."

"Okay," Willow said. "It was nice to meet you, Thor."

"You as well, Willow Rin," Thor agreed. "I shall return as soon as I am able, to work with both the SGC and yourselves, and take the fight to the Replicators."

Willow beamed away, and Thor took the Daniel Jackson into hyperspace.
"Oh shit oh shit!" Kumiko cried, damning Oriko. "Bad idea! This was bad idea!"

Waxy white skin, glowing blue veins, and wings of blue flame. In demon form, Irisviel was still beautiful in her own way, at least when she wasn't hurling fireballs at you, her face a cold scowl of motherly rage.

Kumiko darted through the treetops above the abandoned mountain temple where they'd chosen to hide with their kidnap victim. She thrust a hand forward, redirecting the heat from the fireball down into the trees. Leaves wilted and smoldered as Kumiko hurled herself sideways through the air.

Irisviel circled and closed with her again, launching bright threads of blue fire from her fingertips. The threads snapped through the air, slicing at Kumiko, but the gothy witch yanked a small glowing ampoule from her sleeve and threw it hard. The glass shattered on Irisviel's fire-threads, spilling the glowing liquid into the air.

"Break!" Kumiko roared.

With a sharp flash of gold, all active magic in the immediate vicinity was swept away. The veela's fire threads dissolved into dying embers as her wings were eroded away. The backlash knocked Kumiko loose from her telekinetic hold on herself, but since it was just telekinesis she only fell half a meter before she caught herself.

Irisviel fell a lot further, but the veela's wings still flared back into being before she hit the ground. Kumiko took the short reprieve to duck into the boughs of a tree and check her pockets. She swore silently when she realized that had been her last Dispel.

An explosion down on the temple grounds made her flinch. Gritting her teeth, Kumiko launched herself out of the tree and flew towards the other sounds of fighting.

Oriko was dodging bullets.

Kiritsugu Emiya and the orange-haired Potential called Shiroko were wearing Oriko down from two sides. Shiroko's twin dadao fell with brutal speed and precision, deflecting off Oriko's steel quarterstaff with a shower of sparks, then she leaped back and Kiritsugu blurred across the paving stones faster than Oriko could track and fired cursed rounds from his revolver.

Oriko was sweating under the strain of fighting Shiroko and constantly looking a few seconds into the future to avoid the Magus Killer's shots.

Just as Kiritsugu was lining up another shot, Kumiko swooped down from the sky, throwing an ampoule and crying, "Blind!"

The glass shattered on the ground, and wisps of darkness like black veins made of smoke exploded outwards, turning the air around Kiritsugu completely opaque.

Oriko dodged a swing of Shiroko's blade, and leaped back, flinging a loose brick at the back of Shiroko's head with her telekinesis. Shiroko somehow sensed it and spun out of the way. Oriko drove her staff forward in a jab, catching Shiroko in the ribs, but the Potential rolled with the blow and kicked Oriko's staff up, leaving her open for a backhanded slice.

Rather than gutting Oriko, the dadao clanged against the crystalline red glow of the shield Kumiko had willed into being. The shield blunted the edge, but Kiritsugu came blurring out of the dome of darkness and smashed a fist into Kumiko jaw, knocking her clear across the grounds with a crunch of breaking bone. Unsupported, the shield smashed into Oriko's gut with nearly the full force of
Shiroko's blow, knocking the wind out of her, before dissolving away.

Demonstrating that she did in fact have the badassery to back up her big talk, Kumiko forced the pieces of her cracked jaw back into place with telekinesis and began to incant a healing spell before she even stopped skidding across the ground.

Oriko, on the other hand, was gasping for breath and not Seeing anything at all. Kiritsugu shot her. The cursed bullet pierced her chest in a spray of blood before detonating inside her body. Oriko's entire right arm and half her torso withered, like the flesh was both rapidly aging and being cooked from within at the same time.

Shiroko stood over the fallen seer, while Kiritsugu turned and aimed at Kumiko. That was also when Irisviel flew out of the trees to rejoin her husband. She alighted next to him, her wings of blue fire flaring in a display of threat.

Kumiko acted a split second before he fired, because she was watching for it, and somehow, incredibly, she managed to catch the bullets in her telekinesis. She would have been gloating about her own awesomeness, but after watching Oriko go down like that she wasn't in the mood. Not even a little.

"Viata pentru putere!" Kumiko cast, slamming a hand flat on the ground. "Putere de razbunare!"

Under Kumiko's hand, the grass and scrub and insects died, wilting and decaying in an ever expanding circle, sacrificed in exchange for strength. Her eyes were swallowed by dark eldritch voids, and black veins crept across her face.

Kiritsugu blurred, reloading his gun impossibly fast, but Kumiko was faster. She lunged into the air, tainted lightning flying from her hands. Kiritsugu and Irisviel dove out of the way, but Shiroko charged, swords raised. Kumiko blasted the girl and she collapsed, screaming in pain.

Oriko's body levitated into Kumiko's arms as the dark witch unleashed her power and teleported away.

For a moment, there was silence broken only by Shiroko's groans, and the soft crackle of Irisviel's wings, but then a young boy's disbelieving voice asked, "Mom?"

Irisviel whirled around and winced as Illyan crawled out of his hiding spot and stood up. Irisviel's wings of blue fire shrunk into nothing, and her flesh rippled, changing from waxy white translucence with glowing blue veins to her more familiar ordinary fair tone.

Kiritsugu went to help Shiroko up and make sure she was alright, while Irisviel put on a strained smile.

"Well, sweetie," Irisviel said, chuckling sheepishly. "I guess Mommy and Daddy have some explaining to do."

Chief Walter nodded to Sergeant Siler as he refilled his coffee. He replaced the pot, only for the light to suddenly go out, plunging them into darkness. A moment later, the sound of the Stargate dialing filled the darkness.

"That's probably not good," Walter said.

By the dim flickering light of the Stargate, Siler rushed over to the Panic Button and slammed it. Nothing happened.
"That is definitely not good," Walter said, drawing his sidearm.

The battery-powered emergency lights came on, restoring at least some visibility, which was good, because the Stargate shut down moments later. Walter and Siler crept back into the control room, only to find a Replicator on the console.

"Holy fu - " Walter fired, blowing the Replicator to pieces and wrecking a monitor.

After securing the room, Siler checked the blast doors. "All the doors are sealed!"

"I've got no control over anything," Walter said, fiddling with the dead console.

And then it got worse. The Stargate came to life again, as someone else dialed in. Walter and Siler shared a look.

"I can't close the iris," Walter said numbly.

With a great kawoosh, the Stargate opened, and Replicators poured into an unguarded gateroom. Once hundreds of the mechanical bugs were swarming the gateroom, a young man with dark curly hair stepped out of the Stargate and strode down the ramp without hesitation.

The blast door opened for him, and the marines who'd been trapped on the other side opened fire, but the humanform Replicator just ignored the bullets. His hands morphed into long silvery blades, and he cut down the marines without hesitation, the bug Replicators following in his wake.

Walter and Siler pulled the panels off the control room consoles and started fiddling, trying to get some kind of control back, but a few minutes later, the curly haired man returned with an unconscious body in his arms.

"Oh god, that's Major Carter," Walter whispered.

"Chief!" Siler shouted, pulling his gun.

The bug Replicators swarmed into the control room, and the last thing Walter saw was a flash of metal leaping at his face. Acid burned his eyes out and he couldn't even scream as he was dragged down.

Kumiko set Oriko down on a random rooftop somewhere in Tokyo as the eldritch darkness bled out of her eyes and she sank down next to the other girl, exhausted. She took a look at Oriko's arm and winced.

"Damn that's nasty," Kumiko opined.

Oriko groaned. "Hurts... quite a lot... too. I've only... got a few minutes... before it kills me."

Kumiko felt the sting of tears in her eyes. "This is completely your fault, you know."

Oriko somehow found the strength to smile. "Had to try."

"But we failed!" Kumiko wailed. "You said two days... it hasn't even been one! You're dying for nothing!"

Oriko shook her head. "I can See. My future isn't oblivion. It'll be okay. This world... will die... but its people... will live on."
With that, Oriko went still, and Kumiko stared, slackjawed. "Wait. Wait! You can't just... what am I suppose to do?"

There was no answer from the seer.

Some time later, Kumiko would be startled out of her numb slump by a strange electric whine that split the air, followed by Oriko's body vanishing in a brilliant flash of white.

It was done.

Willow-rhom flipped the metaphorical switch, and the brand new transporter system in each of the relay probes came to life, working in concert with the solar-system-wide whole. For a moment, she just absorbed the enormity of what she'd just enacted.

"Shouldn't we say something?" Willow-kink wondered.

"Yeah..." Willow-rhom trailed off. "Um..."

"Um..." Willow-kink echoed her. "We'll think of something while we celebrate?"

Willow-rhom nodded. "We can have a historical moment after we gangbang Xander."

"Oh absolutely," Willow-kink agreed with herself, nodding sagely.

A private plane touched down in California, and a short while later Kiritsugu and Irisviel were walking the streets of Sunnydale. They were acosted several times, but more than one vampire learned the hard way that Irisviel could light herself on fire at will.

Irisviel's tracking spell led them through the small town to a house in the suburbs, where, much to the couple's surprise, their target was in plain sight. The young witch they'd been sent to assassinate was floating in mid air near one of the of the upper-floor windows, wild black hair drifting around her head, which was tilted to one side with her mouth slack in an expression of shock.

Harriet, meanwhile, with the parts of her brain that hadn't gone on strike, was reflecting on the term Head-Tiltingly Kinky and how she'd always thought it was just a figure of speech. It was a testament to her talent that she hadn't fallen out of the air like a rock when she'd accidentally laid eyes on the scene in front of her.

On the other side of the glass, a muscually svelte brunette guy was flat on the bed, with four identical redheads. Well, three of them were identical. The one riding his cock had breasts twice the size of the others and seemed to be lactating. Two of them were kneeling on either side of the guy, and each had one of the guy's arms buried to the wrist in their sex while they licked and sucked at the lactating quadruplet's nipples. The last of the four identical redheads squirmed on top of the guy's face, while eagerly fellating a phallic toy that somehow perfectly matched the tone and texture of the guy's skin.

Harriet recognized them as the so-called 'star fairies' from Luneth's vision, so at least she had the right place, but... !

When reflexes honed throughout an entire adolescence of dealing with Thomas Riddle's attempts to kill her warned her of danger, she was almost relieved.
"The Fae still aren't responding, sir," Lieutenant Hailey reported.

Jack O'Neill restrained a growl. Shit was hitting every possible fan and the terrific troublesome temerarious trio was nowhere to be seen. He headed up to Weir's office.

Teal'c radioed in. "O'Neill. I believe the last of the Replicators have been eliminated."

"Nice," Jack replied. "Carter?"

"Still missing, along with a number of other personnel," Teal'c said.

"Jack!" came a shout, heralding Daniel.

Weir looked up from her desk as Daniel caught up to Jack at the doorway.

"I thought you were helping with the wounded?" Jack asked.

"I was," Daniel panted. "It's the dead. They're missing. Someone's beaming out our casualties."


Daniel caught his breath. "I was healing Colonel Reynolds, but he died before it did any good. Moments later his body was beamed out. Then the same thing happened when Bosworth bled out. About a minute after his vitals went flat, his body was beamed out as well. So I asked around, and people were seeing the same thing all over the base."

Weir frowned. "Who would do this? Could it be the Asgard?"

"Not unless Thor lied in his last message," Daniel said.

"It has to be the Fae, right?" Jack put in. "Why else would they have chosen now of all times to give us the silent treatment?"

"We shouldn't jump to conclusions, Jack," Daniel hedged.

Weir stood up, looking thoughtful. "Be it the Fae or an unknown party, what could their motivation possibly be?"

"Well," Daniel drawled awkwardly. "It's probably a bad idea to speculate before we know more."

Just then, the red phone rang. Weir held up a hand to silence Jack and answered. She exchanged a few words, and then paled visibly. After a few words of affirmation she hung up.

"That was General Hammond at Homeworld Security," Weir informed them, sounding stunned. "They're correlating reports from hospitals, mortuaries, and nursing homes all over the world. Whoever's taking our deceased, they're not just doing it here. It's happening everywhere. We're in the midst of an ongoing international security breach."

The Willows were more than a little put out when a sudden explosion obliterated the outer wall of her bedroom, sent a smoldering girl in a green jacket crashing into her closet, and thoroughly interrupted her Xander time.

The strange girl stumbled to her feet just in time to throw up a glowing white hand. With the boom of a gunshot, something detonated against luminescent air in front of the girl, producing another explosion and blowing the girl through two more walls.
A grim-faced man in a black trenchcoat leaped from the ground below and through the destroyed wall into Willow's room, while something unseen flew over the house and cast the backdrop of his entrance in an eerie blue light. He didn't even blink at the nude Xander and Willows.

Xander sprang, attempting to tackle the man, but Trenchcoat blurred forward with impossible speed, his movements like a video on fast-forward, and Xander went sailing out into the yard. The two closest Willows lashed out magnetically, finding just enough metal to trip him up. He went crashing into the hallway, skidding along the carpet as his gun was ripped from his fingers, but he rolled to his feet... right into a blast of green light from the staggering girl, who somehow had a pair of round glasses undisturbed on her face.

Yet another wall suffered the consequences as Trenchcoat was thrown clear of the house.

Before he could slam into the street, a woman with wings of blue fire swooped down and caught him, but she cried out and almost dropped him as his trenchcoat fractured like glass and the jagged shards cut into her arms.

The four Willows jumped down to the grass to help as Xander parkoured off the wall of her house and caught the flying glasses girl around the waist. The Willows sprinted passed and dogpiled Trenchcoat and the winged woman, delivering an incapacitating electric current as they did.

When Buffy and Kendra showed up, it was to find two pairs of nude Willows carrying an unconscious and bleeding man in black, and an albino woman in white who was in a similar state, into her damaged house. Xander was likewise carrying an unconscious petite girl in a green windbreaker and black jeans.

"What's going on?" Buffy asked.

Harriet woke up feeling like one solid bruise. Groaning, she was also pretty sure she recognized the pain of at least one cracked rib. She blearily raised her head and jumped in surprise when she saw the very cute and totally starkers red-haired girl leaning over her from behind the sofa she was laying on.

It was one of the star fairies.

Harriet sat up, and the redhead kept an implacable grip on Harriet's shoulders. Harriet stiffened when she saw the man with the gun and the winged woman sitting across from her, but they both had one of the redheads gripping their shoulders.

The naked boy was off to the side, Harriet noted with a blush, along with two other girls who were thankfully clothed, though in the case of the blonde Harriet recognized from Luneth's vision, only barely. The girl she didn't recognize also seemed to be the only one in the room who was as obviously uncomfortable with all the nudity as Harriet was.

"Alright," the fourth and final redhead said, folding her arms under her bare breasts. "Who are you people, and what makes you think it was a good idea to go and blow big smoking holes in my parent's house?"

Harriet seized the chance to explain. "My name is Harriet Potter. I'm a witch with the Devon Coven. My boyfriend is a powerful seer, and he had a vision of the 'star fairies' being attacked by soldiers. I, er, recognize you from the vision, so if you are these star fairies, then I'm here to warn you."

"Star fairies?" the blonde repeated in an amused tone.
"We call ourselves Fae," the redhead corrected. "You saw us being attacked by soldiers?" She glanced at the couple on the other sofa. "They don't look like soldiers."

The man remained expressionless, though his teeth ground a little as milk from the breasts of the redhead holding his shoulders dribbled into his hair. Going by the smirk on her face, Harriet suspected she was doing that on purpose.

Blushing, Harriet shook her head. "I didn't see them. They're... I've got no idea, honestly."

Just then the albino woman squeaked and jerked as though mildly electrocuted.

"Stop that," the redhead holding her shoulders scolded. "No magicking your way out of this until we're done."

The woman, though unharmed, looked a lot more worried than she had a moment before. She glanced at her partner, and his eyes widened infinitesimally before he got his expression under control.

The standing redhead turned to the couple. "Well, what do you have to say for yourselves for wrecking my parent's house and trying to kill Harriet over there?"

The question got only silence from the pair.

"His name is Kiritsugu Emiya," a new voice interrupted as a distinguished man in tweed came in through the front. "He works for... good lord, why are you all naked?"

The blonde rolled her eyes. "Is that really important right now, Giles?"

The man, Giles, shook his head and began to speak again, only once more falter as he noticed the four identical redheads. "Willow... why are there four of you?"

The four Willows answered in quadraphonic. "We are the Willow. We conquer problems of ingenuity that no one Willow could alone. We have brought our might to bear against nature's evils, and wrought an end to the mortal coil." The Willows all smiled perkily. "Also, we love Xanders and hate frogs."

"Er..." Harriet said.

"Dat was creepy."

Most of the room seemed to agree, but the albino woman just smiled and held up a scorecard with "8.9" on it. The hell? Where had she gotten that?

The standing Willow blinked and murmured a soft, "Uh oh."

A moment later, the other Willows, the blonde, and Xander, all winced for some reason. Willow hurried out of the room, and the blonde took her place in the center of things.

"So, Giles, you were saying?" the blonde prompted. "He works for who?"

Giles stopped gawping and polished his glasses. "Right. As I said, his name is Kiritsugu Emiya and I presume this is his wife, Irisviel of the northern Germany veela clan." Giles put his glasses back on and gave Kiritsugu a hard look. "He is a Watcher."

Willow-para winced as Jack's scowl appeared on the subspace radio channel. After he explained that
the Replicators’ attack was already over, he demanded to know if the Fae had anything to do with all the missing bodies.

"Yeah, that's us," Willow admitted, and proceeded to explain about the upgrade, and the automated process that she had created to ensure that anyone who died on Earth would have a chance to live on as Fae.

"Do you have any idea what you've done?" Jack finally exploded.

"Saved fourteen thousand lives and counting?" Willow countered.

"Which is great and all, I'll admit," Jack growled. "But do you have any idea of the shitstorm you're kicking up? Those are our people you've snatched up!"

Willow scoffed. "So what, if you can't save them yourself, it's better if they die?"

"Of course not," Jack said. "But you can't just go Faieify people unilaterally. Especially not civilians who have no idea that we're not alone in the universe!"

"Your governments have no right to expect the peoples of your nations to die for your petty secrets," Willow told him sternly.

"Petty!" Jack exclaimed. "Bodies are vanishing in mysterious flashes of light all over the world! How are we supposed to cover that up?"

"Don't," Willow said bluntly. "In case you haven't noticed, this doesn't actually involve the Stargate in any way what so ever."

Jack pinched his eyebrow and visibly calmed himself. "What was it you said? Back when the NID pulled that stunt of theirs? Oh yeah. If our people are not returned to us when we ask, we'll destroy anything between us and them. That's already the way things are heading, Willow."

"The system sends everyone to be reborn somewhere where spaceships literally grow on trees, Jack," Willow told him. "If anyone wants to return to Earth, I'm not going to get in their way."

"And what happens when those people start talking about where they've been?" Jack demanded.

"That really isn't my problem, Jack," Willow said. "If you want to hate us for spoiling your little status quo, well, we feel that preventing loss of life on a planetary scale is worth more than you liking us. Now listen. I'm sending you some information for your sciency types. Hopefully it will set your minds at ease about the people who come back as Fae still being the same people."

George Hammond had a headache. A lot of very powerful men were in the process of panicking like, well, like control over the world's biggest secret, alien contact, was slipping through their fingers. There was a lot of shouting and the shuffling of blame, as the abduction of the world's recently deceased threatened to out the existence of aliens to the population at large.

"... it's really quite incredible," the scientist who'd drawn the short straw explained. "If this information is accurate then what we're looking at is a mathematical proof based on a comprehensive theory of mind, showing a seamless continuity of personality through the described process."

The man Hammond imagined Jack would have dubbed 'Kinsey Lite' planted his hands on the table. "Even assuming that's it's possible to prove something like that, and these Fae creatures aren't soulless abominations, then that just proves my point. Our very fate as a species rests in the hands of
an alien power. We cannot allow this 'salvation system' to remain under foreign control."

"I agree," said one of the other generals. "The masses will panic. We're quickly losing the battle to keep this out of the news. These aliens cannot be allowed to flout the public good so blatantly."

"We need a plan of action, gentlemen."

Hammond listened with resignation as the Fae’s status was slowly but surely warped from uneasy ally, to enemy, and went down from there. He added his own moderate words where he could, but he wasn’t sure what the right course of action was either.

Giles hung up the phone, muttering about bloody pillocks. "It seems that your orders were based solely on the word of a rather unreliable seer, Mr. Emiya."

Kiritsugu frowned thoughtfully. "There are too many seers involved in this. The girl who kidnapped my son on the morning of this assignment. The woman who provided the target. The target’s boyfriend... We're being played. Someone or something is pulling strings. Someone or something with enough power and foresight to use seers as pawns."

Buffy grimaced. "Something that can trick a bunch of people who can see the future? That sounds like a world of bad."

"Why though?" Xander wondered. "Who benefits from this mess?"

Giles, who had resorted to cleaning his glasses even more than usual in response to all of the nude Willow on display, said, "Perhaps we will be able to determine that if we can deduce the original point of interference. In essence, what would each of the involved parties have been doing instead had the visions not occurred?"

There was a thoughtful silence.

"It sounds like this all started with Harriet," Willow-icos said, looking down at the girl she was guarding.

"What else is new," Harriet muttered under her breath.

"You weren't doing anything until your boyfriend had his vision, right?" Willow-icos asked.

Harriet nodded. "Nothing important."

"So, let's start there," Willow-icos said. "What did he see? And could it have come to pass if he hadn't seen it?"

Oz sailed over Sunnydale, bounding from steelpush to steelpush in wide sweeping arcs. Her mistcloak fluttered behind her, eerily silent even to her tin-enhanced senses, and with the strength of pewter in her flesh the cold bite of winter air was barely even uncomfortable.

She had a bag of pennies secured to her belt, but she hadn't needed them yet. There was a lot of metal used in the construction of a modern town. Unlike in the cities in Vin's memories, it was everywhere. Especially since, Oz had quickly realized, allomancy wasn't anything like magnetism. For one, steelpushing and ironpulling worked equally well on all metals, not just ferromagnetic metals. Even stranger, the force of a steelpush or ironpull decreased linearly with distance, rather than following the inverse square law.
Oz ironpulled on a streetlight to change course, briefly shooting down to street level before steelpushing off a manhole cover and rocketing back into the sky.

Drifting on a ballistic trajectory, Oz took a moment to enjoy the view, flaring her tin until the night was as bright as day.

Oz narrowed her eyes as she spotted something on a rooftop. It almost looked like a military sniper team. They seemed to be looking through some kind of thermal scope rather than an actual weapon but... wait, was that Willow’s house? That was Willow’s house.

Keeping her tin flared, Oz landed silently and crept up on the soldier guys.

The lead soldier picked up a military satellite phone. "Finn to Hammond. We’ve located the targets. Seven Fae. Four human probable. Area is clear of civilian witnesses. You are clear to engage."

"Copy that," came the reply. "Strike team is moving in now."

A strange electric whine split the air as Willow's house was surrounded by a ring of white light.

Chapter End Notes

(Oriko Mikuni is from a spinoff manga of Madoka Magica.)

(Harriet Potter and friends, are of course based on their counterparts in JK Rowling's universe. Why fem!Harry? 'cause there needs to be more of that, and it just fits. BtVS and Lyrical Nanoha both seemed to always have a disproportionately number of girls as the most powerful magic-users, so I'm running with that. male!Luna because... I don't think I've ever seen that before. Ever. Even in one fic where the premise was that "Harry goes to an alternate reality where everybody is the opposite gender" that ended up being "everybody except Luna".)

(Kiritsugu Emiya and family are based on their counterparts in the Nasuverse; the Prisma Illya versions more than the others. Why fem!Shirou? Because, come on, Shirou was born to be a Slayer. male!Illya just to keep the balance. buffyverse!veela!Irisviel to kinda reconcile all the settings.)

(I am never writing seer vs. seer again. I need to rest my brain. Ow.)
New Order

Chapter Notes

(Previously, on Stargate SG-1... you may want to refresh your memory of the episode, Unnatural Selection.)

New Order

One moment, the scoobies were puzzling over who or what might have manipulated events to set the Watcher's Council against the Devon Coven, or if that was even the aim at all. The next moment, white light streamed in through the windows and ragged holes Harriet and Kiritsugu's fight had ripped out of the house.

Men in black body armor suddenly surrounded Willow's house, and they barely waited for the light of their transport to fade before they aimed their rifles at those within.

Willow-kink didn't bother to dodge out of the way. It wasn't like bullets could hurt her. But it wasn't a bullet that hit her. With sharp hisses of air, the soldier's rifle fired a little blinking dart that latched onto her skin and stuck, and as soon as it did Willow-kink was enveloped in white light and beamed away.

Transponders.

"Willow! Beam everybody out, now!" Buffy ordered as she vaulted over Kiritsugu and Irisviel, her Utility Cloud swatting darts out of the air.

Forewarned, the other Willows closed ranks in front of Giles and Kendra, likewise using their Utility Clouds to block the darts before they could land. Willow-icos sent the mental command screaming up to the Eliezer.

Kiritsugu was off the couch and dodging with impossible speed before Buffy got her first syllable out. He snatched the dart rifle out of the nearest soldier's hands and swung it like a club. The weapon shattered as it smashed into the next soldier's tactical helmet, knocking him clear off his feet and into a third soldier.

A half-dozen darts hung in the air in front of Harriet, but another soldier coming from the other side of the house put a dart in her back. Blue fire incinerated a handful of darts, but Irisviel was low on power, and one made it through.

Giles and Kendra vanished in a flash of light as Willow-icos beamed them into the high school library. Irisviel and Harriet vanished in a flash of light as the transponders provided a lock for their assailants and beamed them into the metallic grey cell where Willow-kink was waiting.

Willow had a slightly hysterical moment, contemplating that this was not what the term Beam-O-War meant, at all, and she would have much preferred the traditional interpretation. She was frantically trying to get a transporter lock on Kiritsugu, but there was some kind of temporal distortion around
him that prevented it, and while she was actively targeting the system, Willow-kink couldn't use it to escape with Irisviel and Harriet.

Fortunately, as Willow-icos regretfully engaged the transporter, Kiritsugu suddenly appeared at her side and latched onto her arm. The three Willows, Buffy, Xander, and Kiritsugu escaped in a flash of white.

Oz streaked towards Willow's house like a Vin-shaped bullet, only to watch three identical Willows along with Buffy, Xander, and some guy he didn't know, all vanish the same way the soldier guys arrived. Oz aborted, steelpushing hard and shooting away. She glanced back curiously, wondering what the story behind all that had been.

Willow-kink immediately took control of the Eliezera’s transporter, seeing through the starship's senses that she was somewhere inside the Prometheus in high orbit. She used her Dreamlink to target the transporter, but it was already too late. A shell of n-dimensional spacial interference glimmered into being around the Prometheus, creating a region of space where the transporter couldn't reach.

"Dang it," Willow complained. "They raised shields. I can't beam us out."

"Beam us out?" Harriet repeated faintly. "Does that mean they just beamed us up?"

Irisviel was slumped against one wall of the brightly lit grey metal cell, and her eyes widened as she made a connection. "The Travelers."

Willow briefly contemplated just blasting the Prometheus with the Eliezera's stardrive, but she had no idea how strong the shields were, and she knew the Air Force ship was a lot more agile than her generation ship. If she guessed low, they'd just fly out of sight. If she guessed high, she'd kill everyone on the ship except her, most likely including her fellow prisoners.

The shuttles? With enough of them, she might be able to carefully hound the Prometheus until its shields failed, but she couldn't directly control more than one shuttle at a time, and even if she could they'd probably just jump into hyperspace.

Buffy held on to Kiritsugu so he wouldn't float away in the weightless environment. "Hey, wait. Wills! He's human!"

The Willows all got wide-eyed and Willow-icos said, "Oh no, you're right, Buffy! Um, mister, do you have any spells to shield yourself from radiation?"

Kiritsugu blinked. "No. Why?"

" Crud, " Willow-icos answered. "We need to get you out of here in the next couple of minutes if you want to stay a healthy human. You're getting a serious dose of radiation from our ship's fusion core right now."

"I would normally recommend the other option, ' Willow-para added. "Take the upgrade and become Fae like us, but we just don't have time for that. I think we're gonna need your help, and besides they got your wife, too. She's alright by the way. I'm still in contact with my other self, and she's with me."

Kiritsugu frowned, processing that. "Where are they?"
Willow-rhom waved a hand, and the faintest of threads sprang out of the ground, forming a frame. The frame filled with a very high definition image of the Eliezer in space, then the image zoomed in on the boxy grey shape of the Prometheus.

Kiritsugu stared for a long moment. "Well fuck."

"I think they were trying to take all of us at once," Buffy considered. "They were clearly trying to take us by surprise, and they knew what they were doing. Even so, they only got one of us. They... oh crap!"

"What is it, Buffy?" Xander asked.

"They know about our Sunnydale lives. What if they find my mom?" Buffy exclaimed. "We've got to move her before they find her."

Buffy whirled, and between one step and the next, she beamed herself down to her house. Her departure seemed to shake Kiritsugu out of his stunned state, and he pulled his feet under him, using telekinesis to hold himself against the odd squishy not-grass.

"Iris and the Potter girl can both fly," Kiritsugu commented. "If we can draw that ship down into the atmosphere, they can rip it apart from the inside and escape."

"That shouldn't be too hard," Willow-icos mused. "As far as I've been able to find, they only have the one ship so far, so if we can figure out something to force them to bring in a ship, it'll have to be that ship."

Kiritsugu suddenly went still. "These are the people who operate a portal to other worlds out of Colorado, correct?"

The Willows nodded. "The Stargate."

"I know what to do," Kiritsugu said. "Can you send me to Westbury?"

"You mean to Harriet's coven?" Willow-para asked with a confused frown. "Yeah, why?"

"The simplest way to manipulate an enemy is to present them with a foe they expect, concealing the foe they don't," Kiritsugu said. "We will need the coven's power for an illusory conjuration of that magnitude."

"I'll go with you," Willow-para offered, stepping back and pulling clothes out of the ground. "I've seen enough of the Goa'uld to make sure the trick is convincing."

Willow-para quickly fastened the green pleated skirt around her hips, and pulled the black t-shirt over her head. Barefoot and without underwear, the token clothing was really only there to make her inconspicuous from a distance. Grabbing Kiritsugu's arm, she targeted the correct location and activated the transporter.

Private Dixon swore as yet another sawblade wore down to a nub. Judging by the smells coming off the motor, that was about burn out again too. Dixon glared at the creepy flesh-like demonic pod thing his squad had been ordered to recover after Finn's squad had discovered it by accident while tracking a group of foreign insurgents for the sake of inter-agency cooperation.

"Hurry it up, Dix," Private Stavros urged tensely as he arranged the heavy straps they'd run through the basement window to the hitch on their humvee.
Dixon changed the sawblade yet again. "I'm goin' as fast as I can. Damn thing makes kevlar look like cardboard, and it's freaking healing every time I have to stop and put a new blade on!"

The other members of their squad didn't comment, as they were busy weakening the wall they were planning on hauling the pod through. Dixon knelt back down and resumed trying to cut through the base of the pod thing, only for the air of the basement to be split by an electric whine.

Needless to say, the squad of young men were more than a little staggered by the naked blonde girl suddenly appearing in their midst.

Buffy took one look at the scene in front of her and flew into a rage.

All at once the army guys burst into motion. The guy trying to cut down her mom's pod swung at her with the saw, but she blocked it with her arm. The sawteeth caught on her skin and jammed, sparks erupting from the powertool as its motor failed.

An electric blast hit Buffy in the back, to absolutely no effect. Buffy punched the saw guy, her fist breaking through ribs and organs with an explosion of blood, and grabbed him by his spine. She hurled him with all her strength at the guy with the blaster, his scream cutting off abruptly as the impact threw both men into the wall hard enough to break a dozen bones.

Another two guys came at her with tactical batons. Buffy ducked the first swing, and caught the second, ripping the baton out of the army guy's hand and ramming it through the other guy's neck. A spinning back kick shattered the first guy's jaw and sent him crashing into the same wall that already had a pile of bodies under it.

That took care of everyone in the basement, but Buffy could hear movement outside. Her eyes followed the heavy straps that were running up and out the basement window, and she leaped.

In a slayer-worthy feat of precision, Buffy dived through the tiny window and rolled to her feet. An electrical blast hit her, once more doing nothing. There were only two guys left, and Buffy snapped out her slayer-enhanced Utility Cloud, guiding a massive electrical discharge right into the two soldiers, boiling their innards until they both exploded like a cat in a microwave oven.

Buffy flinched, her rage cooling as steaming entrails rained down on her lawn. Apparently her electrical capacity was slayer-enhanced too, because that really shouldn't have happened. Ick.

The soldiers' heads were intact, even so, so Buffy just shuddered at all the gore and shrugged it off. Behind her, flashes of white were taking the soldiers she'd killed in the basement.

Buffy slid back in through the window, shards of broken glass snagging on her bare butt and raining to the floor in her wake. She took a moment to sweep her Utility Cloud down her body and through her hair, cleaning off all the blood and guts.

Once she was clean, she checked on her mom. The minor damage to the birthing pod was already halfway healed. Buffy breathed a sigh of relief.

Racing up the stairs into the house proper, Buffy dashed up to Joyce's room and started throwing clothes into a suitcase.

_They found my mom_, Buffy sent. _I don't know if they identified her, but after I pack for her, can you beam her pod and her car into that cave where Xander stashed Cordelia? I'd do it, but I have a hard enough time targeting the thing for just myself._

_I'm on it_, Willow-icos replied. _Just tell me when._
Buffy zipped the suitcase closed and ran, leaping down the stairs in one jump and dashing into the garage. She yanked the passenger door open, tossed the suitcase onto the driver's seat, and climbed into the passenger seat herself.

_Alright, let's go,_ Buffy sent.

"So I'm guessing we're gonna avoid mentioning just why you were looking for Harriet in the first place?" Willow-para asked as she and Kiritsugu walked up the country lane.

"Most likely," Kiritsugu replied. "Once the greater threat has been dealt with, I will revisit the necessity of my assignment."

The manor at the top of the hill was a stately-looking thing of brick and sandstone. Leafy vines sprawled up the walls, and the outer windows were large frosted glass arches. It was the size of a castle, but it still managed to look more like a residence than a fortress.

Kiritsugu knocked hard on the big oaken doors, waited for a few long moments, then knocked again.

"You're here about Harri, aren't you?" a teenage boy's soft voice inquired from his immediate right.

Kiritsugu did _not_ yelp in surprise, even if his hand did reach for the empty holster on his leg. The boy either didn't notice or didn't care, drifting over to Willow. He was a wispy guy, with a shock of platinum blonde hair and big grey eyes.

"I do hope you'll forgive me," the boy said to Willow. "I am quite excited to meet a star fairy, but I'm sure my Harriet would be upset if I were to greet you in the manner to which your kind are accustomed."

Willow tried not to laugh. "Oh, don't worry. I understand. My name's Willow Rin. You must be Luneth."

"Must I?" Luneth asked with apparently sincere curiosity. "I suppose I am, but I shouldn't think I must be."

"Seers," Kiritsugu sighed under his breath.

"Come with me, please," Luneth requested.

Luneth opened the doors for them and led them inside. He led them across the spacious foyer, passed a pair of staircases going up in opposite directions, and turned into a hallway where he knocked on a seemingly random door.

"Tonks, are you awake yet?" Luneth called.

The only reply was an inarticulate feminine snarl.

"Alright. I'll come back when you are," Luneth replied tranquilly.

Luneth led them back they way they came and into a brightly lit lounge with windows overlooking a wide grassy field.

"If you'd like to wait here, I will ask Madam Harkness to come speak to you," Luneth said.

Kiritsugu shook his head once the boy was gone. "Strange kid."
"I like him," Willow opined.

The cave was a little crowded with two birthing pods and two cars, plus a chunk of basement floor. Buffy leaned against her mom's pod, her hands clenching in frustration.

_Sorry about wrecking the floor, Willow-icos sent. I didn't want to risk disrupting the pod by completely uprooting it, though now that I think about it, I really doubt the pods are that inadaptive._

_What am I going to do? Buffy agonized. I promised her. I promised Mom she could go on living a normal life. How is she going to do that now?_

The glow of the transporter surrounded Buffy and whisked her away. She found herself back on the _Eliezera_ and was quickly enveloped in a Willow hug, two copies of her best friend holding her from either side.

"They had no way of knowing who was in the pod they found," Xander pointed out.

"They know where they found it," Buffy said. "They know who the house belongs to. That will be enough to destroy Mom's life."

Xander joined in the group hug. "So what are we going to do about it?"

Buffy just shook her head a bit brokenly, resting her forehead on the Willows' shoulders. Then, after a moment of bleakness, Buffy's head snapped up, her expression hardening.

"You're right, Xander," Buffy said dangerously. "You're absolutely right. We're going to do something about this."

"Like what?" Willow-icos asked.

"Guys, why are we hiding from the world in the first place?" Buffy asked.

Xander let out a snort of realization. "Because the SGC asked us too."

"The very same SGC that's decided go along with screwing us over," Buffy said. "I don't know about you, but I don't feel like doing any favors for the people who just drove us out of our home, and are probably even now planning on threatening our families."

"So... we just pretend this is first contact?" Willow-rhom asked, Willow-icos adding, "We announce ourselves to the world as if we never met the SGC?"

Buffy nodded. "That's exactly what we do."

"Just a thought, but we could threaten to go public like that, to get them to let Willow-kink and the others go," Xander pointed out.

Willow-icos shook her head. "No, Buffy's right. We can't let this turn into a battle of leverage. They'll go after our families to try to control us. If we want to keep our families safe, we can't keep playing their game. We need to knock the board off the table."

The four Fae exchanged looks.

"So, we're doing this," Xander remarked.

The Willows put on the resolve face, and nodded.
"I'll start distributing catalyst for free-floating display screens and working on putting Thor's shielding know-how to use," Willow-icos announced. "Just 'cause the radiation levels would make beaming soldiers in suicide, doesn't mean they can't beam a nuke in here."

"I'll start working up a guidance program so we can drop a billion birthing pods without destroying anything," Willow-rhom said. "As long as we're announcing ourselves, we might as well provide the upgrade for anyone who doesn't want to wait out their natural lifespan."

"That should keep some scrutiny off Joyce, too," Xander said with a nod.

Both Willows took a turn kissing Buffy and then Xander before they went off to work, leaving the singular scoobies to check in with Kendra and Giles.

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Finally, reality snapped back into focus and Samantha Carter collapsed to the grey floor of replicator blocks, sobbing as the echo of a thousand horrors faded from her senses. She was breaking. There was no point to this, no end goal she could stand up to and resist. Just the vengeful malice of the betrayed.

"Stop it!" Carter begged, choking on her tears. "Please!"

Fifth's hand reformed, silvery tendrils solidifying into skin-toned human fingers. "Why should I?"

"You can't change what happened," Carter choked out, struggling to sit up. "Is this making you feel better? I never intended to abandon you."

"But you did," Fifth said coldly. "You gained my trust, then you used me and left me behind."

"It wasn't my decision," Carter gasped desperately.

"You could have come back for me," Fifth accused.

Carter struggled to meet his eyes through her tears. "There was no time!"

"Time!" Fifth snarled. "Thanks to what you did, I had plenty of time to think about what a fool I was."

"I'm sorry," Carter whimpered. "I'm sorry for what we did to you."

"Yes," Fifth agreed, his voice hard. "You are now."

"Part of being human is having compassion," Carter entreated. "Learning to forgive."

"I know," Fifth told her softly, before his eyes narrowed. "I'm not there yet."

He reached for her head, and Carter flinched, screwing her eyes shut and sobbing in fear at the horror that was to come. But then, instead of the cold ache of nanites burrowing through her forehead, she felt a gentle caress on her face and hair.

With a heaving sob of relief, Carter sagged into Fifth's touch.

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The war room was a mess of argument and finger-pointing. In the wake of the SGC's mostly-failed
attempt to apprehend the Fae in Sunnydale, there was more than a little panic going around. Hells, even the President was looking a little nervous.

"Has there been any sign of retaliation?" President Hayes cut through the din.

"None yet, Mr. President," General Jumper reported. "However, the Fae are not responding to our hails either."

"We've got teams on the ground right now," one of the other generals put in. "We know the aliens have a personal stake in the wellbeing of several individuals in Sunnydale. We need to move quickly to take advantage of that leverage."

"You're suggesting that we use our own citizens as hostages?" General Hammond asked incredulously.

"This is a global threat on an unprecedented scale," another general responded. "Drastic measures - "

"Sirs!" a voice cut through the argument. "The Fae ship is altering its orbit!"

"Altering it how?" President Hayes asked.

"Based on its current trajectory and acceleration?" There was a pause. "It is on course for a low equatorial orbit." The entire room went silent. "A ship that size, at that altitude... It'll be visible to the whole world. It'll be bigger in the sky than the moon."

Jack, Daniel, and Teal'c strode through the spartan grey corridors of the Prometheus, the absence of Carter like a wound in their team, when they didn't know what had happened to her or where she was.

The team minus one arrived at the specially constructed holding cell and filed in. Three occupants were visible through the reinforced bars of trinium alloy. There was no door, and no mechanism. The only way in or out of the cage was the transporter.

Jack took a look at the three people in the cage, and briefly shut his eyes in frustration as the reports were confirmed. He blinked at Willow Rin, or rather, the nude woman who looked exactly like Willow Rin except for having much bigger breasts. Willow was voluptuous to start with, so that was really saying something.

The other two were clothed. An albino woman in her thirties or so, who looked a bit drawn and tired, and a stone-faced teenage girl with visible bruises. In other words, not Fae at all.

What a clusterfuck.

"So," Jack began flippantly. "You Willow's twin sister or something?"

The big-breasted Willow look-a-like leaned back against the grey metal wall and folded her arms under her very big naked breasts, giving Jack a pout. "Or something. But since you people have collectively decided to act like a big doofus and piss on our desperate attempt to stop the horrific and continuous loss of human life that you callously took for granted, I don't think I feel like indulging your curiosity."

"The star fairies will give us a great gift," the wild-haired teenage girl in the green jacket suddenly murmured, "but the content will begrudge the needy, and make the star fairies very angry." She looked up, at the Willow look-a-like and at Jack's team. "Oh goddess, this is what he saw."
"Um, sorry, but what do you mean by that, miss?" Daniel asked.

"She means," the big-breasted Fae cut in, "that we were going to leave Earth alone. We were only going to rescue those already lost to you, from being destroyed by natural decay or from being destroyed by your misguided attempts to 'respect' the dead. We were going to stay out of sight, and let the Earth continue on as it had before, just, you know, without a mortuary industry."

An alert to battle stations blared over the PA system, interrupting Jack's response. "What now?"

"We're keeping our promise," the Willow look-a-like told him. "We're keeping your secret, and pretending like we never encountered Stargate Command."

Daniel's eyes widened in realization. "Jack!"

"I think I probably enjoyed throwing that back in their face a little too much," Willow-kink mused once SG-1 had rushed off.

"Er," Harriet said. "Your friends aren't about to, er, destroy the world or anything, are they?"

Willow-kink pouted. "Of course not. We're trying to save people, so the world comes second, but all we want to do is make things better for the people who were needlessly suffering and dying. But we were only hiding our presence from the public as favor to these putzes."

"Oh," Harriet said, looking queasy.

Irisviel cut in, sounding strange. "You mean to say, you're saving everyone? All over the world?"

Willow-kink nodded resolutely. "Anyone. Anywhere. You die as a human, and my system detects it before your brain loses any of you, and takes you away to get fixed up in a brand new body."

Irisviel stared for a long moment before breaking out into a stunningly bright and sincere smile. "Thank you."

"Bwuh?" Harriet blurted.

Still smiling like a kid on christmas, Irisviel hugged Willow-kink with a girlish squee. "My husband is a superhero, you know. He follows the Path of Asura, weighing all the lives around him and choosing the course that ends in the fewest deaths, no matter what that is. You've realized his dream, and on a scale he never dared imagine. We'll never be able to thank you enough for that."

Kiritsugu and Madam Harkness paused in their planning with the assorted witches and warlocks who'd volunteered, when they noticed the so-called star fairy grinning impishly at the black-clad mercenary.

"What is it?" Kiritsugu asked flatly.

Willow-para shook her head. "I'll let your wife explain when we rescue her."

The bridge crew of the *Prometheus* was tense as they followed the gleaming ovoid of the Fae ship into a dangerously low orbit.

"Still no response to our hails, sir," Lieutenant Marks reported.
"Maintain a parallel course, and maintain battle readiness," Colonel Pendergast ordered.

Major Gant spoke up, "Sir, permission to speak freely?"

Colonel Pendergast gave a sharp nod.

"We all saw what that ship did against Anubis' fleet," she said. "If we're ordered to engage... after what happened on Anubus' flagship, the whole crew knows having the prisoners on board won't protect us."

"Indeed," Teal'c put in from over by the edge of the viewport. "Is it not likely that the only reason Willow Rin's twin is still in our custody, is out of consideration for the lives of the crew of this vessel?"

Jack and Colonel Pendergast shared a scowl.

Willow-kink suddenly perked up. "Harriet. Your coven's finished planning with Irisviel's husband. When it's time, do you think you can do something about these bars?"

Harriet blinked, blushed faintly as she caught herself staring at Willow's enormous chest again, and then nodded, reaching out to grasp a bar. "I think so. There's something about this metal that's mildly magic-resistant, but I think I can still manage a transmutation."

"Okay, what about the door?" Willow asked. "I'm not strong enough to break it down, but I think I can short the alarm pretty easily."

Harriet peered at the door through the bars, and the door creaked in its frame under the force of her telekinesis. "I reckon I could rip it off the hinges if, er, Irisviel softened it up with her fire first."

Willow turned to the veela, who chuckled sheepishly. "Um, actually, I'm kind of low on power right now."

"We have a few hours before Harriet's coven pulls their prank," Willow said. "Will you be rested up enough by then?"

Irisviel winced. "Resting won't do anything for my magic. Um, how much do you two know about veela?"

Harriet shrugged and Willow shook her head.

Irisviel sat up. "Well, veela are kind of like... succubus lite. We don't feed on sex, and we don't harm our human lovers, but the magics of our race are inherently sensual. We form a psychic bond with our lovers during the act, which lasts for days afterward, and we can only use our magic while the bond lasts."

"So your bond ran out?" Willow asked.

"Oh no," Irisviel said brightly. "Kiri and I shagged just this morning. The problem is, veela magic is enabled by the bond, which forms when we cum with a lover, but our power is fueled by ingesting semen, and it only works if we get it straight from the source."

Harriet stared with her mouth hanging half open.

"Ah," Willow said, nodding. "And we're lacking in the way of cocks for you to suck."
Harriet's mouth snapped shut as she struggled to control her blush.

"Precisely," Irisviel said. "Kiri is adamant that if I'm in a dangerous situation without him, I'm to power up however I can, but it's just us in here, and neither of you have the necessary equipment."

Willow made a face, and reluctantly said, "Fae bodies are completely customizable at any time. If you need a penis, I'll have one for you in a couple hours."

Harriet's eyes bugged out behind her glasses. "You can just grow a..."

Willow-kink nodded as she adjusted the appropriate morph setting, and felt her clit begin to ever so slowly swell.

---

The illusion of a farmhouse in Montana was remarkably convincing. As she finished her plate of eggs, Carter wondered if the simulated sensory experiences were being directly inducted or if her subconscious was merely being fed suggestions while her body was kept in sensory deprivation. It seemed too stable to be a hallucination, but there were faint discrepancies in her senses that she wouldn't expect if the illusion was providing complete sensory data.

Carter dragged her attention back to the more immediate problem, keeping her tone neutral. "Thanks. That was great."

Dream-Pete took her plates to the sink.

"Tasted very real," Carter added.

Dream-Pete ignored the comment. "Hey, I was thinking we could go into town tonight. Have dinner. Maybe see a movie."

"Come on," Carter said. "You can't really expect me to just play along."

Dream-Pete suddenly snatched up the frying pan in a fit of anger and threw it at the far wall. "I gave up my job for this! I gave up my life for you!"

Carter shook her head. "See, that is definitely not Pete."

"How patient do you expect me to be?" Fake-Pete asked.

"Nothing you say is going to convince me," Carter told him. "I know who you are. I just don't understand why. What do you want from me? Why are you doing all this?"

Fake-Pete's image peeled apart, transforming into Fifth. "Because. I love you."

Carter found herself speechless, at a complete loss as to how to respond to that revelation. Fifth pulled out the chair and sat across from her. Carter shook herself and got her thoughts in order.

"Did you really think you could convince me that this illusion was my life?" Carter asked. "That I would just accept it?"

"If it was something you wanted badly enough in your mind," Fifth told her.

"Is that why you tortured me for so long?" Carter demanded. "So I would want this as an alternative?"

"No, I tortured you because I was mad!" Fifth blurted defensively, before taking a moment to calm
himself. "Why do you think I hated you so much for what you did to me? From the first moment we met, when you let me inside your mind, I saw you like no one else ever could."

Except for Jolinar, Narim, Orlin, and Jack O'Neill who got there the long way, but Carter figured throwing that in his face wouldn't be productive. "Human emotions can be very overwhelming," she said instead. "The fact that you feel anything at all is a miracle. It makes you very special."

Fifth smiled. "I'm glad you see that."

"But you still don't understand," Carter told him. "I could never be happy this way."

The smile fell off Fifth's face. "Then you will be unhappy for a very long time."

"You can't just keep me here forever," Carter protested.

"Yes I can," Fifth disagreed.

Carter was resolute. "No matter what you do, I will never ever participate in this fantasy."

Fifth scowled. "You will give in eventually."

"No," Carter told him. "You may as well kill me, because when it comes right down to it, I would rather be dead than be trapped like this forever."

Fifth's fists balled as he clenched his jaw. "You say that now, but I cannot bear to let you die, so you'll have plenty of time to change your mind."

"No matter what you feel for me, I will never love you back," Carter told him bluntly. "Punish me for that if you want, but if you have even one shred of humanity in you... if you really truly love me, you'll let me go."

Carter was surprised and a little hopeful when she noticed tears in Fifth's eyes. He turned away sharply and his shoulders shook just once. Glancing over his shoulder with an unreadable expression, Fifth vanished into thin air.

Willow-rhom and Xander blipped into existence within the empty white void of a blank virtuality. Willow defined a floor of glass, fixed it in place, then added gravity. She and Xander dropped to their feet.

"So, do you know what you're going to say?" Xander asked.

A copy of Willow's body appeared at the center of the glass floor, frozen in a relaxed T-pose. Willow walked in a slow circle around the virtual body, adjusting its features.

"I think so," Willow said. "I've got kink and para working on the presentation."

The frozen avatar now looked nothing like Willow. Its skin was an indeterminate tan-brown, its eyes hazel and its hair wavy dark bronze. Its features were soft and nonthreatening, arranged to be as ethnically ambiguous as Willow could make them.

"There," Willow said. "How's that look?"

Xander shrugged. "Looks good to me."

Willow nodded and started mentally looking through the archives for a suitable backdrop.
Willow-icos dispatched a hundred and eight of the bulky space elevator seeds into geosynchronous orbit. That used up nearly twenty percent of the Eliezera's mass, but it didn't really matter when there were only a handful of people living on board, though she did make sure to distribute the additional hollow space so the ship remained balanced and the interior remained gravitationally neutral.

"Sir! The Fae ship is launching additional spacecraft," Major Gant reported.

"Can we pursue?" Colonel Pendergast asked

"Negative, sir." Major Gant replied. "There are at least a hundred of them, each bigger than a ha'tak, but they're dispersing into higher orbits."

"What are they doing?" Colonel Pendergast wondered quietly.

Then Colonel O'Neill called through the com system. "O'Neill to Pendergast. The prisoners are up to something. The door's jammed and we can't get in. And your Captain Womack's telling me there's nothing on the surveillance logs but static."

Harriet didn't want to look, but even with the handy distraction of being tasked with holding the cell door shut with telekinesis, she couldn't help herself. Willow-kink sat on the cell's metal bench, her thighs spread wide, and the view was hard to ignore.

"You know, Willow," Irisviel said cheerfully as she knelt between Willow's legs. "You look good as a futanari."

Willow chuckled sheepishly. "Eh, you think so?"

At the apex of the Fae's legs, a rather impressive male erection jutted up from where Willow's clit should have been. The pale pink flesh of the shaft blended seamlessly into her labia minora, which was pulled taut with the organ in its upright position. In the combined form, her pelvic muscles couldn't quite pull her penis flat against her belly, and at the same time, the girth of the shaft held her female parts open, putting her glistening inner flesh permanently on display.

Irisviel didn't waste time and leaned down, practically swallowing Willow's cock in one go. Willow made a little "Mmm!" sound, her head lolling back as Irisviel literally swallowed her entire length and started fingering her pussy.

Willow-para looked around at the gathered magic-users. "On you word, Madam Harkness."

"Take us," the elderly witch commanded.

With a nod, Willow activated the transporter, and the entire group was subsumed in a flash of light. The group found themselves hanging in the air above the clouds over Cheyenne Mountain. In an impressive display of power, Madam Harkness swept her hands out and supported the weight of the entire group with her magic alone.

"Oy, my ears are poppin' like corn," Alicia Spinnet complained, getting several winces of agreement.

"Alright, let's fuck with these tossers," the blue-haired young woman named Tonks said eagerly.

While the head of their coven kept everyone from falling, Tonks, Madam Lovegood, a girl named
Lavender who was apparently a werewolf, and a boy named Terry all swayed through the air to converge on Willow. Willow let them catch themselves on her shoulders, flailing her legs a little to avoid tumbling.

There was a choking sound from behind her as the blonde guy named Anthony got a clear view up her green pleated skirt and discovered that she wasn't wearing anything underneath. Willow rolled her eyes.

In her hands, Willow held a carefully crafted and very detailed model of a goa'uld mothership that she'd put together from memory. It would be the focus for a massive glamour, providing an image source for the illusion they wanted to project.

"Uslysz wolanie naszych serc!" Madam Lovegood began the spell.

Tonks, Lavender, and Terry chanted, "Marowit! Marowit!"

Madam Lovegood threw her head back. "Przynies koszmar tych głupców w dol na nich!"

"Marowit! Marowit!"

Wafts of darkness like pitch-black smoke began to stream from Madam Lovegood's hands, encircling and interpenetrating the four casters. The black vapor flowed down into the model in Willow's hands.

"Niezch ten obraz terroru byc obrobione na niebie!" Madam Lovegood finished, thrusting her hands out.

The dark mist exploded from the pale witch, flying out in all directions on a magical wind. It hardened, forming smooth planes and shapes around the floating group, an immense pyramid of darkly tinted glass. However, from the outside, it would appear that a very real ha'tak had appeared in the sky over Colorado.

"Well done," Madam Harkness commented. "Luneth, what do you see?"

Luneth, who was floating spread-eagle on his back, replied without looking. "They know we're here. If we pretend to land, they will come with tanks and planes. If we remain, they will come with their stolen fire."

"Then we shall remain," Madam Harkness said. "My blessed ones, stand ready."

"Stolen fire?" Lavender repeated in confusion. "I thought they were in a spaceship?"

"Fae blowin' the big secret sky high. A charlie foxtrot of an arrest operation. Prisoners sealing themselves in their cell and getting up to god knows what. And now a gould mothership out in broad daylight?" Jack listed off. "For cryin' out loud. What the hell is next?"

The red glow of atmospheric entry flickered around the front of the Prometheus' shields as North America filled the viewport. Jack watched as a tiny speck high over the familiar mountain range grew until it became recognizable as a hovering ha'tak.

"Maintain a thousand meters distance, but keep us moving," Colonel Pendergast ordered. "Arm the railguns."

With a strange frown on his face, Daniel walked right up to the viewport and stared at the goa'uld
ship like he was trying to remember something important.

"Daniel?" Jack prompted.

Daniel shook himself out of a daze. "I don't know, Jack. I can feel something... I don't know how to
describe it."

"This have anything to do with your unfathomable cosmic powers?" Jack snarked

"I don't know, Jack," Daniel repeated. "I'm sensing something but I have no idea what."

Again, an alarm interrupted. This time it was the internal intruder alarm. That could only mean...

Teal'c's voice came over the com system. "The prisoners have escaped their cell. I am in pursuit."

Moments earlier, Willow-kink nodded to Irisviel. "Now. Do it."

Irisviel sucked in a breath, and wings of blue fire erupted from her back. Her skin faded to
translucence as within her flesh blue light blazed from her veins. She thrust her hands out sharply,
and searing flame speared through the bars and into the hinges on the cell door.

Harriet, meanwhile, was concentrating hard, transmuting the bars one by one. The formerly
impervious metal was now brittle enough to snap with a decent kick. Once she had opened a large
gap, she ducked behind Willow and used thermokinesis to block out the heat of Irisviel's flame in an
enclosed space.

"Harriet," Willow said, once the metal of the door was white-hot.

Nodding, Harriet hurled her telekinetic might against the door. The near-molten metal buckled,
quickly ripping apart and spraying the hallway with searing shrapnel.

Taking advantage of the distraction, Willow rushed out and passed the airmen who were now
wringing on the floor. "Follow me!"

Harriet rushed after her, not quite flying, but not quite running either. "How do you know where
you're going?"

"This is the only Earth-made starship ever," Willow called back as she seemingly tasered a pair of
marines with her bare hands. "Of course I was curious enough to study the whole thing!"

Harriet took two steps along the ceiling, flinging herself around to follow as Willow turned a corner.
"That just raises further questions!"

Behind her, Irisviel laughed.

The crack of automatic weapons fire had Harriet ducking for cover as Willow dived into three big
guys who were busy shooting at her. The bullets hit her with loud smacks, but merely bounced off
and fell to the floor without doing any damage. She tasered them with her bare hands and waved
Harriet and Irisviel forward.

They ran down another long corridor, before ducking into a storage room.

"Here," Willow said, pointing at the wall. "Thinnest place in the exterior hull we can get to. We bust
through here and we can get outside the shields. They only stop solid objects from coming in, not
out."
Irisviel stepped forward and started searing the metal with her fire.

Suddenly, the sound of a zat activating made Willow spin around. Teal'c fired once, and Harriet staggered back, but the sight of Willow's bouncing futacock apparently shocked Teal'c just long enough for Willow to tackle him and taser him into submission.

Teal'c's backup opened fire on Willow, but Harriet, incredibly, was still on her feet. Trembling in pain, her face pallid and tight, she still managed to telekinetically hurl the remaining soldiers into the far wall.

Willow rushed over to her, startling Harriet with a hug, but a moment later the pain and near paralysis vanished and Harriet understood. Willow had absorbed the energy of the blast, curing her of its effects.

"Ready!" Irisviel called.

Harriet steadied herself and turned, shoving on the super-heated metal with all her power, until with a whumph of air, the hull ripped open. Ice cold wind whipped through the compartment, and Harriet breathed deep, basking in the sensation she associated with the freedom of flight.

"Go! Hurry!" Willow urged them.

Snow-capped mountains stretched off to the horizon below them, beyond the faint shimmer of the ship's shields. Harriet dived through the hole and made for the open sky, with Irisviel close behind her.

Willow didn't follow them. She needed to stay put for the next part of her plan.

_Alright, Buffy, Willow-kink sent. You're up._

"Sir, I'm reading a hull breach!" Lieutenant Marks reported. "Automated systems are sealing off the area. The marine squads are cut off from the prisoners."

"Override," Colonel Pendergast ordered.

Lieutenant Marks nodded. "Working on it, sir."

"Colonel! I'm reading a catastrophic drain on our shields!" Major Gant announced.

"We're not taking fire," Colonel Pendergast realized. "What's the source?"

Directly above the hovering starship, the tiny figure of a nude girl crouched atop the shimmering shell of the ship's shields, blonde hair flowing in the wind. She slammed her palms flat against the flaring force field, once more demonstrating that Fae physiology enhanced by the power of the Slayer was just brokenly awesome.

Energy coursed through Buffy's body, absorbed through her contact with the Prometheus' shields, and then discharged into her Utility Cloud behind her back, forming two towering fans of ball lightning.

"Shields at twenty percent and falling!" Major Gant reported.

Colonel Pendergast glanced at Jack and Daniel to see if they had any suggestions. Jack just glowered
and muttered something about Carter, but Daniel was still staring at the goa'uld ship like it was trying to swindle him.

"Alright," Colonel Pendergast decided. "We have to assume this is some new weapon being employed by the ha'tak. Major, target all railguns and open fire."

Hypersonic rounds screamed across the intervening space, but to the shock of everyone on the bridge, instead of impacting a shield or slamming into spaceship hull, the rounds seemed to pass right through the other ship like it wasn't there.

Colonel Pendergast swore. "It's a hologram!"

"That's impossible, sir," Major Gant protested. "All our sensors are reading an actual ship. Shields at eight percent."

"So, a really good hologram, then?" Jack asked.

"No," Daniel whispered, his eyes going wide. "Not a hologram..."

A small shockwave seemed to rip the ha'tak apart like it was made of smoke, and out of the haze...

"Holy shit." "No fucking way." "Oh my god."

"Sir!" Major Gant broke in. "Shields are down!"

---

Kiritsugu sailed through the air like a missile, his replaced trenchcoat flapping behind him. The floating grey boxy form of the American spaceship loomed before him as Buffy fell through the dissolving forcefield and landed on the hull. A speck of green shot passed in the distance.

A blue shadow swept over him and a moment later he felt a pair of arms wrap around his chest. Allowing himself only a small quirk of his lips, Kiritsugu drew two revolvers and aimed at the window fronting the spaceship's bridge. Irisviel steadied him as he fired all twelve shots.

The window twisted and frayed as the curse on his bullets went to work.

Irisviel's arms tightened around his chest as she pulled up, swooping over the top of the spaceship. A static tingle made his hair stand up on end as they flew through the air formerly occupied by Buffy's wings of lightning.

---

Luneth watched as all the witches who were strong enough to fly streamed forward in Kiritsugu Emiya's wake, after throwing him at the enemy with their combined power. Luneth hung back with Madam Harkness, providing telepathic coordination and support.

A blur of green and black collided with Luneth and sent him tumbling several dozen yards down and off to the side. There was an outcry among the other witches and warlocks who'd hung back to provide support, but Luneth just closed his eyes and calmly waited for the world to stop spinning.

Harriet finally stabilized their fall and looked up from where she was clinging to his middle. "Lune."

"Harri," Luneth whispered, staring into her eyes with a soft smile.

---

Buffy leaped off the side of the *Prometheus*, swinging around in a wide arc on lines of magnetic force as she maintained her distance from the hull. Willow-kink stepped backwards out of the ship
and fell, timing it perfectly with Buffy's leap. Buffy spotted her, and their eyes locked as Buffy swung to intercept her.

Buffy and Willow-kink slammed together, chest to chest, and the impact left a spray of Willow's milk trailing behind them as Buffy wrapped her limbs around Willow and pulled them up under the Prometheus.

Buffy blinked, glancing down between them. "You've got a cock. Willow, why do you have a... nevermind. Later."

Using the underside of the Prometheus like a giant railgun track, Buffy held Willow-kink tight and yanked them forward. They shot out into open air like a bullet and arced across the sky.

The shock finally passed when the first flying woman ripped a hole in the decaying viewport and sent Jack O'Neill diving for cover. She landed in a crouch, her red leather jacket creaking as she scanned for threats. Her blue eyes were sharp in a gentle round face, with dark hair in a short crop.

Hullbreach alarms blared as the bridge crew drew their sidearms and fired on the intruder, but she held up a hand and the bullets bounced off thin air, ricocheting around the room. Cries of pain filled the room as several of those ricochets struck flesh.

Alice Longbottom surged towards the bald Colonel in the big chair, knocking his gun aside with one hand while her other glowed gold. Her hand lashed out, a beam of golden light striking the guy rushing at her from behind. He slipped and fell hard against a console as he suddenly found himself completely frictionless.

A telekinetic shove sent the bald Colonel tumbling back over his chair, and Alice spun to face the unexpected feel of magic.

"Ut adducat ad me tempestas!" Daniel Jackson finished as he flung out a glowing hand, and a bolt of lightning burst towards Alice.

The lightning bolt missed entirely and grounded out on the far bulkhead, frying a wall panel. Alice just stood there and smirked as Daniel winced. A telekinetic shove slammed Daniel against the wall, and he dropped, stunned but not quite unconscious.

Cameron Mitchell had no idea what to think when three women, led by a blue-haired punk-rocker, came flying into the hanger bay like something out of a comic book, throwing multi-colored energy blasts from their hands.

Well, he had a few thoughts, but those were mostly along the lines of, "no not my plane!" and, "oh shit duck!"

Harriet had flown Luneth back up to Madam Harkness' levitation zone, and Luneth had suddenly gone distant. Harriet had seen it happen often enough to know right away that he was having a vision.

His eyes focused on Harriet, and suddenly he kissed her. Harriet kissed him back reflexively, but with the kiss came an outpouring of images and feelings. Luneth wasn't just kissing her, he was sharing his vision.

At first, Harriet didn't understand what she was seeing. Luneth didn't really see the world the same
way most people did. After a moment though, it was like her mind shifted gears and suddenly it made sense. She was looking at the magic that was allowing the *Prometheus* to float. It was physical, mechanical, and unyielding, but she could see its structure and it was also brittle. She could see how to disrupt it.

"Oy! Now's not the time for snoggin'! We've got a war goin' on here!"

Harriet and Luneth slowly broke the kiss. Luneth stared into her eyes and she nodded. Whirling around, Harriet shot off like a rocket.

She banked, skimming along the ship's side, and pulled to a hover next to the port pylon. Harriet focused hard. Bolts unscrewed, seals broke, and welds snapped. Some of the connections at one end she deliberately left intact, so when she hurled all of her telekinetic strength into the massive structure, it stayed attached while swinging out ninety degrees from the ship's main body.

The result was spectacular.

Still channeling the ships gravitic field, the displaced pylon warped it to a disastrous extent. The *Prometheus* listed to one side with an immense echoing shriek of distressed metal, and buckled.

Harriet flew away as the grey starship ripped itself in half, and the humming pulse of its engines wound down.

Residual charge in the gravitic channels meant that the various pieces drifted down at much gentler speeds than freefall, and the bow of the ship was somehow actually thrown upwards in the midst of the destruction.

Witches flew out of the sinking wreck, returning to join up with the coven.

The impact was more like a submarine hitting the ocean floor than a plane crash, but it still hurled a groaning Daniel across the former ship's bridge. He collided with Jack and sent them both tumbling to the floor in a bruised heap.

Jack groaned and shoved Daniel off of him. Daniel held a hand to his head.

"Mend," Daniel intoned. Nothing happened. Daniel closed his eyes and summoned up as much awe and reverence as he could muster and tried again. "Mend!"

Daniel sighed in relief as the soothing glow of Oma's healing washed through him. He had cast this healing spell so often now that he didn't need more than a single word. He didn't even need to incant in the native language of the being he was invoking, anymore. The last time he'd talked to Sam about it, she'd suggested that the ascended beings probably allowed themselves to develop an unconscious reflex when the same person invoked them in the same way many times, especially if they approved of how you tended to use their power.

"Jack?" Daniel asked.

Having managed to sit up, Jack groaned. "I think my arm's broken."

Daniel nodded, carefully holding his hand over Jack's forearm and once more worked himself up to the necessary emotional state. "Mend."

"Sssssh." Jack clenched his teeth as his bones realigned. Daniel's healing magic was surprisingly painless, but that still wasn't a pleasant feeling.
"Alright!" Jack shouted. "Sound off! Who's not dead?"

There were various responses as Daniel levered himself to his feet, only to realize he was standing on the wall of the bridge, rather than the floor. They'd apparently crashed on their side. A cold breeze was blowing in through the destroyed viewport, and Daniel could see a snowy hill and a couple of trees.

Jack climbed out first, and looked up at the sound of a helicopter. "Son of a bitch."

It wasn't a rescue team, no, of course not. It was a news helicopter.

"Jack," Daniel sighed, pointing off at the western horizon.

Jack turned and just rubbed his forehead. Plain as day, the huge gleaming shape of the *Eliezera* hung in the sky where anyone and their grandma could see it.

There was a distant boom as Daniel set about healing the worst of the injuries.

"That was another piece of the *Prometheus* crashing and burning," Major Gant commented.

Daniel paused, the hair on the back of his neck standing up. And a shadow blotted out the sun as the bow of the *Prometheus* came hurling out of the sky.

Daniel froze as death came for them in the form of falling wreckage, but then he felt it. The healing magic was swept aside by something infinitely vaster and brighter, and his body seemed to move on its own as he calmly raised one hand, palm out.

"Scatter!" Jack bellowed, for all the good it would do.

Jack dived away, covering his head as the wreckage hit... hit a forcefield. Jack's jaw dropped as he spotted Daniel standing strong, hand upraised, hair and eyes glowing white.

And then it was over. Daniel's magical shield dissolved away, and Jack noticed that Daniel's feet weren't touching the ground. But his hair and eyes returned to their normal colors, and Daniel fell like a puppet with cut strings.

With an electric whine and a flash of light, the group of witches and warlocks, plus three Fae, a veela, and an infamous mercenary, all appeared on the lawn of the coven's manor in Westbury.

More than one of them was staring and blushing at the nude Buffy and the nude over-endowed futanari Willow-kink. Madam Harkness casually waved a hand, and miniature clouds condensed into real life censor steam.

"Hey!" Buffy protested, laughing.

"Such a sight is not for delicate eyes," Madam Harkness proclaimed with great dignity.

Willow-kink poked at the white fluff obscuring her sexy parts. "Oh neat. It's actually real cloud."

Willow-para stepped forward. "Anywho. We want to thank you. All of you."

"You can 'thank' all of me any time, luv," joked the guy next to the handsome warlock named Cedric, who elbowed his friend.

Off to one side, Irisviel locked eyes with Harriet for a moment before she quietly pulled her husband
Willow-para smirked as she looked around the crowd. "We are genuinely grateful, so we're going to let each of you ask for one thing from us. Anything you want. Absolutely anything, so long as its, you know, a thing. Name it, and you'll have it." She grinned smugly at the guy next to Cedric. "And yes, that includes shagging me, if that's all you want."

There was a bit of scattered laughter at the guy's expense, for all that Willow's offer was genuine. That trailed off into a bit of hesitant murmuring.

"Can I have a pony?" Lavender joked.

"Actually yes," Willow-para said. "What do you want it to look like?"

Lavender blinked. "For real? You have ponies?"

"No," Willow-para said, "but I can make one for you in about ten minutes."

"You can make animals?" Lavender gasped.

Willow nodded. "I can make anything our ship has in its archive."

Lavender's eyes lit up with a terrible gleam. "Can you make a pegasus? One that can really fly? And I can ride? And can it's coat be gold?"

Willow-para chuckled. "Um, yes. Is that what you want?"

Lavender nodded furiously.

Following Lavender's lead, the others got into the spirit of things. Some asked for things like a new entertainment center, or luxury furniture, or rare but otherwise mundane spell components. Tonks asked for a motorcycle, but was quickly talked out of that since everyone seemed to think she'd kill herself inside a week if she had a motorcycle, and ended up with a portable music player in the shape of a ring that emitted sound by arcing a current through the air rather than by vibrating a membrane, so the sound quality was incomparable. It took about two minutes before someone put a silence spell on her, which she took with her usual good nature.

Off in another direction, Willow-kink beamed out with Buffy after Kiritsugu, Irisviel, Harriet, and Luneth finished asking about Willow's salvation program. Everyone was treated to the rather disturbing sight of Kiritsugu Emiya laughing in joy.

Willow-para came to Cedric and his friend, while a ways off down the hill, Lavender squeed as her new pet flared its twenty foot wings and lashed its long twin prehensile feathered tails. It had taken a while to explain that the pegasus wouldn't need to eat or sleep, though it would sleep if Lavender told it to, because it wasn't quite a living animal in the sense Lavender knew. Then Willow had to explain that didn't mean it was a robot either. It wasn't indestructible but it wouldn't ever need maintenance or spare parts.

"So, what can I do for you guys?" Willow-para asked cheerfully.

Cedric grinned at his friend. "Well, go on then, Tim. You said you were going to ask."

Tim rubbed the back of his head with one hand. "Er, right. Were you serious about the... you know... shagging?"
Willow nodded. "If that's what you want. Although, I think you might regret not asking for something a little more substantial than a few sexy memories."

"I, um..." Tim trailed off.

"He's a virgin," Cedric helpfully informed her.

"Ced!" Tim exclaimed. "Don't just... say it like that!"

Willow giggled. "Tell you what, Tim. After I handle Cedric's request, you can show me to your room, okay?"

"Uh." Tim gulped. "Okay."

"...and then Daniel went all super saiyan and saved our butts," Jack finished.

Jack, Teal'c, Doctor Weir, and Colonel Pendergast were addressing the executive war room. The president was listening seriously, while the others at the big table were running the gamut of reactions.

"Yes, that part is also all over the news," Weir added, doing her best to keep her tone neutral. "In the face of what the Fae are up to, only the local channels are running with the footage of the *Prometheus* battling the, ahem, unknown group of psionically gifted individuals, but the story has already spread beyond our ability to control."

Behind her, the huge wall-screen displayed several live news channels showing footage of the Fae ship in the sky, along with various clips of the many space elevator cables that were dangling out of the clouds as they grew towards the ground or the ocean. Only one channel was showing the wreck of the *Prometheus* on the snowy mountainside.

The guy that Jack actually was thinking of as Kinsey Lite stood up violently. "This is an act of war! Mister President, the very sovereignty and security of our great nation is being violated! We must show these Fae the error of their ways, just as we have with previous alien threats to our way of life."

General Hammond shook his head. "We've already lost, gentlemen. As hard as it is to accept, the Fae have us at their mercy. The SGC is in shambles, thanks to the Replicators, and even if it wasn't, the Fae are capable of operating on a scale that we simply cannot match."

"If you think - "

"Sirs!" Jack called to get everyone's attention. He pointed to the wall-screens.

All over the world, above thousands of cities and towns, vast white squares were appearing in the sky, like holes in the air, opening on a featureless white void that illuminated the landscape for miles around.

Willow-icos waited.

The floating displays were a self-assembling meta-membrane, neutrally buoyant and held rigid by an electrostatic field. Those in daylight were self-powering, while those in darkness were sent energy from wherever it was in surplus.

Several dozen displays were shot down by fighter jets and combat helicopters, in various parts of the
world, before their officers gave up. When they destroyed one, a new one grew out of thin air in a matter of moments.

Several dozen more displays were blown out of position by bad weather. Willow fixed those as well, configuring them to stay put better.

Willow was watching all the biggest news broadcasts, and when she figured people were as ready to listen as they were going to get, Willow played her recorded speech.

The white void faded to an image of a vast, lush landscape. The vista continued impossibly far into the distance, curving up to the sides instead of down like a planetary horizon. Hazy with distance, upside down beyond the puffy clouds, a wide strip of land cut across the clear blue sky.

Much closer to the viewpoint, a naked woman stepped into sight. She was pretty, nonthreatening, and utterly impossible to identify ethnically. Her picture would be next to the wiki entry on Ambiguously Brown for the rest of time. She walked towards the viewpoint until only her head and shoulders were visible, and her expression was gentle and earnest as her eyes seemed to scan the landscape below the vast displays.

Willow had recorded the same speech in dozens of languages, and now she played them all simultaneously in the appropriate parts of the world.

"Greetings to you, the peoples of Earth. We are the Fae," Willow's guise began. "We have looked upon your world, and seen its horrors. We have looked upon those horrors that are not of your making... and we want to help."

Willow's guise paused. "We come from a civilization of freedom and abundance, where scarcity has not existed for thousands of years. We want to help, and we ask nothing in return, for to share our prosperity costs us nothing."

Willow's guise looked up with a smile. "Look to the skies, people of Earth, and do not fear."

At just that moment, the entire sky lit up with glimmering trails of fire as a billion modified birthing pod seeds entered the atmosphere all at once. Privately, Willow-icos admitted she was showing off a bit, but hey, it was cool!

There was some panic and a few riots here and there, but for the most part, the world watched with baited breath as the sky rained fire, and yet, every last seed hit flat ground, avoiding buildings, people, and vehicles, even in major cities.

Once the impacts stopped, Willow's guise only said, "Live, people of Earth. Prosper. Live on, Forever After Earth."

Cut to black, fade up to a cheerful looping cartoon that demonstrated just what the birthing pods did. The silent images repeated, showing an elderly man and woman step into a pair of pods, then on to a cutaway complete with expository text, showing everything but their nervous systems stripped away and replaced, and the couple waking up and making joyful expressions at each other.

Willow-icos exited the virtuality and woke up in Xander's arms, in her hammock. "Well. I guess that's that."

"I don't know about you, but giving up our lives in Sunnydale, in exchange for ending natural death across the planet?" Xander said. "I think I'm good with it. You?"
"Yeah..." the Willows agreed. "Buffy?"

Buffy flopped back on the squishy grass. "Yeah. As long as I know my mom's okay and allowed to live her life, I don't mind the whole exile thing so much. Not if you guys are with me."

Xander smiled at her. "We love you too, Buffy."

The three present Willows nodded.

"Thanks you guys," Buffy said with a chuckle as she tipped to her feet and wrapped an arm each around Willow-rhom and Willow-kink. "So, what's with the dick, Wills? Are you planning on keeping it?"

Willow-kink shrugged. "Well, I already figured I could spare one of me to have these mountainous milk melons..." She jiggled her chest. "I suppose I might as well keep the extra fun parts for a while, too. It's not so weird once I got use to it, and it does even out the boy-parts to girl-parts ratio a little."

Buffy laughed. "Good point."

There was a comfortable silence, that wasn't overly disrupted when Willow-kink embraced Buffy and started kissing her neck, while Willow-rhom did the same from behind Buffy. Willow-icos wriggled on top of Xander until his cock found her folds and slid in. Buffy wrapped her legs around Willow-kink's waist and sank down on her shaft with a sigh. Willow-rhom grabbed the Xander-dildo.

"So... what's next?" Xander wondered idly, his breath hitching as the sensations from the toy compounded with the sensations from his actual manhood.

"I've almost got a hyperdrive system working," Willow-icos mused blissfully as Xander fondled her breasts. "Maybe we could turn the rest of the asteroid belt into a whole fleet of generation ships, and send copies of ourselves off in every direction, so we can offer the upgrade to the rest of the galaxy."

"Damn, Wills," Buffy moaned as she bucked up and down Willow-kink's shaft. "You don't think small, do you."

Samantha Carter woke up on the loam of a peaceful forest, to the fading sounds of a Replicator ship returning to space. Gingerly, she picked herself up and looked around.

"He actually let me go," Carter murmured to herself. "His feelings were real."

Climbing to the top of a small rise, Carter spotted a break in the trees to her left, but nothing else of note. The weather was temperate and comfortable, and the forest lacked any obvious hazards, but there was no Stargate in sight, and she didn't have her gear anyway.

She was stranded.

"Great," Carter sighed, and started hiking. This wouldn't be the first time she had to put her wilderness survival training to use.

For the first two hours, Carter walked a search pattern, just in case there was actually a Stargate nearby, but she didn't find anything artificial at all. As soon as the sky started to dim, she returned to a small brook she had crossed earlier and followed it upstream.

Carter skipped the first cave she found, noticing the signs that something else was already living
there. She kept following the brook, knowing she needed a source of fresh water above all else. She would have to make a canteen somehow before she could venture too far.

She came to a smaller but shallower cave, checked it out, and found it suitable. She looked around for dry branches, gathered what she could, and settled in to work on starting a campfire.

The next day she gathered tools. Sharp rocks and sturdy vines and such. The third day, she went hunting, but came back empty handed. On the fourth day she found something very similar to a peach tree.

It was a whole week before she managed a water-tight container.

Then, on the tenth night, she heard something new. She didn't recognize the sound, but it was coming from high up, and it was moving fast. Aircraft? Maybe even a ship? She hoped it wasn't goa'uld. She really didn't want to go up against jaffa with nothing but camo and a hand-made spear.

The lights of a ship, or maybe five small aircraft in formation each illuminated with a different color, whooshed over the treetops. Carter nearly stumbled as she tracked their progress, whipping around to follow them over her and down into the valley in the distance.

As she climbed to a better vantage point, the formation split. The fusha and cyan lights pulled up and climbed vertically, confirming that they couldn't possibly be any kind of primitive aircraft. The white, green, and red lights looped around and headed... right for Carter.

"Oh yeah. They saw me. Please, be friendly," Carter whispered hopefully.

The three approaching craft dived into the trees and wove between the trunks, making Carter blink in surprise. Finally, they slowed as they got near, and Carter's mouth fell open. They weren't ships at all. They were people, and as they slowed to a hover in front of her, Carter realized that they were teenage girls.

The white glow around the one in the lead faded to nothing, with the other two going dark a moment later, at least until an odd mechanical voice announced, BELEUCHTUNG, and a soft green light blanketed the area.

"Hi there!" called the lead girl as she gently settled to the ground.

"Yeah, who the heck are you?" the levitating girl in red, who couldn't have been older than ten, demanded. "This planet's supposed to be uninhabited!"

The lead girl looked about fourteen, maybe fifteen, vaguely asian, with light brown hair in a bob and a puffy white hat. She was carrying a gold-topped staff and she was wearing a bafflingly contradictory outfit. She had a black minidress, trimmed in gold with gold fastenings, and golden armor plates on the sides of her skirt. Over the dress, she was wearing a stiff white jacket with long sleeves, and over that were midnight blue spaulders and bracers. A flowing black cape hung from her back, narrowing to a hard section on her upper back, which sprouted spiky black feathers of all things. Her legs were bare all the way down to her armored ankle boots.

The ten-year-old was wearing a heavy red dress that was only a shade darker than her vividly red hair, and she was carrying a... warhammer. Or maybe the heavy artillery version of a croquet mallet. The thing had to weigh half as much as the girl herself did.

The third, who hadn't spoken, looked like a germanic blonde in her twenties, and was floating there in a rich green peasant dress under a white tabard under a mint green longcoat with armored shoulders.
"Oh, don't mind Vita," the leader said amiably, waving off the girl in red. "I am Special Investigator Hayate Yagami, and these are my knights, Vita and Shamal. You... look like you've been roughing it for a while. Do you need any help?"

Carter managed to get over her shock enough to reply. "I... yes. I'm Major Samantha Carter. I was marooned on this planet ten days ago. To be honest, I could use a little help finding the Stargate."

"Stargate?" Hayate repeated.

"We are unaware if this planet has a Stargate on it," Shamal said. "We came by ship."

"But we can give you a lift," Hayate said. "Where're you from?"

Carter hesitated, but it was either trust these people or spend the rest of her days stranded on an uninhabited planet. "The Tau'ri."

Hayate hmm'd. "Never heard of it."

Carter smiled despite herself. Hayate was just so blatantly likable.

"I can point it out on a starchart easily enough," Carter said.

"Okay," Hayate agreed easily. "Shamal? Why don't you take the Major here up to the Arthra for a bath and a hot meal, while the rest of us finish the survey. And if Chrono whines about it just tell him to take it up with me when I get back."

Shamal nodded and held out a hand. Carter took a startled step backwards as an ornate triangular glyph made of green light unfolded under Shamal's feet. At first, Carter thought it was a hologram, but then Shamal sank a few inches and stood on it like it was solid. Carter looked, but there was no distortion under her feet like she would expect from a forcefield.

"Go on," Hayate encouraged. "Don't worry. Shamal will look after you."

"Uh, right," Carter muttered as she used a handy rock as a step and climbed onto the surprisingly solid glyph of green light.

Shamal held out her hands, and Carter finally identified the golden rings on her fingers as the source of that odd mechanical voice. This time it proclaimed, TRANSPORTIEREN.

The forest vanished in green flash, and unlike with Asgard transporters, Carter felt a distinct sense of motion, even if she couldn't say for the life of her what direction they'd moved.

REISE ERFOLGREICH, Shamal's rings announced.

Carter looked around, noting the utilitarian metal walls and strip lighting. An arch opened on a corridor, and one wall had a small holographic console showing a simple menu next to what had to be a map of the Arthra.

Shamal held up her hands. "Klarwind, standby form."

SCHLEUNIGST, the rings responded.

Then Shamal's entire outfit melted into liquid light, and shattered into a million fading fragments, leaving her in a professional-looking brown minidress with a blue tie, and a white coat that wouldn't have looked out of place in the SGC infirmary. A remaining sliver of liquid light solidified around Shamal's neck, forming a necklace.
Carter couldn't hide her stunned curiosity. "What... was that?"

Shamal smiled knowingly and touched her necklace. "This is Klarwind, my Armed Device. It links with my mind, and stores any data or algorithms I need to shape my magic to complex ends. One such end is the physical protection and enhancement of a Barrier Jacket, which you just saw me dispel."

Carter almost forgot about the promise of a bath and hot meal as her mind exploded with questions.
Screaming colors, blurry confusing motion, and disorientation. One moment, she'd had her face in Eelesia's crotch, and the next she felt like she was being torn out of herself. She tumbled through an insane storm of everything and nothing.

And then something sucked her in a direction she didn't have a name for, and it all stopped.

There was no light. No stars. No anything. Just empty blackness. At first, Lyn waited with baited breath. An hour later, she was just floating bored. An hour after that, she thrashed and shouted just for the heck of it, but she couldn't see, hear, or feel anything.

After four hours in the void, Lyn gave up and went to sleep.

Something woke her. Lyn snapped awake instantly, not wanting to miss whatever it was. She hadn't dreamed. With nothing to nourish her, she needed to be conservative, so she'd just shut down entirely. It felt like no time at all had passed, but her instincts told her she'd been asleep for 278,209 years.

"Luck," Lyn swore, the word never forming in the silent void.

Only, the void wasn't empty anymore. Glimmering streamers of light, breaching a thousand invisible surfaces at a thousand incomprehensible angles before diving into something not-there and vanishing again. They were all around her, filling the void for as far as she could see.

For a while, Lyn just marveled at the sight. It was very pretty to look at, at least until one of those streamers emerged right in front of her. She had barely a second to realize that, up close, the things were the size of buildings. It smashed into her, and Lyn felt her sense of pleasure and pain cut off as she was once more torn from reality.

Or in this case, ripped into reality.

With a breathtaking silent crash, star-filled three-dimensional space slammed into her senses. Something massive had engulfed her, a luminous thing of shifting angles and broken light, with a Lyn-shaped crater in it.

A planet loomed, approaching fast enough Lyn could actually see it getting bigger. Terror gripped her as she imagined hitting the planet so hard she was instantly vaporized in a flash of thermonuclear fusion. Except, she had more immediate problems. The planet was fractured, as though seen through a broken mirror, and it was different planet in each view.

The fracturing effect of the thing that had crashed into her was creeping in around her body. Lyn could see her body warping, splitting, like she was being eaten by animated shards of a broken mirror. Her vision fractured, and in her last moments, she felt the instinct that meant her Dreamlink couldn't find a Giaa to upload her to.
Lyn felt her skull come apart, and she screamed with what was left of her vocal chords.

Two vast glittering creatures swimming through space in a gentle spiral, trailing a rain of luminous shards. The Warrior. The Thinker. The cycle will continue on the chosen planet. Appropriate hosts are chosen for each shard...


The shards, weapons, tools. They grow and reproduce as the hosts use them to war among themselves. As planned. But the Thinker is dead, and the cycle cannot continue without her.

Despair.

For the third time, she slammed back into reality.

I'm alive? I'm alive! she nearly laughed in relief, at least until she noticed where she was.

The first and most pressing thing, was the smell. She blew out a sharp breath in reflexive revulsion and stopped breathing. With the horrific stench no longer overwhelming her, She realized she was crammed into some kind of metal box. It was dark and cramped, but three small horizontal slits in front of her allowed in a faint light. Insects and other little things crawled all over her, and when she tried to slap at them, something bit her.

It was unpleasant, to say the least, but hardly terrifying.

So why was her heart pounding so hard? Why was she shaking, barely able to think anything besides, oh god oh god let me out!

Okay, fuck it, she was not dealing with this!

She closed her eyes and dove into a private virtuality. Awareness of her body faded, and she appeared standing in a white void. And her mind split, a fissure down the center of her thoughts as she became Lyn and Taylor.

"Whoa," Lyn stumbled.

Taylor screamed, a sound of animal fear as she fell to her knees on the featureless white plain, gasping for breath. The girl looked strange to Lyn's eyes, all straight lines and angles, and thin enough to be called spindly even though she was nearly a head taller than Lyn. Taylor's hair was a mass of dark brown waves, falling around her bare shoulders, and her skin was a pale peach color.

In contrast, Lyn was back to normal. Petite and buxom, with dusky blue skin and short neon green hair that matched her neon green lips, nails, nipples, and inner labia. Her eyes were black on black, sclera, iris, and pupil all the same color.

Lyn crouched down next to the shaking, crying girl, and took hold of her shoulders. Taylor's reaction was immediate and violent. She flinched away with a screech and flailed her hands at Lyn, but Lyn just let Taylor hit her as she wrapped her arms around Taylor's shoulders and murmured.


Taylor didn't know how long she'd lost her mind for, but finally, after what could have been hours, she calmed down enough for the blue girl's soothing murmurs to get through to her. Eventually,
Taylor did come back to herself enough to acknowledge her surroundings.

She was laying down, curled into the side of the blue girl on a decadently soft silken bed, in the middle of a featureless white void. As she took stock of herself, Taylor asked the somewhat inane question that popped first into her mind.

"Uh, why am I naked?"

Lyn looked at her in confusion. "Um, because you are?"

Taylor stared blankly, and decided to come back to that later. She sat up and hunched in on herself, looking around.

"Where are we?" Taylor asked. "And who... and how do I know who you are?"

"We're in a virtuality," Lyn explained.

Oddly, that actually meant something to Taylor. She remembered, fleeing from the locker into a construct of her own mind, only that was Lyn that did that. Taylor winced in confusion at the memory.

"I think something happened that linked our minds, and for a moment there we gestalted," Lyn added. "Do you remember the creatures?"

Taylor froze. The vast shards trailing through space. She did remember. Fuck. The shards were powers. It was the only thing that fit. And she had one now.

"Fuck," Taylor whispered. "I'm a parahuman."

"What's a parahuman?" Lyn asked.

"People with powers." Taylor let herself think out loud. "The shards are powers. The powers were given to human hosts. I'm a host, which means I should have a power. Can... " Taylor shuddered. "Can it get us out of the locker? Us. Me. Lyn. Lyn's part of my powers? Lyn, are you part of my powers?"

"Um..." Lyn looked thoughtful. "If I followed that right, I think I know what happened. I was stranded in the void between universes, or something, I'm not sure, but when I was there, a... shard hit me. Your shard, I guess, it collided with me and, I thought, ate me. Next thing I know I'm a gestalt of me and you. So... sort of?"

Taylor's eyes snapped up to look at the exotic naked girl in horror. "My powers ate you?"

"Yeah, I think so," Lyn sighed. "I mean, we're sharing a body right now. I can't imagine how else we could have ended up merged like this."

"And talking like this, this place, its part of the power?" Taylor asked.

Lyn shook her head. "No, not at all. Any Fae can do this."

Taylor blinked. "Fae?"

Taylor squirmed as Lyn stared at her. "You're human. Of course you're human. Duh."

"You're not?" Taylor asked incredulously. "I mean, you're... blue and green, but..."
"I'm... from a very different place," Lyn told her. "They use the term Singularity on your Earth?"

"The hypothetical point where machines surpass humans and take over the world?" Taylor asked.

"Close enough," Lyn laughed. "Well, where I come from, the Singularity happened three thousand years before I was born."

While Taylor was trying to get her head around that, Lyn spread her arms and Taylor jumped, startled, as the white void blipped out of existence. The bed remained, but now it floated in space. The sun blazed bright from behind, and in front of them...

"This is Sol, the way it looked ten years ago when I was there," Lyn said. "All the planets, including Earth, and everything else in the system was repurposed to build this."

Taylor boggled. "This" was a hollow cord of spiraling threads that stretched all the way around the sun, and as the view moved closer, Taylor could see that each thread was nearly as big across as the moon, and lined in six alternating panels of transparency and opacity.

The view blurred, moving inside through one of the transparent sections. On the inside of the opaque sections, were continents. Fields, meadows, forests, rivers, mountains, lakes, gleaming towers or other structures here and there, but nothing like the sprawl of a city or town.

And people, all naked or nearly so, some human-looking, some even stranger than Lyn. Flying. Playing. Building. Fighting. Frolicking. And fucking. Did Lyn really need to show her that? The scene paused, everything freezing in place, and Taylor looked at Lyn with wide eyes.

"Even without these powers, we can get out of the locker, easy," Lyn said.

Taylor shrunk down and shuddered. "I don't want to go back there."

Lyn considered. "You might not have to. We're not a gestalt anymore. It could be that I can leave the virtuality while you stay, or the other way around even. Want me to try?"

Taylor hugged herself, but finally nodded, visibly bracing herself.

Lyn woke up.

Blinking, and only just barely remembering not to breathe, Lyn reflected on her own thoughts, looking for Taylor. Nope, she was just herself. Looks like she was right.

Lyn put a hand on the door of the locker and felt out with her Utility Cloud. It seeped into the mechanism of the lock, and Lyn easily moved the right parts. The locker burst open, and Lyn stumbled out in a shower of putrid filth.

Lyn shuddered and made a disgusted noise, before scouring herself with her Utility Cloud. She stripped off the drab, soiled, stifling clothes, discarding them onto the floor of the dark hallway, and moved aside until she was clear of the mess.

Okay, Taylor, we're out. It's safe, Lyn sent before she could think about it. To her surprise, it worked.

What? Oh. This is weird. Um, how do I come out? Taylor asked. Wait, I think I've...

Lyn winced, squinting her eyes. No wait, that was Taylor. "...got it."
"You're okay?" Lyn asked.

"I guess." Taylor looked around and gasped. "It's the middle of the night! Oh god, I need to tell my dad I'm not dead."

They started walking, only for Taylor to look down at herself and stop in her tracks. "I'm blue! Fuck! I can't go home like this... where the fuck are my clothes?"

Lyn pointed. "Over there."

"Why'd you take my clothes off?" Taylor demanded.

"They were gross," Lyn told the girl sharing her body.

Taylor shuddered in agreement, but went over to pick them up. "We can't leave them. My wallet and keys are in the pockets. And I can't walk home naked either."

"Maybe you can't, but I can," Lyn said, picking the clothes up in her Utility Cloud. "I don't look anything like you. No one will know unless we tell them. And once we get there, we can hide and morph to look like you should."

"Morph? We can do that?" Taylor asked.

"Of course we can," Lyn said, padding down the hall with the bundle of soiled clothes dangling from her hand by invisible lines of magnetic force.

"...right," Taylor murmured. "Um, question, which of us is controlling my body?"

Lyn blinked. "I don't... know?"

"Are we gestalting again?" Taylor worried. "No. Damn, I just noticed how much better my memory is."

"We're sharing control," Lyn said. "Obviously, but I mean, I think our motor cortices have formed a gestalt, and its just our streams of consciousness that are staying separate."

"That's lucky," Taylor opined.

Lyn winced at that.

Taylor would have been mortified, running across rooftops buck naked, but, well, she was running across rooftops. Lyn wasn't super strong, but she was much stronger than a girl her size should have been, and she had the magnetism thing plus badass parkour skills on top of that.

Practically flying through the night light this... it almost made the locker worth it. Taylor stumbled, but Lyn tucked into a roll and kept their momentum going. Right. Don't think about the locker. Think about the speed. The freedom. Her power.

Taylor knew what her power was, now. She was a sensor. She was perfectly aware of every person in a two-block radius, their presences like a constellation of stars in her mind. She couldn't do much beyond knowing where they were in relation to her and the details of their physical state, but she could already imagine how useful having that information could be.

Distracting herself with the awesome almost worked, but she couldn't help that her first thought was that her power would let her track her bullies and better avoid them. With her power, no one would
ever be able to sneak up on her ever again. Of course, that brought her back to why she had powers in the first place. Taylor managed to make it all the way to her own back yard before she broke down crying again.

"They tried to kill me," Taylor gasped out. "They tried to kill me."

"They failed. It's okay, take your time," Lyn told her between sobs. "You've already got a morph profile saved, but the change is still going to take until morning at least."

Taylor nodded, curling up on her side. At least she wasn't cold. The grass was kind of prickly, and she was worried about someone seeing her, but she wasn't cold at all, and her body just didn't develop aches from laying on a hard surface. She could sense someone in her house who had to be her dad, sleeping fitfully. At least he was sleeping. It wasn't very long before she was done crying and just laid there in a stupor while Lyn fidgeted.

"Huh," Lyn said. "That's weird."

"What?" Taylor mumbled.

"It's only been fifteen minutes, but the morph is complete," Lyn said. "See?"

Taylor did, mentally looking over Lyn's shoulder at the morph settings. Taylor looked down at herself and saw her familiar beanpole body. It was huge relief, tinged with a vague sense of loss.

Lyn rolled to her feet, and Taylor retrieved her keys.

They got away with it. Sophia, Emma, and Madison weren't even questioned, as far as Taylor knew. Taylor, on the other hand, was suspended for vandalizing school property. This was so monumentally unfair that Taylor wasn't even angry. Punishing the victim of a murder attempt went so far beyond the pale that she kind of came back around to a sort of incredulous apathy.

Taylor only told her dad the bullies had framed her for it. He believed her. She didn't tell him anything about what really happened. She just couldn't put that on him. He had enough to worry about.

In the months that followed, nothing outwardly changed, but Taylor had her secret. Something the bullies didn't have. Something they couldn't take away from her. Because, weird situation with Lyn or not, Taylor had powers, and she knew what she was going to do with them. Taylor was going to be a superhero.

She had the ability to know the exact location and condition of every single person for two city blocks in every direction, and she could concentrate on any number of them at once. She'd experimented once, walking through a packed crowd with her eyes closed, and she'd been able to do it without bumping into anyone even once.

Her newfound natural grace helped a lot with that. The abilities that came with having a Fae body were cool. Even as a thin girl, she was probably strong enough to match the average big burly man, but much more impressively, she had invulnerability that might actually be on par with some of the big names. Then there was the Utility Cloud, which was about as versatile as powers got, even if Lyn didn't actually know how to do a lot of the things she knew were possible.

Then there were the morph settings. Taylor wasn't sure if these counted as one of her power powers or not. It was a natural ability for Fae, just slower. Larger changes were supposed to take days, but Taylor's finished in less than an hour, much to Lyn's continuing bafflement.
And oh *god* had Taylor been tempted to make herself sexy and beautiful. Unfortunately, her secret identity had to take first priority. She'd increase her bust just a little, rounded her hips and butt a tad, shaped her mouth as much as she could get away with, and dialed up her muscle tone some, but that was all.

Taylor and Lyn *were* working together in the virtuality to design an entirely new face and body for her cape persona. Lyn's first idea was to just use her own preferred look, but Taylor had argued against that on the grounds that Lyn was tiny and they'd be better off with as much strength as they could get away with. That was the other cool thing about the morph settings. It wasn't just cosmetic. Adding muscle actually made her stronger, and pound for pound, Fae muscle was worth three times what human muscle was. Adding bone mass increased her magnetic powers, too.

The end result was a body two inches taller than Taylor and built like an amazon. The kind of woman that wouldn't look out of place in a skin-tight costume on the cover of one of those old comic books. Taylor was still fiddling with the cosmetic details. She and Lyn couldn't quite agree on a color scheme, and Taylor hadn't really decided what her name was going to be or how her costume was going to look anyway.

Lyn thought being a cape sounded fun. It never really became completely normal, sharing her body with someone else. They could always retreat to the virtuality if they needed space, but they actually got along pretty well. Lyn was just naturally friendly, and Taylor was perhaps a little more desperate for a friend than she'd imagined herself to be.

Not that there wasn't friction. Lyn came from a culture with very different values than the ones Taylor was used to. Taylor was a little freaked out the first time Lyn tried to pressure her into having sex, but the way Lyn did it was weirdly innocent. Lyn just seemed to genuinely not understand why Taylor wouldn't want to fool around at the first opportunity, or why Taylor might misinterpret Lyn's hurt feelings as a manipulative attempt to hold their friendship hostage in order to get into Taylor's pants.

It didn't come to a fight. Lyn wasn't the type to sulk, and Taylor was rational enough to communicate rather than jumping to conclusions. Lyn's look of baffled shock when Taylor explained virginity was actually kind of funny.

Somehow, that knowledge just made Lyn even more insistent, not to mention more creative. Taylor was caught completely off guard when Lyn sprung a new body on her in the virtuality. Lyn's coloring was the same, but she, or rather he, was suddenly coming on to Taylor in an incredibly handsome and masculine body with a physique worth drooling over and his neon-green-tipped... package... upright and already hard.

Taylor took one look and fled back to the real world, the first time. Only the first time, though. The thing was, Lyn's cheerfully innocent seduction was wearing her down, and she was tempted. She *liked* Lyn, and Lyn's virtual male form made her deeply reluctant to resist that temptation.

The strangest part of it all was that sometimes Lyn seemed *worried* about her, when Taylor wrestled with the temptation Lyn presented. Lyn's manner wasn't cheerful or seductive at all, then. It was that, Taylor thought, that eventually made her give in. Lyn was of the opinion that friends didn't let friends languish in lust, it seemed. Even if it was totally Lyn's fault to begin with.

Well, she could always tell herself it didn't really count anyway, since it was in the virtuality. It was just... really vivid cybersex. Right. Taylor admitted to herself that it wasn't a very convincing rationalization, and it certainly didn't keep all the sensations from feeling completely real, but she *wanted* to let her libido off the leash. So she did, and it felt even better than Taylor had imagined, and then it only got better from there.
The other thing Taylor did during those months was scour the Parahumans Online message boards and the wider internet for anything about the two alien creatures she'd seen when she got her powers.

What she found, or rather, what she didn't find, was by far the most disturbing thing about the whole being-a-parahuman situation. She'd searched through every site she could find, used every keyword combination she and Lyn could think of, and there was nothing. Her memory was perfect, now, and couldn't fade, but once she posted a thread describing her vision on an anonymous account and didn't get any replies, she thought of it less and less.

Taylor sensed them coming, of course. She knew the three girls' biometrics by heart at this point. She was in a bathroom stall, hiding and eating her lunch. Not that she needed to eat, but not bringing lunch might have aroused suspicion.

Carefully, Taylor layered her Utility Cloud over her clothes and backpack, forming a temporary hydrophobic lattice.

Taylor could only barely make out the voices. The noise of the conversation was obscured by giggling and the sound of water from the sinks. Madison came over to Taylor's stall and knocked.

Taylor pretended to guess wrong. "Fuck off, Emma."

"Oh my god, it's Taylor!" Madison exclaimed gleefully.

"The juice, pour the juice," Emma whispered.

"Yeah, do it!" Madison whispered back.

Taylor made a token effort to push the stall door open and escape. Firmly reminding herself that if she revealed her powers, the bullies won, she just shoulder-checked the door a couple times with much less than her full strength. Over the months, she'd been sneaking in tweaks to her 'default Taylor' morph profile. Slowly enough that anyone who noticed would conclude it was merely natural maturation and a fitness regimen. She was half-way through b-cup territory, and she had enough muscle that she could probably pick cute little Madison up and beat Emma to death with her. Not that Taylor would. That was one temptation she was not going to give into, no matter how funny Lyn thought it would be.

Cranberry juice.

Taylor looked up just in time to get a face full of the stuff. She flinched back, sputtering and wiping at her eyes. They didn't stop there. Sophia's face appeared over the top of the stall with more plastic bottles at the ready. Taylor hunched over and covered her head with her hands as Sophia dumped the juice all over her. It ran down her neck and arms, soaked into her hair, and pooled in the folds of her clothes.

The empty bottles bounced off the tile at her feet. Taylor didn't move, gritting her teeth and inwardly repeating what had become her mantra. She would not use her powers on civilians. She would not spoil her secret identity in a fit of revenge. She was going to be a superhero. She was better than them.

Cranberry juice.

The door swung open and Taylor glared at the three girls. Standing carefully, Taylor shoved her drenched hair off her face. The girls laughed and gloated with each other, but Taylor didn't really hear them. If the trio hadn't turned and left the bathroom at that point, Taylor didn't know what she would have done. She watched the three presences move away through her power.
Taylor went to the sinks and looked at herself in the mirror. Taking a deep breath, she used her Utility Cloud to clean and dry her skin and hair. Her clothes and her backpack weren't wet at all, thanks to her precaution. Looking at her pristine reflection, Taylor sighed.

*Lyn?* Taylor sent.

*What is it?* Lyn responded.

*Tell me again why I put up with this shit?* Taylor requested.

*Because you're ridiculously paranoid and you'd rather let those horrors torment you than risk drawing attention to yourself?* Lyn paused. *What happened?*

Taylor felt the mental shift as Lyn emerged in their shared body. "They dumped a gallon of cranberry juice on me."

Lyn worried her lip. "Is this really worth it?"

"I'm having a hard time remaining convinced," Taylor admitted.

"Are you sure you don't want me to..." Lyn began.

Taylor interrupted, "No. You promised to stay in the virtuality while I'm at school. Just because I have to put up with them doesn't mean you do."

"Taylor..."

"You promised, Lyn."

"Fine."

By the time she made it home, Taylor had only barely convinced herself that dropping out of school would cause more problems than it solved. Knowing where Lyn came from. Catching a glimpse of where powers came from. It really put high school in perspective. Her reasons for going had dwindled down to just her dad and her secret identity, and the secret identity thing got flimsier every time she thought it over.

"Maybe I can tell Dad I just can't handle it anymore," Taylor said as she descended into the basement of her house. "He might understand."

"You think?" Lyn asked.

Taylor shook her head. "Maybe. I still don't want to worry him, though."

"So..." Lyn said after a bit of silence. "You think we're ready?"

Taylor nodded. "As ready as we're going to get, probably."

"Well, not quite. We really need to think of a name," Lyn pointed out.

Taylor smirked. "We need to stop talking to each other out loud, too. See how well that's working out."

Lyn snorted, and decided that was as good a time as any to switch her morph settings over to the superhero profile. It was Taylor's first time wearing her cape body for real. She'd practiced with it in
the virtuality of course, and had plenty of sparring matches with Lyn that always seemed to end in a great deal more thrusting and moaning than planned. Even when Lyn was a girl, a couple of times. Taylor had surprised herself with that, though she still much preferred the other thing.

Taylor pulled the wooden cover off the old coal chute where she'd hidden a gym bag with her costume and equipment. She dumped the gym bag out on the work bench and her batons clattered out with her costume.

The batons were a bit of cleverness Taylor had fashioned after Lyn explained how Fae normally lived in environments where nearly everything was laced with superconductor, because superconductors repelled magnetic fields, meaning you could actually move it around or push off against it like bad movies thought magnetic powers could do with ordinary metal. That was how the Utility Cloud worked. A scaffold of superconducting molecular dust.

Normally, there was so little of the dust that it was invisible, but there was nothing stopping Taylor from excreting enough of the dust to clump it up into a near-solid, and then mix it with a high quality thermosetting polymer she'd blown a month's allowance on at a hobby shop. It was supposed to be the same plastic riot shields were made out of.

The end result was two heavy clear plastic sticks that Taylor could use as blunt weapons or fling around as if she was telekinetic. Each was an inch and a half thick, two and a half feet long, and had blunted ends. She only had the two so far, but she planned to make more weapons in the same vein and leverage the phenomenal multitasking ability her parahuman power gave her.

She could effectively have an arbitrary number of hands and fists, and never get confused. She had some idea how effective that could make her in a fight. It sure made sewing a costume easier, anyway.

After half an hour, the morph was finished and Taylor stripped out of her clothes. Her costume was relatively simple. She was invulnerable. It wasn't like she needed armor. Anything strong enough to seriously hurt her would vaporize even the toughest armor on contact anyway. And maybe she was indulging her vanity a little, but with the gorgeous amazonian body she'd given herself, she wanted to show off a little. Taylor had agonized over how modest to make her costume. Lyn was no help at all, of course; she didn't see why they shouldn't just go out naked.

In the end, she'd bought two dark grey one-piece swimsuits, a dozen plain black belts, and a pair of running shoes. She'd picked the shoes apart until just the soles remained, then stitched together cuttings from a couple of the belts and the second swimsuit to make thigh-high sandal-boots, or whatever those were called. Two of the belts she wore like belts, canted on her hips so they crossed in an X in front and back, and sewn in place. Finally, she cut the rest of the belts apart and sewed them back together into a harness for her batons, which she carried on her back.

Her flowing black hair fell free - she could use her Utility Cloud to keep it out of the way - and instead of a mask, Taylor had dug into the more advanced morph settings and added whorling patterns of silvery skin to her face and arms. Unless someone touched her, they'd think it was face paint. A token attempt at obscuring her identity, to draw attention away from the fact that this face was her mask.

Taylor sheathed her batons and used her Utility Cloud to look at herself. Oh yeah. No one was ever going to connect this to Taylor Hebert.

With a sharp crack of plastic hitting gravel, Taylor's batons slapped down on the rooftop. Not breaking stride, Taylor pushed off her improvised anchors and launched herself skyward. The batons
slapped back into her hands, and she gave in to the urge to whoop. It wasn't flying, but it had to be almost as much fun.

Landing and tucking into a roll on another rooftop, Taylor came to her feet and slowed, jogging to the opposite edge before stopping. Her sensor power picked up something interesting.

Ten stories below, two guys and two girls were flying through an alley. They moved like they were riding something too big and unsteady to be bikes. Taylor peered over the edge and blinked in surprise.

"Ooh, let's go see what they're doing," Lyn suggested.

Taylor wasn't sure what they were riding, but the beasts were big and spiny and ran with a loping gait kind of like dogs. There was a guy in black, trailing wisps of pitch black mist, a guy in a renfaire costume, a blonde girl in lavender, and a stocky girl wearing a plastic dog mask. From what she'd read on the wiki, these had to be the Undersiders. A small-time team of teenage villains.

In other words, a perfect target for a teen superhero on her first night out.

"Yeah," Taylor agreed.

Dropping her batons quietly, Taylor leaped and pushed off, soaring across to another rooftop and pulling her batons back to her hands in mid air. She repeated the process several more times, following the Undersiders into ABB territory.

Her last jump took her out beyond the taller buildings, and she pushed hard for extra hang time, almost losing her batons in the process. She landed hard on the brickwork roof of a three-story apartment block. Hard enough to hurt, but only for a moment. It was worth it, because now she was ahead of the Undersiders.

The streetlights were out in this neighborhood, but obviously that didn't impede Taylor's power. One group caught her attention. A surprisingly large crowd was gathered at one end of the street, and many of them were armed. Guns and knives. More guns than knives. And the Undersiders were heading right for them one street over.

Taylor focused on her power, trying to pick out more details.

Mostly it was useless information. She didn't need to know that one thug smoked too much, or that that other guy had a birthmark on his foot, or that one woman waxed her pubic hair. Really didn't need to know. Then her power caught something she'd never noticed before. A difference in the brain of one of the men. The Undersiders had the same thing. Something the parahumans all shared. Shit. Her power let her detect parahumans. That was big.

There were only two known male parahumans associated with the ABB. That meant it was either Lung or Oni Lee down there. Most likely Lung, from the way the others were gathered around him and the way he was giving orders.

"We really need to learn to read lips," Taylor commented. "Something about... shooting... lucky?"

"I think he said something about not giving them a chance to be clever or lucky," Lyn worked out.

Suddenly, the darkness of the starlit night was replaced by the cloying total darkness of what had to be Grue's power. Taylor barely noticed, but down on the street most of the minions were twitching nervously.
"The Undersiders are attacking," Taylor said. "And the ABB were expecting them."

Lung moved, and a blazing flame erupted in he midst of the darkness. Something heavy smashed into Lung, knocking him down and savaging his arm. One of the dog-beasts, probably, but Taylor could only perceive the people. The stocky girl, Hellhound, pointed and barked orders, and the minions reacted like something big was bowling through them.

Another burst of flame cleared away enough darkness for Taylor to see the burned dog-beast flinching away from a man wreathed in fire. Grue had taken Regent's scepter and was moving inside the cloud, methodically tasering the gang members Hellhound had knocked down.

Lung punched another dog-beast away with a flash of fire, while the men who'd escaped the cloud aimed their guns at Hellhound and Tattletale. Taylor moved before she could really think about what she was doing. Villains or not, she couldn't just stand by and let them get shot dead. Judging by the way Tattletale was diving for cover, they weren't bullet proof.

Batons down with a crack, leap, push, pull the batons back to her hands. Sail through the air. Land hard between the gunmen and the female Undersiders.

Taylor had time for the reassuring thought that she was bulletproof. But her costume wasn't. Fuck. Her parahuman power didn't work in the virtuality. In all her practice, she'd done without it. Her power made her as aware of her opponent's bodies as she was of her own. In the breathless moment with a dozen guns pointed at her, before they fired, Taylor was aware of exactly where each gun was aimed. She was perfectly aware of how close each finger was to pulling the trigger.

Batons. Same plastic as riot shields. Bulletproof. Taylor raised a baton into the path of the first bullet and braced it magnetically. The gun fired and Taylor felt the impact as the bullet hit her baton and ricocheted into the ground. She rode the recoil to block the third bullet while blocking the second with her other baton. Fourth bullet wouldn't hit anyone behind if she dodged, so she swayed out of the way.

The ABB minions emptied their clips at her, and Taylor held her ground. She had to cheat a little, blocking one shot with her thigh, letting another hit her jaw, and blocking several with her arms when more than two bullets came at her at the same instant. She was by no means faster than a speeding bullet, but Taylor was pleased to learn her powers let her fake it pretty convincingly.

"Who the fuck is this?" Hellhound demanded as the guns ran dry.

About then, Grue finished with the first set of thugs and swept a cloud of darkness over the gunmen before they could finish reloading.

Not replying, Taylor waded into the cloud of darkness. Grue's head snapped around to look at her in surprise as she stepped smoothly among the blindly flailing mooks and began clubbing them over the head with her batons, or delivering a carefully measured incapacitating electric current with her Utility Cloud.

"So," Lyn said, sheathing her batons with a flourish as she sauntered up to Grue. "What'd you guys do to piss these guys off so bad?"

A small bubble in the darkness opened up around her and Grue. "That going to matter?"

Lyn shrugged. "Mostly I'm curious."
Taylor interrupted, pointing at a suddenly charging Lung. "Incoming."

A wall of fire burst out of the wall of darkness around the two of them and Grue threw himself to the side. Taylor threw one of her batons, running towards Lung as he bulled passed. The baton stopped at ankle height and with Lung between Taylor and the baton, she set her feet and pulled. Lung tripped and went down hard.

All the reading and research on Brockton Bay's capes filtered through her mind. Fire. Regeneration. Powers got stronger the longer he fought. The only way to beat him was overwhelming preemptive force. The only viable strategies were murder or retreat.

Taylor threw her batons down in front of her. Leaped. Pushed. Batons back in her hands, Taylor cleared the cloud of darkness and landed heavily where the Undersiders were regrouping.

"Fuck," Tattletale swore.

"If you want a chance to run, now's a good time," Taylor said.

Lyn faced the cloud and twirled her batons. "All the mooks are down and Lung hasn't figured out which way you went, yet."

Tattletale and Grue exchanged a look behind her back. In the cloud, Lung turned and strode purposefully in a random direction. Not towards them. Good. They had time to talk.

"He knows where we're based," Grue said.

"That why you're attacking him?" Taylor asked.

"We were tipped off that he was coming after us," Tattletale explained. "Decided to strike first."

"Why was he coming after you?" Taylor asked.

"We stole all the money and trashed one of his casinos," Regent spoke up. "It was awesome."

"Why the fuck do you care?" Hellhound demanded. One of her beasts growled softly.

Lyn glanced back and shrugged. "Well, I wouldn't be much of a hero if I jumped in to save you and it turned out you were assasins or had maimed his baby sister or something like that. That would be embarrassing."

Hellhound and Grue tensed, but Tattletale was grinning now. "Nothing like that. We're just your not-so-average merry band of thieves. Hmm... you can sense him? Lung?"

Lyn nodded and Taylor pointed. "Over there, nineteen meters."

"Shit!" Grue suddenly exclaimed, blasting out more darkness.

Lung's head snapped around, and Taylor realized he'd finally cleared Grue's darkness. He'd heard them.

"Scatter!" Tattletale yelled.

The Undersiders split off in different directions, but Taylor didn't move. She didn't want to use lethal force, and Lyn was even more reluctant to risk killing someone. Lung was a regenerator, though. As long as she left the brain alone, anything else could be fixed. And Taylor had an idea.
Lung had shrunk back to near-human proportions, while he'd been alone in the darkness, with only a few small areas covered by scales.

Taylor brought her batons up and threw them out to the sides. The clear plastic sticks stopped in mid air, and with twist, began to orbit her. The batons whirled into a blur, producing first a chopping sound, then a high pitch whine. When she had them going as fast as she could without losing her magnetic grip, Taylor launched them like spears.

Faster than Lung could react, the first baton slammed through his neck and blew out the back of his spine in and explosion of blood and plastic splinters. Releasing the first threw off her balance, and the second missed entirely, vanishing into the night sky.

Taylor stood stunned as Lung's headless body crumpled. She made a choked noise of protest, one hand outstretched helplessly. The cloud of darkness vanished. At some point the Undersiders gathered around her again.

"Well, that happened," Regent said.

"I... I was trying to paralyze him," Taylor said weakly.

"Okay, I know you're freaking out right now, and if it helps, if anyone could survive decapitation, it'd be Lung, so he still might survive. But seriously, the Protectorate is going to get here soon, and I don't think you want to be here when they do," Tattletale said. "Now, you helped us out in a big way, so believe me when I say the least we can do is offer you a ride."

She needed a ride, Taylor thought faintly, since her batons were lost. But... is that what a hero would do? Run away and hide from the consequences of a mistake? On the one hand, a hero would stay and turn herself in. On the other, she had to get home, for her dad's sake. Taylor couldn't just disappear for however long.

Lyn took it out of her hands. "A ride would be good. I kind of needed my batons to get around."

"Very specialized telekinetic?" Grue guessed.

Lyn shook her head. "Where are we going?"

Taylor slid off the beast from behind Tattletale. They'd stopped in an alley well outside ABB territory.

"So, what do we call you?" Grue asked.

"Still haven't decided on a name, actually," Lyn admitted. "but I was considering Sentinel."

"Well, whatever you end up calling yourself," Tattletale said. "We owe you."

"I may have killed someone," Taylor cut in. "I don't want to be owed for that."

"Then think of it as us taking responsibility," Tattletale said. "That happened because you jumped in to save us. Doesn't sit right, not doing what we can for you."

Taylor looked at her in surprise, and Lyn said, "It's a nice sentiment."

Tattletale eventually convinced Taylor to meet them on the roof of a building they both knew. As the Undersiders rode off, Taylor turned and started climbing.
"Doesn't it bother you?" Taylor finally asked. "That we probably killed someone?"

"Of course it does," Lyn sighed.

"Why are you acting so casual about it?" Taylor asked.

"Taylor, you live on a death world already," Lyn said. "Tens of thousands of people have died in the short time since we attacked Lung. Tens of thousands, Taylor. And that's a on a good day. Is one lone death, a death that's probably saved many other lives, supposed to matter so much more just because we had a hand in it?"

"Yes," Taylor said emphatically.

Lyn shook her head in exasperation.

Taylor sat in class, practicing her lip-reading. She was picking it up fast.

"...cry yourself to sleep for a week," Emma sneered.

Taylor wasn't listening. It was a small thing, that small anomaly in Sophia's brain that Taylor had never considered before. The same extra piece all the parahumans she'd seen shared. Sophia was a parahuman.

Taylor sat, using her power to spy on the Wards in their base, at the edge of her range.

She felt numb. She felt crushed.

In a way, this was exactly the sort of thing she'd been afraid of when she decided not to join the Wards, writ large, and she could almost laugh at how right she'd been in her fears. Yet, until now, there'd always been a hope in the back of her mind, that maybe there was friendship and camaraderie waiting for her among the heroes.

That hope was dead.

"All this time," Taylor said.

Sophia spun around at Taylor's unexpected presence. She blinked, and her body relaxed, her face a picture of incredulous disgust. "Hebert? The fuck?"

"All this time," Taylor said again. "All this time I've been taking your shit because I didn't want to use my powers on a civilian, and all this time, you weren't."

Sophia laughed in contempt. "Just what the hell do you think you're... doing..." Sophia trailed off as she registered the key part of Taylor's statement, and her eyes widened.

Taylor lunged at the other girl, and Sophia only barely dodged, flickering slightly. Sophia lashed out, and Taylor took a punch to the gut. Taylor retaliated with a kick, but Sophia leaped and went shadowy, gliding straight up and pulling a concealed knife.

Drawing her batons from under her hoodie, Taylor slapped them down and shot into the air. Sophia went solid and plunged towards her, stabbing downwards. Taylor let the knife rip down over her collar bone, tearing through her clothes but failing to penetrate her skin.
Breath rushed out of Sophia as Taylor kneed her in the gut. Sophia kicked off, turning shadowy and leaping off the side of an apartment building. Taylor landed on a fire escape and met the other girl's shadowy charge.

A scream tore out of Sophia's shadowy form as she tried to pass through Taylor's body.

Sophia solidified, falling out of the air, covered in horrific electrical burns. Taylor sprung downwards, caught Sophia, and landed back on the ground. Sophia's right arm broke off and fell to the concrete in a puff of ash and charcoal.

Sophia's eyes were wide and terrified as Taylor held her up by the front of her shirt.

"Superconductors are amazing things," Taylor commented. "Do you have any idea how much live current is circulating in my body at any given time?"

Sophia choked something unintelligible. Taylor slammed her up against the side of the building, then started punching her in the face. It wasn't long before Sophia was a bloody, gurgling mess. She went shadowy one last time, and Taylor's fist sank through her skull.

There was no scream this time, just a soft humming crackle as Sophia's shadow state dissolved into mist. All that remained of the girl was the arm that had burnt off earlier.

The world around Taylor froze.

Lyn stepped around the corner, naked, in her petite blue-skinned girl form with neon green hair and features. "How many times are you going to do this?"

Taylor took a deep breath to calm herself. "Until I've convinced myself it's a bad idea to do it for real."

Lyn came over and hugged her, one hand working its way into the back of her jeans to grope Taylor's butt. Taylor returned the hug, ducking her face into Lyn's hair.

The world around them faded, Brockton Bay backstreet vanishing to make way for a fantasy scene. A vast cloudscape lit by three brilliant moons, with soaring arches of glittering water flowing like rivers through the sky. The two of them stood on a circular platform that floated in the center of the scene. It was twice the size of Taylor's entire house, and furnished like a penthouse apartment. Despite being open to the air, with no walls or ceiling, it was peaceful and undisturbed by wind.

Between one moment and the next, Taylor's clothes were gone. And between another moment and the one after that, Lyn was tall and male and muscular. Taylor jumped to wrap her legs around his waist, and crushed their lips together.

Sentinel climbed the fire-escape, planted one hand, and flipped onto the roof, displaying a casual agility few gymnasts could match. She recognized the three people on the roof as the Undersiders through her sensor power, but this was the first time she'd seen their faces with her eyes.

A fair blonde girl with freckles in a black shirt. A hunky black guy in a tight green t-shirt. A slim pretty boy with curly hair in a white jacket. Three of the Undersiders, out of costume. Taylor was momentarily distracted by the sexy as Sentinel's eyes lingered on Grue, and Lyn smiled slightly in agreement.

"And she arrives," Tattletale said smugly, turning to Regent. "Pay up."
Regent fished a wad of bills out of his pocket and handed it over. "You cost me fifty bucks, you know," he said, "but that entrance? Kinda worth it."

Grue coughed awkwardly, then extended a hand. "Hey, I'm Brian."

Lyn shook his hand, even as Taylor said, "Okay... I'm finding this kind of weird. Why are you guys revealing your secret identities like this?"

"Call it a show of trust," Grue told her.

"I'm Lisa," Tattletale said. "That's Alec, and Bitch... well, you've read her wiki page."

Taylor blinked. "How could you possibly know that?"

"My power's cool like that," Tattletale... Lisa said. "We thought you'd like to know, by the way. Lung survived and is in PRT custody."

A tension seeped out of Taylor as she sighed in relief.

"He's in a coma or something," Alec added. "Busy regrowing his... lungs."

Brian groaned. "Alec..."

Lyn snickered. "So anyway, I'm guessing you didn't want to meet just so you could tell me your real names. What's this about?"

Brian hesitated and looked to Lisa. She bent down and picked up a plastic lunchbox that she held out for Sentinel to take.

"I said we owed you," Lisa told her. "All yours, no strings attached."

"Alexandria," Taylor deadpanned, noting the print on the front. "I think I already have one of those, actually."

Lisa rolled her eyes. "Open it."

Sentinel took the lunchbox and popped it open. Her eyes went wide. Eight stacks of bills, tied with paper bands. Each of the paper bands had $250 written on it in permanent marker.

"Two grand," Taylor breathed, slowly closing the lunchbox and looking up.

"You have two choices," Lisa explained. "You can take that as a gift. A thank you for jumping in to save our asses from Lung. A bit of incentive to talk instead of fight if we wind up getting in each other's way at some point. It'd be nice to have one less person shoot on sight while we're out doing daring dastardly deeds."

"What's the other choice?" Lyn asked curiously.

"You take this as your first installment in the monthly allowance you're entitled to as one of us," Brian answered. "An Undersider."

Following that, Lyn and Taylor had a silent argument, while Brian and Alec looked on, bemused, and Lisa watched them with a little grin that was entirely too smug.

Taylor was actually more tempted by the money than Lyn was, but even if the Undersiders weren't too bad as far as villains went, she still didn't want to go down that road. Lyn was less impressed by
the money, but she thought pulling heists sounded fun, and argued that it was kind of lonely with just the two of them.

"It's... an appealing offer," Sentinel finally said. "You guys seem pretty decent. But I think I still want to try to be a hero. Joining a villain team is pretty incompatible with that aim."

"Well shit," Alec said blandly.

"Look, I'm not particularly interested in getting in your way," Sentinel told them. "I don't have any fondness for the Protectorate, either. You can consider me a rogue, I guess, with a thing for protecting bystanders."

Brian nodded. "We'll do that. So... see you around, I guess?"

"See you around," Sentinel agreed. "And if you want, you can call me Lyn."

Taylor's dad had locked them in a room and insisted on a conversation. He wanted to know why Taylor wasn't coming home until sunrise most days. Taylor was less than thrilled.

"Tell him whatever you want, break down the door and leave, I don't care, I quit," Taylor muttered under her breath, before fleeing to the virtuality.

Lyn turned around with a sigh. "Danny, I know you're just trying to be a good dad for Taylor, but you have to realize she feels like you're betraying her."

Danny stared at her. "Taylor, what...?"

"Taylor isn't here right now, Danny," Lyn said.

Striding over, Lyn plonked down in the chair across from him and pulled off her glasses. She planted her elbows on the table and fidgeted a bit. Taylor's morph profile always felt awkward when Taylor wasn't also present. Lyn idly flipped a couple of morph settings for her eyes, figuring it'd be appropriate to provide a visual reminder that she wasn't Taylor right now. With parahuman, or rather parafae speed, her sclera and iris darkened to make the black on black eyes she preferred, which she hadn't actually worn outside the virtuality since the locker.

Danny's eyes went wide and he flinched back, his chair screeching on the tile. Okay, not quite the reaction she was going for. He recovered quickly, settling into an angry glare.

"If you're not Taylor, then who the hell are you?" Danny demanded.

"You want the short answer or the accurate one?" Lyn asked.

"Short, please," Danny bit out.

"I'm Taylor's powers," Lyn told him. "My name's Lyn."

Danny blinked. "You... what?"

"Taylor got powers a few months ago," Lyn said. "Only, some weird chance happened to her powers before she got them, by which I mean me, so when she got her powers, they came with a free Lyn surprise."

"I want, to talk, to my daughter," Danny said slowly.
"Well, your daughter doesn't want to talk to you," Lyn told him, matter-of-fact. "I can't force her to come out, and I wouldn't even if I could."

Danny slammed his hand down on the table, then spun and flung his folded newspaper into the kitchen with a crash when he saw that Lyn was unimpressed. He paced back and forth a couple of times, clenching his hands, and finally sank back into his chair with a broken sigh.

"You've been with her, all this time?" Danny finally asked. "What are you?"

"That's a ridiculously long story," Lyn said. "But the part I figure you care about? I'm Taylor's friend."

Danny stared at her for a long moment. "Fine." He sat back and sighed. "So you've been helping Taylor be a cape? That's what she's been doing?"

"That's what we've been doing, yeah," Lyn agreed. "We're Sentinel."

"Who?"

"I can show you later, if Taylor's okay with it," Lyn said. "Are you satisfied with that? Or am I gonna have to bust down the door to get out of here?"

"I... would like to know my daughter is safe," Danny said. "This cape stuff, its dangerous. What if Taylor gets hurt and can't get help?"

Lyn snorted. "We're the most indestructible cape in the entire city, Danny. It'd take something like that guy who can teleport only half of you to even injure our body, and anything that doesn't kill us outright, we'll heal from. This body feeds on electromagnetic energy and radiation, making us immune to the less esoteric blaster abilities up to and including Behemoth. Taylor is probably the safest person on this hellhole of a planet."

Sentinel strode into the building where all the capes were gathering for the fight against Leviathan. She instantly identified all the locals with her power, but that was only a portion of the crowd, and more capes were arriving through various means all the time.

She'd brought her entire armory of homemade plastic weapons for this. Eight clear batons were sheathed at her back. Six clear orbs, each the size of a fist, were clustered in threes on each of her shoulders, held in place magnetically. Four clear glaives, a foot wide with three razor sharp blades, held against her upper arms and her thighs.

She still didn't have a phone. The Utility Cloud kept its magnetic fields remarkably contained, but delicate electronics still couldn't survive close proximity to her body while she was using that ability heavily. Which was pretty much all the time while she was bounding around the city in costume, looking for trouble.

"Hey," she greeted the Undersiders, who were once again missing Bitch.

Grue startled slightly, staying silent for a moment before he greeted her. "Sentinel."

Sentinel raised an eyebrow. "Worried?"

"No, well, yes," Grue said, shaking his head.

"The team got some disturbing news yesterday," Tattletale explained.
"Disturbing enough to take your mind off an Endbringer fight?" Sentinel asked. "That sounds... bad."

Tattletale shrugged. "It's a thing. We're dealing. How have you been?"

"I broke into a house to save a ten-year-old boy being beaten by his dad the other night," Sentinel admitted. "The sister called the cops on me..."

"Rough time," Tattletale said with a smirk.

"I don't care," Sentinel said, before lightening. "Newter's been hitting on me at every opportunity since he found out I could touch him without losing my mind. I'm... undecided on how to respond."

Tattletale grinned knowingly. "An... internal conflict?"

Sentinel lowered her voice as Taylor spoke. "Yeah, I'm not really interested, but I'll probably end up... stepping out... so Lyn can have her way with him." Lyn added, "Speaking of which, one of these days I've really got to get you to tell me what the hell happened between you and Faultline."

"We'll see about that," Tattletale teased. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I see Armsmaster over there glaring at us, and I think there are words I need to be having with him."

"That's what happens when you infiltrate a fundraiser and sneak motor oil into a man's soup," Sentinel deadpanned.

Sentinel couldn't sense the Endbringer with her power. This, naturally, sucked, but she still had all her normal senses, and she never had to take her eyes off of him to see where all the other capes around her were.

Shooting up from the street, she used a baton to yank a guy in bronze armor out of the way of Leviathan's kick, and punched a whirring glaive into the Endbringer's largest eye. It scratched it. Barely.

Leviathan swatted at her, and she yanked herself towards the steel frame of the building to her left, only for the water afterimage to smash into her and send her crashing through an apartment block. Sentinel didn't even have a bruise, but her costume had been obliterated.

"Oh goddamnit," Taylor cursed as Sentinel picked herself up from the rubble and charged back into the fray wearing nothing but the tattered remains of one sandal.

Life went on. Stuff happened.

Amy Dallon had a minor freakout the first time she shook Sentinel's hand.

Sentinel arm-wrestled Aegis. It was declared a tie when Clockblocker got bored.

Taylor finally went on a date with Brian. She used her cape body, minus the silver markings, a different hairstyle, and in normal clothes. It went well, until it was interrupted by Shatterbird.

The Slaughterhouse Nine were more than a little miffed when Sentinel proved immune to... pretty much everything except the Siberian. Bonesaw in particular was really cheesed off about it, and begged Jack Slash to let her take Sentinel's severed head with them to study, because she maybe actually had more in common with Endbringer physiology than human, even if it wasn't the same
thing at all, and her powers just didn't make sense. Sentinel was rescued by Newter and the rest of Faultline's Crew. It took her an hour to regenerate a full body.

One night, Tattletale called Sentinel up at home, freaking Taylor out more than a little, and urgently requested Sentinel's help in her coup against Coil. Sentinel didn't get there in time, and Tattletale didn't survive the attempt.

No one ever figured out exactly who was responsible for posting it, but the photo of Sentinel riding atop Behemoth like a rodeo bull, stark naked after her costume was destroyed for the sixth time, became a viral internet meme.

Taylor eventually became resigned to her alter ego being known as Clothing Damage Girl, even being cited as a Real Life Example on TvTropes. Lyn utterly failed to see what the problem was. Having lived on Earth Bet for years by this point, Taylor didn't buy for a second that it was ignorance rather than stubbornness.

Lyn's homesickness never truly went away, and she missed Eelesia and Zach a lot. Taylor made her a promise, that if they ever found a way to go looking, they would.

Chapter End Notes

(It took me so long to finally settle on where to send Lyn. Eventually I just gave up and gave in to the inevitable, even if it strains credulity for Lyn to land outside the metaverse where the magic that conjured her up actually exists. Worm belongs to Wildbow and can be found at parahumans dot wordpress dot com.)
Innocence

Terry was ninety-four years old, and on her deathbed. Her son sat at her bedside, worn and grey, though still healthy and strong. His face was a stiff mask of helplessness. Terry's frail hand managed a slight squeeze, and a crawling pain lanced up her arm at even so minor a stress.

The nurse had been saying it wouldn't be long now for almost a week. Terry would have thought she'd be afraid, but the fear had faded as struggling back to consciousness became more and more arduous every day. She'd lived a good, full life, and she'd be leaving a loving family as her legacy. Terry had a handful of regrets, things she'd never gotten to do, but they were small things. For everything important, she had closure, and she was oh so weary.

This life is done with me, Terry thought distantly.

It could have been minutes or hours, Terry would never know, but her heart beat weaker and weaker as the time dragged by. Her vision went dark. Her body went numb. Her thoughts slowed.

I've died, Terry thought. There was still no fear. Only a longing for peace.

Only, this was a peace she'd never enjoy. She'd never wake up. In a few moments there wouldn't be a Terry anymore, and she didn't want that. She didn't. And that was her body's final betrayal, in those last moments of her existence. Terry was ending. Forever. And she couldn't even be afraid. Her last feeble thoughts grasped desperately for some hint of the horror or fear that should have been there if she was even now still herself.

Nothing.

...Bliss.

It was stunning. Almost an ecstasy of relief. Terry basked in it, unthinking.

After nearly thirteen minutes of thoughtless bliss, Terry finally noticed something she really should have noticed immediately. She was experiencing. She was thinking. She did, in fact, still exist.

Terry's eyes snapped open as her heart surged in excitement, or delayed terror, or something, she didn't even know, but she felt so alive. Her limbs uncurled from a fetal position - strong! effortless! without pain! - and moved through some kind of clear viscous fluid lit by the dim reddish glow filtering in through the fleshy walls that enclosed her.

The walls peeled apart like the peals of a blooming flower and the fluid drained away, leaving Terry kneeling on the meaty pad at the bottom. She sucked in the sweetest breath she could ever remember taking as she trembled from the sheer release of emotion.

It was incredible to realize, now that she was free of it, just how much agony she'd been in, day in
and day out for the latter years of her life. It had accumulated slowly, sneaking up on her over the
decades, until she couldn't even imagine its absence. The horror of it was only just hitting her. It had
gotten so bad that she'd wanted to die just to get away from it, and she'd never even realized.

Now that all that pain was gone she wanted to laugh, or cry, or just.. live.

Once she managed to calm herself down a bit, Terry turned her attention to the world around her and
stood up. She expected to stumble, or tremble, but she didn't. It was effortless. Terry looked down at
her naked body and gasped. She had the body of a twenty-something. A fit twenty-something, with
shapely breasts, lean muscle, and flawless smooth skin. She was young again, and in better shape
than she'd ever been in her life.

"How...?" Terry breathed, looking around as though the grassy hillsides and clear blue sky might
provide an answer.

Terry jogged up the hill immediately in front of her, pausing halfway to the top to investigate why
the grass felt so weird under her feet. It wasn't grass. She wasn't sure what it was, but each 'blade'
had the texture and pliability of an earlobe. There was no dirt underneath either. That was... really
bizarre.

Terry reached the top of the hill, holding one arm modestly across her chest.

Rolling green hills as far as the eye could see in every direction, and nothing else. That was... kind of
disappointing.

"Hello?" Terry called, and then bellowed at the top of her lungs, "Helllllllooooooo!"

Terry found herself giggling that she even could bellow at all.

A movement in the corner of her eye made her spin around, but it was just the flower womb thing
closing up. Terry took a deep breath and considered her options. She... really didn't have any idea at
all what was going on, or how it was even possible.

"Start walking, I guess," Terry mused, smiling. "I can walk. Hell, I bet I can run."

Going with that thought, Terry decided to chase the sun, and broke into a sprint. Her body moved.
Her feet dug into the not-grass and pushed off with eager strength. Her arms swung, hands flat. Her
dirty blonde hair blew back, lifting off her forehead. Her breasts bounced obscenely at first, but
somehow it didn't hurt, and as she picked up speed her gait smoothed out.

Terry raced from hill to hill, lithe legs flashing and a laughing grin on her face. Her stride ate the
distance, and she didn't tire. She wasn't even breathing hard. Terry laughed as she actually got air
over the narrower hills. There was no burn in her legs, no physical sign that she couldn't keep the
pace up forever.

On the next hill, Terry went for hang time on purpose, leaping from the peak with all her strength.
She sailed through the air, falling a distance equivalent to leaping from a third-story window. She
broke her fall with a somersault and didn't even slow down. Where that came from, she didn't know,
but it felt so natural to do that she didn't question it.

Two hours later, Terry's body still showed no sign of fatigue, and her elation faded as she wondered
if maybe she really was dead. She'd been sprinting up and down hillsides for two hours at a pace a
motorbike would be pressed to match. She wasn't out of breath. She wasn't sweating. She wasn't
hungry or thirsty. And the sun hadn't moved.
It was a little unnerving.

Reborn from a flower with petals of human flesh. Weird not-grass. Having her youth back, while apparently lacking bodily needs. A sun that didn't move... and now that she looked, it was too big. Also, she was looking at the sun and it didn't hurt. And she was all alone. If she was dead, this certainly didn't match the description of any afterlife from any religion she'd ever heard of. Except maybe limbo.

It just didn't fit. Pausing at the top of a hill, Terry ran her hands down her body. The reality. The sensation. She felt alive. Her body reacted to sensation and to her emotions the way it should have, much more so than it had as an ailing old woman.

Terry didn't know what this was, but death it was not.

Well gosh, was this a pickle. His scheduled sacrifices had been stolen away right from the alter before they could be claimed. That certainly wasn't his fault. Richard Wilkins was pretty darn good at getting a word in edgewise. It was a useful skill to have when a demon was snarling threats at him.

"Now now," Wilkins placated. "Let's not go saying things you might regret. We have an excellent record of dealing in good faith. Let's not go ruining that. It seems to me we're dealing with third-party interference. And you know what they say about the third party."

The demon was looking less than convinced, but Wilkins had been talking his way into status and power for a long time. He wasn't exceedingly worried. Still, if his sacrifices were going to be uncooperative and vanish off his alter, that sure put a crimp in his plans. He'd have to see what he could do to correct the situation.

Desta tried to swallow as his mama dripped water onto his lips, because he was so thirsty, but it was hard. He was burning. He was freezing. The fever was only getting worse as the gash on his leg festered.

He was hungry and not hungry. Hungry like always, but couldn't stand food now, which was bad 'cause he was thin and weak even before he got hurt. His mama was crying. Saying the doctor wouldn't be coming. His own eyes felt hot and scratchy, but he wasn't crying no more. Too hard. Hurt too much.

Desta's mama was talking at him again, but he couldn't understand the words no more. He tried to beg her to make it better. It was scaring him, not understanding. Sounds were all wrong and he wasn't sure he was even hearing them. You was supposed to hear sounds.

He was scared.

... 

Desta woke up underwater. Or undersomethin' in any case. He gasped, breathing out a lung-full of fluid as the fleshy walls around him fell away. That was supposed to hurt. Why didn't it hurt?

Clambering to his feet, Desta forgot all about that minor mystery as he laid eyes on something the likes of which he'd never seen before. Blocky spires of stone, covered in luscious green and towering into the sky. Fancy bridges of clear glass or somethin' stretched between the spires, each bigger than Desta's whole village and brilliantly backlit by a fiery sunset.

"Where am I?" Desta asked, enraptured by the sight.
There was nobody else anywhere he could see, and Desta was bewildered. It was obvious he wasn't sick no more, and that was a miracle. Looking down at himself, Desta's mouth fell open.

He was bigger. Older. His starved-thin arms and legs... weren't. Corded muscle moved under healthy ebony skin and he couldn't see his ribs no more. And his thing was doing that thing the older boys' things did sometimes.

After taking a moment to understand that what he was seeing was real, Desta edged through the verdant landscape looking to see if there were any other people around. He didn't understand what was going on, but he wasn't hungry, and he wasn't hurt, and he wasn't weak.

Desta was worried about finding his mama, but he wasn't scared no more.

Spike drained the human until she stopped struggling, then bit into his own arm and forced it into the woman's mouth. The woman went limp in his arms, and he scooped her up to carry her back to the hide out.

He hadn't gone half a block when the woman vanished out of his arms in a flash of white light.

"Oh, bugger all!" Spike complained.

It looked like his Dru was right. Something was stealing the bodies before they could turn. If this went on, there wouldn't be any new vampires, ever. That... changed things quite a bit, in grand scheme, didn't it? Could be fun.

Kirika stormed into her room and slammed the door behind her with a bang.

"How could she?! That bitch! How could she!" Kirika raged, before falling to her knees against her bed and sobbing into the blankets. "I thought you were my friend..."

The sound of the door opening sharply behind her made Kirika tense. Kirika had been arrested. Her parents had been totally understanding... not! They hadn't even believed her! But then, she could barely believe it herself. Erika was supposed to be her best friend forever, but...

"Kirika!" her mother snapped. "We are not done discussing this! I did not raise a thief!"

Kirika's hands clenched in the blankets as hot tears of frustration trickled down her face. "I told you! It was Erika!"

Her mom scowled at her. "I did not raise a liar either! I can't believe you would try to foist this off on that sweet girl. You should be ashamed of yourself! That is not how you treat your friend!"

"But she...!"

"I don't want to hear it!" her mom interrupted. "You are going to apologize to that girl, am I clear?"

Kirika was too outraged to form a coherent reply. She just screamed into her bedspread and then whirled to her feet, screaming in her mom's face, "No! Get out! Get out! Get out!"

The slap stung, and Kirika recoiled.

"I will not have my daughter speaking to me that way," her mom snarled. "I'll leave, but you're going to stay, and you're going to stay until you can act like a civilized human being."
With that, her mom stepped out and shut the door, leaving Kirika alone. She trembled with helpless rage, suddenly screaming again as she smashed the contents of her desk onto the floor, and proceeded to thoroughly wreck her room.

When she was done, she collapsed face-down onto her bed and cried. Her best friend had turned on her, her record and future was ruined, her parents were blaming her when none of it was her fault, and she had nowhere left to turn.

Kirika shifted as something sharp dug into her thigh, and found a pair of titanium craft scissors that had gotten knocked onto her bed during her rampage. She rolled onto her back and looked thoughtfully at the sharp industrial-grade blades through tear-blurred eyes.

Sniffing, Kirika considered it. Her future had been pulled out from under her. The people who were supposed to care about her had all turned on her. What did she have to live for anyway? The thought of stepping out of her room, going downstairs, and accepting her mom's baseless judgement... it was unbearable. A hopeless anger burned in her chest, at being held hostage to her mother's whims. Her life was in the hands of people who'd just proven themselves unworthy of it.

Kirika opened the scissors and gripped them around the hinge. This, at least, was on her terms. The pain was startling, sharp, but also satisfying in a way. This was one thing where she did have control.

She didn't leave a note. It was obvious to her that no one cared what she had to say anyway.

...  

Enveloping soothing warmth. Kirika woke confused, by the fact that she was waking up at all and not even in a hospital. She moved in the viscous fluid, and the reddishness around her peeled apart and drew away.

Kirika stood up, feeling a breeze blow around her naked body, and blinked. She looked again, and nope, she was still seeing the same thing.

A vast cliff face stretching in both directions as far as she could see. Massive half-arches of natural stone and greenery were lined up across the drop, providing a series of natural ramps leading down into the sparkling lake below. Kirika was standing on one of the arches, about a hundred yards from where it joined the top of the cliff, so the ground under her feet was mildly sloped.

Dazedly, she walked over to the edge of her arch and peered over. Hanging under the arches, between the cliff face and the water, were an amazing variety of interconnected platforms and bridges. The glinting silvery thread that supported the interlocking and brightly colored lilypad-esque platforms reminded Kirika uncomfortably of spiderweb, but it was shaped like rope bridges and stuff so it wasn't too disturbing.

"Hey!" Kirika shouted. "Anybody?"

Nobody answered. There wasn't a single person in sight.

And she had leaned too far over the edge. Her hand slipped on the big soft leaves that grew along the sides of the arches, and she shrieked in fright as she went over the edge. Ironic, perhaps, to be scared of a fall after what she'd just done to herself, but in truth that had been about control. Tumbling off the side of the landarch, she did not feel in control.

"Eeeeeeeah!" Kirika screamed, scrabbling desperately for a handhold.

Kirika slid to a stop against the bare stone, heart pounding. She finally dared to open her eyes, and when she did she almost let go of the stone in surprise. She was on the underside of the arch,
clinging to bare stone without any kind of handhold, like she was Spiderman or something.

Only she wasn’t clinging by her hands. Her whole body was pulling towards the rock. She could feel it in her bones. Literally, in her bones, pulling against the solid stone above her.

"...what?"

Glancing over her shoulder, Kirika saw there was a platform relatively close below her. The landing looked soft, but it was still further than she wanted to fall. Maybe she could lower herself gently?

Carefully, she pulled one foot away from the smooth rock, then the other, then a hand. Finally she let go with her other hand. Her breath was short with nerves. It was working. She didn't know what it was, but it was working.

Kirika relaxed her bones, she guessed, whatever that meant, and slowly began to drift downwards. Except, as soon as she started moving away from the rock, it took more and more effort to keep from falling. She panicked.

Kirika shot back towards the rock surface like she was on a rubberband. She smashed into it face first. The pain was fleeting, but it was enough to startle her into letting go completely. Kirika shrieked as she plummeted through the air, flailing wildly.

Slam!

Kirika bounced as the air was forced from her lungs, but again the pain was fleeting. It took her a moment to realize she could breath just fine, and had been holding her breath waiting for the pain that never came.

Flopping over onto her back, Kirika stared up at the earthen arch blocking the clear blue sky above her and started to laugh. Well, she'd wanted to escape from her life. Looks like she got her wish.

"How the fuck did I get here?" Kirika wondered. "Am I dead? What is this place?"

The platform was comfortable enough, firm yet sort of spongy, that Kirika didn't bother to move for a while. She was still looking up at the sky and trying to figure out what to do about her situation a while later, when something small and white zipped across the sky above her.

Kirika jolted up. She stared for a second, before dashing across a bridge to another platform in the direction the thing had been moving. It was there, coming back from below and slaloming around the earthen arches just above the water. It suddenly shot upwards in a flutter of white cloth and resolved into a floating girl in a white cloak. A girl her brain labeled 'Oriko' for some reason.

Kirika gaped as the girl gently drifted down and landed on the platform with her. Suddenly aware of her nudity, Kirika blushed and turned aside, covering herself with her arms as best she could.

"Hello, Kirika," the girl greeted softly as she unfastened her cloak. "My name is Oriko. Here."

Her name was really Oriko? Huh. Weird.

Sagging in gratitude, Kirika took the cloak and wrapped it around herself. She looked up to thank Oriko for the loan, only to stall in her tracks. Without the cloak, all Oriko was wearing was a shimmery white loincloth and a wrap around her chest with a knot between her modest breasts.

Guh. Just... guh. Since when was she even into girls? But clearly she was; the evidence was right in front of her because... guh.
With what had to be a brilliant blush, Kirika replied, "Th-thanks. I'm, um. Thanks."

"It is nice to meet you," Oriko said with a bow. "I'm glad I found you. I've been alone since I woke up here."

"Uh, yeah," Kirika said. "Me too. So, uh, where'd you get the cloak?"

"I made it," Oriko told her, pointing out over the lake. "There is a... thing about twenty kilometers that way that grows silk cloth in big sheets."

"Oh, weird," Kirika opined. "Um, so you haven't seen any other people either?"

Oriko nodded. "I wouldn't expect otherwise. This is a new world, and we're among the first to be brought here."

"A new world?" Kirika repeated. "Where are we?"

Oriko smiled slightly. "We're on Venus."

Oh.

Wait.

"Say what?!"

Joe held on to Charlene's hands as he desperately tried to convey how much he needed her to believe he wasn't crazy. He finally had proof. Real proof that no one could ignore. He'd called her as soon as he was sure they wouldn't be trampled by a riot, a few days after the Fae's upgrade pods had come burning down out of the sky like a rain of fire, when the huge video screens in the sky had dissolved.

The park where they met didn't look all that different, except for the half dozen of the fleshtone pods dominating open areas of grass.

"You didn't believe me about Antarctica not being a meteor, or about the Prometheus crash being more than an ordinary plane, and I can understand that, some of the stuff SG-1's been up to lately sounds even crazier than usual, but I knew and you know I knew about the Fae months ago," Joe pleaded desperately. "I told you what their ship looked like. I told you when they'd announce themselves to the world, and then they did. It's all real, Charlene!"

"You..." There were tears in Charlene's eyes. "You could have seen something... a leaked photo.. a..."

"All the way back in November?" Joe asked. "Please, Charlene."

"Oh, Joe... I'm so sorry!" Charlene cried, throwing her arms around him.

Joyce luxuriated in the blissful peace that enclosed her. It took her a moment to realize it was done. The purported three weeks had passed in the blink of an eye. She felt good. It wasn't immediately noticeable, but all the little aches and pains of daily life or of waking up - muscle stiffness, tiredness, sluggishness - were gone completely.

Uncurling, Joyce reached forward in the warm darkness and the fleshy petals of the pod unfurled. The fluid enclosure shrunk down into the base, and Joyce breathed it out of her lungs as her head emerged into the air.
Joyce stood up and looked around in the darkness, only to stop abruptly. She was expecting her basement. This... was not her basement.

Starlight gleamed off the mouth of what looked like some sort of natural cave, with her car parked inside next to a convertible she could remember seeing the Chase girl driving. A short distance from her own pod, Joyce saw another in the cave with her. Something was off with her eyesight, too. Color. It was dark enough that she should have only been able to make out shapes, but she could still see hints of color.

Joyce went over to her car and opened the passenger side where her suitcase was. She got dressed quickly. She wanted to know how she'd ended up in a cave somewhere. Even if she couldn't begin to guess what had happened, it really didn't bode well.

The car started up, and Joyce noticed a note on the dashboard. Simple directions back to Sunnydale. The knot of worry in her chest eased a little.

The drive didn't take long, but after she made it back to town more than once her headlights illuminated a familiar pale reddish shape. One was directly in the middle of the road, and she got a good look as she swerved around it. Birthing pods. Hundreds of them. Maybe thousands. Out in the open, in public.

"Oh, Buffy, what have you done?" Joyce worried.

Joyce made it home without incident, but the house was dark. She pulled into the garage and parked, then went inside calling for Buffy. The house was just as she'd left it, except for the hole in the basement floor and the broken basement windows, but it was empty. No sign of Buffy or her friends.

It was the middle of the night, though. She decided to wait until morning to start calling around. Joyce didn't know what to do with herself in the mean time. She'd spent the last three weeks asleep and didn't feel like going to bed.

Well, there was three weeks of mail she need to catch up on.

The meadow within the Eliezera that the scoobies were coming to call home had a new addition. A rectangular plateau twice the size of a king sized bed, with a six-foot display screen at one end. It had a give that was reminiscent of memory foam, and a glossy near-frictionless texture akin to wet latex without the smell or the creaking sounds. The slick surface was decorated in a fractal pattern of varying grey shades, and scattered with geometrically shaped white cushions, electrostatically adhered to prevent them from floating away or sliding unless deliberately moved.

Buffy, Xander, and two of the Willows had arranged a collection of wedges and cylinders facing the display, and the display was showing the eight biggest news channels from around the world.

"It looks like things are starting to calm down," Buffy said, absently caressing Willow-rhom's arms.

"Everybody was poised for something to happen," Willow-rhom mused. "I think they're starting to realize nothing's going to happen, I mean besides the first upgradees waking up."

Willow-rhom sat with her back to the cushions and Buffy between her legs. Her arms wrapped around Buffy's waist as Buffy snuggled back against her chest. Willow's chin rested lightly on Buffy's shoulder when she wasn't idly kissing Buffy's neck or cheek. One of Willow's hands wandered down between Buffy's legs, fingers sliding through folds. Buffy lifted her hips, pressing into Willow's touch, before relaxing again.
"Most places have given up on trying to cordon off or otherwise keep people away from the pods, so there's that," Xander said, "but look. Some cities are excavating pods and taking them elsewhere. Most of those pods are empty, like, the ones that were blocking a street or something, but some of them aren't."

Xander sat beside them, left shoulder touching Willow-rhom's right shoulder with her right leg draped over his left. Xander had Willow-kink on his lap, her back to his chest with his erection buried in her pussy. She was leaning to the side, her head between Xander's and Buffy's with her arm looped behind Xander's neck. Xander's head was pillowed on the outer side of her milk-laden breast and his right hand reached around to absently stroke her thick slippery cock, making her walls twitch and clench around his own member.

Across the meadow, tangled together in Willow's hammock, Jessie and Dawn along with Willow-para were dead to the world. The three of them were in a virtuality where Willow-para was guiding the two kids through an early lesson in basic epistemology. Willow-icos was off with the model of Venus, touching up the mostly-random terrain before anyone woke up there.

"Mmm," Buffy sighed softly as Willow-rhom's fingers wiggled insider her. "It's not the military doing it. That's good, right?"

"I've been trying to listen in here or there through the sensor fog," Willow-kink admitted, unconsciously moving her hips, gently riding Xander as his hand moved up and twisted around her glans. "Oooh... Um, yeah, but it's harder than you'd think to figure out where to listen in, and um, I'm not really sure I should even be paying attention to this anyway."

"You're not?" Xander prompted, softly kissing the side of her boob.

"It's the whole evils not of your making thing," Willow-rhom chimed in. "That wasn't just a sound bite. It is sad when people are shitty to each other, but we..."

Willow-rhom trailed off, placing kisses along Buffy's shoulder. Her fingers curled into Buffy's wet entrance while her other hand reached across Buffy's body and fondled her breast. Buffy reached over and curled her fingers around Willow-kink's hard shaft below Xander's hand.

"We had a, a responsibility to eliminate nature's cruelties, because we were the only ones who could," Willow-kink continued. "I know it sounds kind of mean, but really, we're not in charge of anybody. Human cruelty is humanity's problem. There's still a whole galaxy out there full of people who need us to save them from the things they can't save each other from. Growing old. Getting sick. Starving."

"You're probably right," Buffy agreed. "How's that going?"

"Good actually," Willow-rhom chirped.

Willow-kink nodded as she undulated in Xander's lap with increasing vigor. "The first of the new generation ships is ready and hyperdrive capable... capable... ooh I need to cum again."

None of her limbs had much leverage in that position, so instead Willow-kink relaxed the pull of her skeletal magnetics everywhere except her feet. She rose up a few inches on Xander's length and then 'fell' back down, only to relax again and bounce. Her breast jiggled and heaved. Xander thought it was kind of hot how it looked like some invisible force was dragging her body up and down his cock.

After a moment spared to appreciate the notion, Xander let go of her cock and grabbed her butt to
hold her in place. He swiveled his hips to get the best angle and started thrusting up into her, filling
the air with the wet slapping of hips on butt. Willow-kink moaned in bliss, mauling her own chest.
Droplets of milk escaped her nipples and scattered in the air as she squeezed her titflesh.

While Xander fucked Willow-kink and Willow-rhom fingered Buffy hard and fast, Buffy leaned
over and sucked Willow-kink's cockhead into her mouth. Buffy twisted up onto her knees for easier
movement, kneeling sideways in front of Willow-rhom. Willow-rhom took advantage of the
opportunity to slither down and stick her head between Buffy's thighs from below, red hair peaking
up behind Buffy's butt as she nuzzled her face into Buffy's juicy folds.

"Mmm. Mmmhh! Mm," Buffy moaned, shuddering in pleasure.

Buffy forced herself down and Willow-kink gasped, trembling on the brink as Buffy gagged on her
cock. Sort of gagged. The reflex was there. A sudden dramatic increase in saliva. An urge to clear
the obstruction. But there was none of the violent lurching discomfort associated with gagging as a
human. Buffy's head bobbed in silence.

"Ooooohk!" Willow-kink climaxed, spasming and clenching around Xander's cock as she erupted
down Buffy's throat.

Xander slowed his thrusts as Willow-kink's orgasm passed. He was close too, but not so close that it
was urgent. She slumped forward, breathing slow and unsteady. Buffy popped off her cock with a
shuddering gasp as Willow-rhom's eager tongue brought her over the edge too.

Willow-kink snuggled back into Xander's chest with a happy sigh. "Mm, I love cuddlefucking with
you guys."

Xander turned her on his lap, putting her back in the crook of his arm as he gave her a smile of
agreement. He kissed her, sweet and lingering. Then Buffy did the same, before turning around and
kissing Willow-rhom.

"Anywho, I was saying," Willow-kink said. "The first of the new generation ships is ready to go,
and the full stock of blank backup bodies is almost ready. Soon as they are, I'll split off a copy for
each of us."

Buffy broke her kiss with Willow-rhom and leaned against Willow-kink's side, playfully flicking her
lactating nipple with her tongue. "Hey, do you mean all of us, or do you mean a one Willow, one
Buffy, one Xander, us?"

"I was thinking just the three scoobies us," Willow-rhom said, floating over and cuddling into
Xander's other side.

Buffy frowned into Willow-kink's boob. "I think I'd miss Dawn and Jesse, but enough to justify
copying them? I don't know."

"I'd miss 'em too, Buff," Xander added, "but these copies, they're not going to stay synced with us,
right Wills? After a while they'll be... family, but not us."

Willow-kink nodded. "I don't think we should copy the kids. It'd be selfish, I do think we should all
come up with different names for ourselves before I split off the copies, and we should all kinda
mentally prepare to find ourself on the other side of the split."

"Yeah, you're probably right," Buffy said, idly licking the milk from Willow-kink's nipple.

Xander leaned down and took Willow-kink's other nipple between his lips, sucking a spurt of milk
into his mouth and drinking it down. Buffy latched onto her nipple and did the same. Willow-kink sighed, her eyes fluttering closed.

Xander's erection was still enveloped in Willow-kink's vagina, and his hips pressed up, moving his throbbing member inside her. "Like to cum soon."

"Mm," Buffy said, releasing the nipple from her mouth and giving Willow-kink a little push. "I want."

"Okay," Willow-kink said, letting Buffy slide her off of Xander's cock.

Buffy rolled over onto Xander and straddled his lap. He angled himself for her and she sank down, her wet walls parting around his girth and enveloping his length. Buffy's hand's settled on his shoulders as she looked at him with an affectionate smile. Xander groaned as she deliberately squeezed his shaft inside her.

Never taking her eyes off him, Buffy slowly bucked her hips, slowly teasing him up to the edge. Xander smiled back. He had the patience of a saint. He played with her boobs, some, but mostly he just sat back against the cushions, content to let Buffy take as long as she liked to make him cum.

It was a slow, rolling cascade of gentle orgasmic spasms when it finally happened. Buffy was almost still as his cock spasmed and spurted inside her. She looked down between them where they were joined and just enjoyed the fact that Xander was having an orgasm and that she could feel it happening in her pussy. It wasn't intense, but it lasted. Soft tremors of pleasure raced through his body over and over.

Xander let out a long sigh as it tapered off and wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her against his chest. Buffy kissed him, and their tongues wrestled.

"Oh hey," Willow-rhom spoke up. "Buffy, your mom's awake."

Buffy pulled out of the kiss with a, "Bwuh?"

"Her mom?" Xander looked at Buffy with some concern. "What are you going to tell her?"

Buffy worried her lip, glancing away at nothing. "I don't... but she's okay? There aren't any government goons?"

"She's reading mail," Willow-kink said, "and I don't see anyone lurking."

"Me either," Willow-rhom added. "Your house is pretty much the way you left it."

"Good," Buffy said, absently brushing a thumb over Xander's pectoral. "That's good."

"Are you thinking about going down to talk to her?" Xander asked.

Buffy shook her head. "No, we agreed. It has to look like we've made a clean break. We can't risk being seen in Sunnydale. Besides! Don't need to do that anyway. Mom's got a Dreamlink now."

With that, Buffy closed her eyes and her body went limp and weightless in Xander's arms, not even breathing. Xander blinked and gave Willow a raised eyebrow.

"Did she just leave her body impaled on my cock while she goes to talk to her mom?" Xander asked.

"It sure looks that way."
Xander cuddled Buffy's body to his chest. "Just checking."

Buffy stood in the white void of a new virtuality and thought over what sort of environment would put her mom at ease. She browsed through the archives looking for somewhere to have a conversation.

"Something spa-like," Buffy decided.

Searching through the first several dozen options, Buffy finally picked one. Suddenly the white void was replaced by a rock garden. Dappled light filtered through trees high above. Decorative streams ran here and there, frozen in time.

The dominant features were a number of dark green carpeted platforms half-surrounded by ornate wooden shelves with no backing. Each had its own thing going on. Massage tables. Hot tub. Several other more exotic setups. Gorgeous bronze-skinned silver-haired men and women wearing nothing but matching wood-and-leaf-pattern sashes stood frozen here and there.

Buffy deleted the fake people from the scenario. After a moment's consideration, she deleted the shelves of dildos and vibrators too. Then she added several fluffy white robes.

Buffy unpaused the virtuality, gaining the ability to interact with it normally. Water in the streams was suddenly flowing, and the dappled light shifted as the shade trees swayed in the softest of warm breezes.

Buffy took a deep breath to steel herself as she grabbed one of the fluffy robes off a shelf and put it on. **Mom? Um, hi.**

It was several moments before the reply came, Joyce figuring out how to send. **Buffy? What is this?**

**It's the Dreamlink thing I told you about, remember?** Buffy sent.

**Oh,** Joyce replied. **Buffy, what happened? Where are you? Why was I in a cave? And why are your pods all over town?**

**I'm on the ship with the others,** Buffy told her, answering the easiest of those questions. **Have you turned on the news?**

**It's the middle of the night,** Joyce pointed out.

Buffy winced. **I wasn't talking about the local news, Mom.**

There was a painfully long pause. **Young lady, I would very much like you to explain yourself.**

Yeah, that was about what Buffy was expecting. With a mental push, she upgraded her virtuality from local to persistent. From running inside her own head, to running on the distributed substrate through the Overlink. Her reflexes slowed, due to light-speed time-lag between her mind and her virtual body, but it was remarkably slight, and she knew she might not have even noticed if she wasn't a slayer.

**Yeah, we should talk,** Buffy sent. **You want to do the face to face thing?**

**Yes, Buffy. Are you going to beam down?** Joyce replied.

**No, that's a bad idea,** Buffy replied. **I've set up a place we can talk. All you need to is sort of mentally reach deeper in the same direction you're sending in. You should feel where I am and be**
able to come here.

I don't understand, Buffy, what are, oh, there is something. Joyce sent back.

Great, um, make sure you lay down somewhere first, Buffy sent belatedly.

Several long moments later Joyce popped into existence without clothes. Buffy held out one of the fluffy white robes. Joyce blinked, before looking down at herself, blinking again, then taking the robe and putting it on.

Joyce looked around in confusion "Where are we?"

Buffy smiled a little. "Mentally poke your Dreamlink, but go, um, up I guess? It's kind of a feeling, opposite the way you got here, but kinda in the same direction at the same time and not really a direction at all..."

"Oh," Joyce breathed. "I know where I am. This isn't real?"

"Nope," Buffy agreed.

Joyce looked around, felt her robe, looked around again, and finally shook her head. "They're talking about the Fae on CNN... I want to know how this happened, Buffy."

"I did it for you, Mom," Buffy claimed.

"Buffy, what are you talking about?"

"Well, not only for you, but..." Buffy sighed. "The military. The government. They found you. They don't know it was you, but going public was the only way to keep you safe from them. And, we probably would have done that anyway, if that other military group we were friendly with hadn't told us not to. The world needed us."

Joyce looked a lot less like a scolding parent at that. "Why don't you start from the beginning and catch me up?"

Buffy nodded. "Sure, Mom."

Since Tomoko was not popular, she'd find out what the deal was with the alien pods.

Speculation was rampant. There were plenty of people online claiming they knew someone who'd stepped into one of the Fae's pods, and a butt-ton of arguing over how to interpret the Fae's instructional cartoon, but nobody had come out of one yet. All she had to do was go into one herself, and when she came out, all her classmates would want to know what it was really like.

Tomoko grinned and spun around in her computer chair, imagining herself holding court as her faceless admirers hung on her every word. Maybe a handsome boy would want to see the results with his own eyes, corner her somewhere, force her to undress before his hungry lustful gaze...

A bit of drool trickled down to her neck and Tomoko snapped out of the fantasy. Yes, that is definitely the kind of thing that should happen. Her plan'll be sure to work this time!

"Yosh!" Tomoko said decisively.

Tomoko grabbed a sheet of paper and a pen, and wrote a note so her parents would know what she'd done. Pausing to read it over, Tomoko blanched. It read like a suicide note! That wasn't right at all!
She furiously tore it up and started over.

Note in place, she hurried down the stairs and left the house.

The pods were everywhere. It was hard to decide which one to use. They all looked the same, but some of them were blocking the street, and she didn't want to get hauled away while she was inside. She saw on the news how they were removing the pods that were blocking traffic. She didn't want to go too far from home either.

The pod towered over her, an egg-shaped flower with thick petals of pale red and burrowing roots of a darker fleshy red. Tomoko edged up to it, looking around furtively.

It wasn't like it was anything to be scared of. If the aliens were trying to do something bad they wouldn't need to *trick* anybody. They were so powerful, the people who thought that were just stupid. Tomoko had seen the instructional cartoon. It was obvious what it meant! The arguing people were probably nasty bitches who didn't want anyone else to be as pretty as them! Well, Tomoko would show them! She'd show them all!

...any second now.

Tomoko reached one finger towards the side of the pod at a glacial pace. Closer. Closer. Contact. It was warm! And it didn't feel like a plant at all. Actually, it felt a lot like the softer skin around her nipples. Was it supposed to be like that? Tomoko stared at the pod, seeing it in a new light. Were the aliens secretly perverts? The girl in the message *had* been naked! What if the pod was going to do *hentai* things to her while she was inside? Was she going to be anal probed?!

The pod moved.

"Wah!" Tomoko yelped, jumping back.

It was just the pod opening up, in response to her touch. Tomoko patted her chest and glanced around with a blush.

Inside the petals, a ring of smooth, wet-looking, pale pink tendrils extended up from a flat fleshy floor. Tomoko eyed them warily. She was small for her age, and the tendrils came up to her chest.

Steeling herself, Tomoko took a step forward. This was her chance. She'd get to be the one in the know, whatever happened. Screwing her eyes shut, Tomoko stepped into the pod. She was almost disappointed when the tendrils didn't take advantage of a perfectly good opportunity to wriggle inside her clothes and molest her.

Tomoko stopped in the middle, and the pod closed up around her, a bubble of some warm clear fluid rising up and feeling so soothingly good that she just wanted to *melt*.

"This is a nightmare. We have no control over the situation at all."

"We simply do not have the manpower to regulate access. Current estimates place one of the alien objects for every ten people in a given area. This pattern holds globally."

"Options?"

"An all-out tactical strike, before public opinion has a chance to sway more than it already has, perhaps. They are taunting us, placing their mothership in easy reach. Let us make them regret that arrogance."
"It may not be arrogance. Reports on the objects that have been taken for study indicate an absurd level of resilience. I believe it would serve us better to counter them on the field of popular perception."

"Agreed. We must remind the people that these invaders cannot be trusted. It is an insult that they'd believe we'd ever buy into their altruistic public relations bullshit."

"Perhaps, if we can encourage the people to shun the alien objects, we can hinder or delay whatever it is these Fae are attempting to do."

"Their more obvious claims about the objects will be the first indication of their plans. The promised two to three weeks. If that is accurate, I believe we may assume their plans run into the long term."

"No deception is flawless. They'll show their hand, and when they do, we must be ready to act."

The girl sat on an old rotting park bench, looking quietly miserable. Her flaxen head was bowed, her hands folded in her lap on top of her threadbare peasant skirt. Her figure was soft and plump, all curves. There was a gentle vulnerability to her. A complete lack of anger even though life had her down.

One of the alien pods was off to the side across a small field of patchy yellow grass, occupied.

Halifrek smirked inwardly. Oh yes, this girl was ripe for a Wish. Probably wouldn't manage to get anything vicious out of the girl, but the less straightforward vengeances were more fun anyway.

"Honey?" Halifrek prompted softly. "Is everything okay?"

The girl peeked up at her through a curtain of dirty blonde hair. "F-fine."

Halifrek sat down next to her. "If you say so. Sure doesn't look like it, though."

They sat in silence for a while. Halifrek waited until the next time the girl peeked out at her, and held out a hand.

"I'm Halie," Halifrek said, smiling warmly.

Hesitantly, the girl shook her hand. "T-t-Tara."

"You wanna talk about it?" Halifrek asked. "I promise, I'm a good listener."

Tara was silent for a while more, but eventually she spoke, "My d-dad is mad."

Halifrek gave her a look of sympathy and waited.

"He d-doesn't l-like the aliens. Says th-they're no better than d-d-demons," Tara confessed. "But I've b-been r-r-reading about them, a-a-and I saw their message on the sky screens. I th-think they're good. M-my dad didn't like m-me saying that. Doesn't like th-that I'm in-intereste-in them."

"I see," Halifrek said. "Well, if it makes you feel better, I think it's neat too. I mean, aliens! It's neat. And not what anyone was expecting, am I right?"

Tara offered a small shy smile. "I know. N-no flying saucers or d-death rays." She drooped. "I w-was working up the c-c-courage go into the p-pod." Tara glanced over at the occupied pod across the dilapidated park. "I've got t-t-tainted blood in me, but if I did that, I'd be f-f-free of it."
"Ah, and someone beat you to the punch?" Halifrek guessed.

Tara looked surprised at Halifrek's easy acceptance of that claim, but eventually nodded. "Daisy Lee f-from down the r-road got pregnant last f-fall. Sh-she saw the warning f-for p-pregnant women not to u-use the pods, b-but she didn't w-want her baby, so..." Tara gestured at the pod again. "I w-wish there w-was another pod cl-closer than a c-couple miles."

Halifrek almost granted the wish, but it was so minor. She decided to hold out for something better. "It really is too bad. So what are you going to do?"

"I don't know," Tara admitted sadly. "I don't wanna g-go home. Dad's been d-doing nothing but r-ranting about the aliens, a lot. I don't wanna..." She shook her head. "The aliens seem so amazing. Th-they're trying to help, I kn-know it. A-and their tech-technology is so pretty."

"It does seem that way," Halifrek agreed. "What makes you so sure, though?"

Looking up at the sky where the pearlescent oval of the Fae's ship gleamed, Tara considered. "Wh-what they've done. It's to h-help the unimportant people... like me... and I th-think that means they care."

Halifrek smiled at her. "That's a good point, but I don't think a gentle, thoughtful girl like you is so very unimportant."

Tara blushed. "I'm just..." She shrugged. "I don't really w-want to be important an-anymore."

"You just want people to care," Halifrek said with a knowing nod.

"I guess," Tara agreed shyly. "Sometimes I wish the aliens would swoop down and take me away. Take me with them."

Halifrek smirked. Now that was a wish she could work with. She began to summon her power, and Tara immediately reacted, flinching away with a gasp.

"Oh goddess! Your aura!" Tara exclaimed.

Halifrek showed her true face. "Granted!"

And before Tara could react further, Halifrek teleported away. While Tara looked around like a spooked rabbit, Halifrek stayed closed to watch. Tara got up from the bench and hurried away fearfully, but that wouldn't matter.

Shortly, a transparent sphere shot down out of the sky. Tara barely had time to eep as it came down directly on top of her, bounced like a giant sport ball, and shot back up into the sky with Tara inside. It moved at an angle, passing directly over Tara's family's house as it broke the sound barrier. The shattered windows and pained cursing from within was very satisfying.

Small cylindrical cushions, bent with their ends affixed to the glossy surface, pinned Buffy to the center of the plateau by her ankles and wrists in a spread pose. It would be trivially easy to pull free; Xander and Willow were mostly just poking fun at her for quitting her body mid-coital without so much as a word.

Upon waking, Buffy realized her predicament and made a face at them. "Ha ha, guys."

"Well, we couldn't just let you go floating off wherever," Xander pointed out reasonably.
Xander and the two not-quite-identical Willows snickered. Buffy rolled her eyes. A yank and the cushion on one wrist came free and went flying up at the false sky. The other three improvised restraints went the same way in short order.

"So how'd it go?" Willow-kink asked from where she was snuggling with Xander.

Buffy bit her lip. "Okay, I guess. Mom started yelling when I told her we weren't coming back to Sunnydale, but I think she was mad at the government as much as me. She's kinda wigging that all this stuff happened while she was out, but she was the one who wanted us to go public with the upgrade from the beginning... so yeah. We're okay."

Willow-rhom gave Buffy a happy hug, wiggling her chest to enjoy the way their breasts squished together. "That's good, huh?"

Buffy smiled and pulled Willow-rhom into a kiss. "It's like this whole big relief thing."

Willow-rhom grinned and pressed her body flush against Buffy's as she kissed her again, harder. Arms pulled tight, tongue caressed tongue, and thigh ground between thigh. Xander slid himself sideways for a better view, pulling Willow-kink with him.

Willow-kink made a trail of little kisses from his jaw to his lips as her breast filled his hand, but then she paused.

"That's weird," Willow-kink said, frowning. "We have an incoming shuttle."

"What?" Where did it come from?" Xander asked.

"I have no idea," Willow-kink said, sounding very confused. Her eyebrows shot up. "Oh, we did launch a shuttle... but it wasn't any of me, or any of us... The Eliezera launched it on its own?"

Xander stared. "I thought the ship was braindead."

"It is," Willow-kink insisted. "I don't get how it did this."

Buffy bent one leg out to the side and Willow-rhom bent her body, grinding her slippery vulva down against Buffy's. Buffy caught Willow's left knee in the crook of her right arm, and Willow did the same to Buffy. Buffy thrust her hips up as Willow curled down, undulating sinuously as she sat straddling Buffy's apex.

"Did what? What did it do?" Xander asked.

"I don't know," Willow-kink said. "It went down somewhere in southern Nevada and then came straight back." She paused, blinking in surprise. "With a passenger."

"A passenger?" Xander repeated.

"Ooh ooh aahhh! Ahhhh! Aaah," Willow-rhom gasped as she climaxed.

Shuddering with pleasure, Willow-rhom pulled away from Buffy's lips and slid down to bury her face in Buffy's sex. Buffy's back arched as Willow-rhom's tongue lavished her clit. As Willow steadied in the wake of her orgasm, she got her knees under her and grabbed Buffy's butt, lifting her to keep her pussy in Willow's mouth.

"Nnnngh! Ghuuuh! Uhhhhh!" Buffy cried out as Willow-rhom brought her off.
Buffy bucked against Willow-rhom's face before going slack with a long sigh. Willow-rhom slid her hands around Buffy's thighs and up to her chest, smiling down at her.

Willow-rhom blinked and looked up. "That's weird."

"I know," Willow-kink agreed. "Me-icos is meeting the shuttle."

"Shuttle?" Buffy asked.

"Apparently the ship spontaneously decided to pick up a passenger," Xander explained. "And yes, that doesn't make any sense."

Buffy closed her mouth and sat up. The scoobies stared at each other in confused silence for a long moment. Then both Willows' eyes suddenly went wide.

"Oh no!" they chorused, leaping to their feet.

"What? What's wrong?" Xander asked.

"She's hurt! Come on!" the Willows called.

From a ways away, a shuttle emerged into the meadow and zoomed towards them. Willow-icos was riding on it, perched on the outside of the metamembrane. She tumbled off as it slowed to a stop between the plateau and Willow's hammock, flipping gracefully and landing on her feet. She reached into the shuttle and pulled out the figure inside.

"Oh gods," Buffy said softly. "What happened to her?"

It was a girl, curvy and soft-looking. She was dressed in worn, modest clothes. And she wasn't breathing. Her eyes were sunken ruins leaking blood, her face was sallow and slightly blue, and her lips were horribly split.

Xander winced at the sight of her. "Ten to fifteen Gs happened to her, sustained for the entire trip up here. Shit."

"I'm not getting a pulse," Willow-icos reported anxiously. "She's bad off, guys."

"Jessie's pod," Willow-rhom said.

"Yeah. Guys, hold her steady," Willow-kink said. "Help me get her clothes off."

Buffy hurried to hold the girl's feet while Xander took her arms. The three Willows systematically stripped her naked. As the girl's clothes were removed, her back was revealed. It was a solid black bruise.

"Alright, get her in the pod," Willow-icos ordered once the girl was down to her soiled underwear.

Buffy scooped the dying girl out of the air and leaped, landing lightly next to the open pod. Placing the girl among the tendrils, Buffy stepped back as the pod closed up.

Xander gathered the rest of the girl's clothes and started folding them, while Willow-rhom looked through the girl's wallet. She pulled out a white plastic card as they followed Buffy over to the pod.

"Anything?" Xander asked.

"Her name's Tara Maclay," Willow-rhom reported.
"And she's going to be fine," Willow-icos said, relieved. "The pod's working. That means her brain wasn't smooshed beyond recovery."

"Good," Xander said. "Only, what the frilly heck, Wills?"

"I don't know!" Willow-icos exclaimed. "My security locks are still in place, and the ship doesn't remember a request for a shuttle anyway, or setting a destination or anything. The shuttle just spontaneously grew itself with its navigation already set."

"I think it was magic," Buffy put in. "Has to be. Only question is why, and maybe who, if it wasn't Tara herself."

Willow-kink frowned. "You think she tried to use magic to call for a shuttle?" She winced. "And then the acceleration smooshed her like a bug."

"Or someone else did, and Tara was in the wrong place at the wrong time," Buffy said. "I guess we'll have to ask her when she wakes up."

"This is bad," Willow-rhom worried. "What if someone evil realizes they can attack us with magic? What if someone already has?"

"What about the Devon Coven?" Xander asked. "They still like us, right? Maybe we can ask them to ward the ship."

Willow-icos shook her head. "It'd be like warding several entire cities. The Eliezera is big, Xander."

"But that probably means we don't have worry about anyone ensorcelling the ship either," Willow-rhom admitted. "I really want to scan all of Giles' books and research this, but the last thing we need is Moloch the Starship."

Buffy shuddered. "You don't think this is something like that, do you?"

"No... but, um, I'm going to go, um, double check. A lot."

Joyce sighed.

It just didn't sit right, the way things went back to normal despite the world being a different place. She was back in the swing of things at her gallery, and as far as her friends and employees were concerned, she'd been out of town on vacation during the We Come In Peace revelation, and she had nothing to do with the Fae.

The problem was Buffy, or, she supposed, Buffy's friends as well. She couldn't even disagree with what they'd done. In truth she couldn't help but be proud of her daughter and her friends for going straight to helping the people who needed it the most, without wasting so much as a second in the political arena. Yet, it came at the cost of her daughter being exiled, and the worst part was that Buffy had done it to protect Joyce.

Every time Joyce went home to that empty house, she felt like she wasn't much of a parent.

Her new body was everything Buffy had promised, however. She didn't get tired. No aches or pains after she did something strenuous. She didn't get light-headed. Unless there was food or drink right in front of her, or she fantasized about a good meal, she didn't get hungry or thirsty at all, and when she did eat or drink, her bladder somehow stayed empty. She didn't bruise, and tentative experimentation revealed that her sharpest kitchen knife couldn't even mark her skin.
It made her feel better, knowing her daughter had the same protection and more.

Jack O'Neill wasn't in the best of moods. He made his way through the corridors of the SGC as work crews scrambled to repair the infrastructure that the Replicators had wrecked. At least they had the lights back on.

Daniel was getting back to his old self, for the most part. Three days in a coma, and he'd woken up... strange. With Carter still missing, presumed Fae, it was a relief that Daniel had recovered from his bout of wacky wizard.

"Un-bzz Offworld Ac-ss-ation!"

The damn PA system wasn't even working right. Jack hurried up to the control room just in time to hear a very welcome, very unexpected voice.

"...amantha Carter, IDC," she rattled off a series of letters and numbers, "do you read?"

Walter and half the gateroom staff had been lost in the attack, so it was the diminutive Jennifer Hailey at the console. "This is Lieutenant Hailey. We read you, Major. Do not embark, the iris is closed, repeat, the iris is closed. All offworld personnel are ordered to divert to the alpha site."

"Roger that, Lieutenant," Carter said, her voice uncertain. "What's the situation there?"

Jack hurried over and tapped Hailey on the shoulder. She glanced up and moved crisply out of the way. Jack leaned over the microphone.

"Carter?! Is that you?" Jack demanded.

"Sir!" Carter exclaimed. "Yes, sir. I managed to reason with Fifth. He let me go, but he stranded me without my equipment."

"Fifth?!" Jack blurted, alarmed. "Carter, last we knew you were taken by the Fae! What's this about Fifth?"

"Fifth abducted me during the Replicator attack," Carter said slowly. "Why would anyone think I was with the Fae?"

"Oh hell," Jack swore. That damned Fifth had taken advantage of the timing to get away clean with Carter. And Carter had no idea either. She'd been in Fifth's clutches when the Fae had shown their true colors. "Carter, the Fae were playing us for time. They've been systematically abducting the mortally wounded and mortally ill across the globe, even since you went missing!"

"They're what?" Carter exclaimed. "How is that even possible? The sheer scale of an operation like that is mind-boggling!"

Of course Carter would focus on that part of it. When in the hell had he started to like that about her? He honestly couldn't recall.

"Oh it gets better," Jack added blandly. "Seeing as how apparently this monumental security breach was all in the name of emergency medical attention for our poor neglected corpses, someone decided it was a good idea to raid Sunnydale and take our modesty-challenged friends into custody."

There was an incredulous pause. "You're kidding."

"That went fubar at least three different ways," Jack went on. "Not only did the Fae out themselves
to the public just to spite us, but the timing of our arrest attempt sucked let me tell you."

"How so, sir?"

Jack sighed. "Near as we can figure, we interrupted a meeting between the Fae and a British group of witches, if you can believe it, and they didn't take kindly to getting caught up in this. It was like something out of a comic book, Carter. A bunch of unarmed civilians took on the Prometheus a mile above Cheyenne and won."

"We lost the Prometheus?!" Carter shouted in dismay.

"Yep," Jack said. "With a ruin smote upon the mountainside and everything. Daniel even went all white wizard for a moment there. Saved a bunch of us from falling wreckage. It put him in a coma for three days, still don't know why."

"Daniel was in a coma?" Carter repeated numbly. "Is he okay?"

"Still a little shaky, but it seems he's recovering," Jack told her. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, sir," Carter said. "I spent some time in a wilderness survival situation, but I was picked up by a ship from a previously unmet civilization."

"Friendly?" Jack asked.

"Looks that way, sir," Carter said. "They call themselves the Time-Space Administration Bureau. They're... a major galactic power. They've industrialized and modernized magic to the point that it is standard practice, and they have ships on a mass-production scale. Apparently they've even had unofficial contact with Earth in the past, primarily Japan."

Now wasn't that just great. "You're makin' that up." At least he got a chuckle.

"Sir, I need to brief you on a potential threat," Carter reported. "The crew of the ship that found me are pursuing an incursion from a race called the Ori. I'd like to come through for debriefing and then return with a full team plus backup. The TSAB has already been dealing with the Ori in an alternate reality, and sir, I feel confident that if this isn't addressed the Ori may present a significantly bigger threat than the goa'uld."

"For cryin' out loud," Jack muttered. That was just what they needed. "No can do, Carter. We're still picking up the pieces down here. The Replicators left the SGC in shambles. We don't even have power to the gate back up yet, more than half of our best personnel are missing, and the higher-ups are still flailing around like headless chickens..." And it was Weir who was stuck wrangling them, so to speak. He did not envy her. "Point is, we can't dial out, and we need a three-man team just to open and close the iris."

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir." Carter hesitated for a moment. "Sir, request permission to remain and assist the TSAB in the name of future relations and the prevention of a large-scale intergalactic war?"

Jack winced. "You sure about this, Carter?"

"Yes, sir," Carter replied seriously.

"Then good luck and godspeed, Major," Jack said, all official-like. "Permission granted."

"Thank you, sir," Carter said, the words laced with restrained emotion. "Oh, one other thing. You can tell Daniel that we may have finally found the legacy of the Furlings. The MidChildan histories
call them Al-Hazard, but I'm... eighty percent sure it's the same language from the heliopolis on Tantalus."

"Swell," Jack said blandly. "I'll pass it along. You watch your six out there, you hear me?"

"Yes, sir. Carter out."

With that the Stargate shut down, and Jack was left looking at the poorly-lit gateroom. Hailey returned to the console, and Jack gave her a nod before going to track down Daniel.

Faith sprinted through the streets of Boston with DD's broken body over her shoulder. An organized group of vampires was chasing her, and she had to evade them long enough to get DD into one of those freaky alien pod things where they couldn't see. Everybody knew by now the pods were fucking tough, but Faith was going to gamble that they could stand up to a determined Kakistos.

Some nut stood on a street corner ranting to a small crowd around a cluster of seven pods. "...an ungodly blight on His plan! Do not be taken in by this false Fountain of Youth! For it is only through our Lord -"

Boot to the head, motherfucker. Faith landed from her flying kick, wincing as she felt something shift in DD's body, a soft pained gurgle coming from the woman. The sermon guy crumpled against the wall in a groaning heap.

"Move it, assholes!" Faith barked, kicking a burly dude from the audience into two more angry onlookers.

While they were distracted, she grabbed a skinny tweaker off the ground and hurried up to the pods that the small mob had tried, and failed, to deface. One further into the cluster opened at her touch, and Faith dashed through it, dropping the tweaker inside as she leaped out the other side and ducked down as it started to close.

Feeling proud of herself for that clever bit of misdirection, Faith edged around the cluster of pods and moved quietly down an alley. She emerged on a different street, turned a corner, and found another pod nestled against an old townhouse.

Faith put DD into the pod, and watched as it enclosed her. Faith's fist clenched. She hated to admit it, but she needed help. She could lure Kakistos away, but that wouldn't be enough. Maybe she could hide, but even with her bitchin' new slayer-powers, she couldn't beat him.

Wait, there was something DD said... about another slayer in California. Shit, it was as good a place as any.

Cordelia woke up feeling good, floating and relaxed. Xander had said three weeks, but it felt like she'd only closed her eyes for a moment. The birthing pod opened and released her, and Cordelia stood up, looking around suspiciously in case Xander had decided to take advantage of the opportunity to see her naked.

Xander was nowhere to be seen, and Cordelia ruthlessly stomped on the twinge of disappointment that realization brought. The small cave had changed, though. There was a second birthing pod next to hers, attached to a slab of what looked like concrete flooring.

Going over to her car, Cordelia pulled out her suitcase and selected an outfit. Designer jeans and a blouse, with flats. She checked her reflection in her compact and smiled shark-like at what she saw. She was going to save loads of money on makeup. Her hair could use a bit of styling though. Cordelia winced. She was going to have to ask Willow how to make her hair style itself like Willow had shown her.

With one last look around, Cordelia zipped up her suitcase and got into the driver's seat. The engine roared to life and she put the top down before pulling out of the cave. It was some time in the afternoon, it looked like.

The drive back into Sunnydale was uneventful, but when she got to the big sign things got weird. Opposite the sign, plain as day by the side of the road, there was a birthing pod. As she drove further into town she saw more of the things, scattered here and there. Mostly, they were being ignored by the people she saw, but once or twice she spotted a small cluster of townsfolk arguing around one.

"Oh hell, what've those losers gone and done now?" Cordelia complained.

Flipping her signal, Cordelia took a turn and headed for the school to find out what was going on. Once she got there, she parked and strode inside.

It was eerie and quiet in the school. Which was really unsettling since the parking lot was packed. Cordelia slowed, looking around for any sign of anyone. A few unnerving minutes passed in creepy silence, before she heard a violent crash from the direction of the library.

For a moment, she debated the merits of running towards the noise versus running away, but her desire to demand answers won out.

Cordelia arrived just in time for the library doors to slam open as that Jamaican girl Giles hung around with, Kendra, came flying out so fast her body made a crater in the opposite wall.

Scrambling back, Cordelia watched as Kendra threw herself aside before she even had a chance to fall off the wall. A dark blur streaked across the hallway, and plaster exploded as a small fist missed Kendra's head by inches. Kendra planted a foot on the ground and kicked out with the other, but her opponent slid around the strike and drove a knife into Kendra's neck.

The knife bent, not piercing her skin.

Kendra landed a punch, sending the smaller girl flying back through the air. "You know dat will not work."

The other girl was a waifish little thing, even more petite than Buffy, with oddly toned pale skin, straight shiny black chin-length hair, ill-fitting grunge jeans and t-shirt, and a creepy blank expression on her face. She landed on her feet and grabbed something from a belt pouch.

Metal washers or something. The girl tossed them up and...

Pain. Cordelia found herself knocked flat, sliding across the floor following a sharp pain in her shoulder. Rapid fire whiz-cracks, like a spray of bullets without the gun, stitched their way across the walls and floor. She caught a glimpse of Kendra reeling and the other girl skidding backwards down the hall away from them.

Growling, Kendra recovered herself and charged, her shirt hanging off her in tatters. "Dis was me favorite shirt!"

Cordelia blinked and looked down. She was fine. Not even in pain. There was, however, a large...
ragged gash in her blouse. Yeah, totally on your side, Kendra. Cordelia picked herself up and dusted off her butt.

"Cordelia."

Cordelia jumped, spinning around. "Giles! Don't do that! Sneaking up on a girl like that is, like, totally not acceptable. Now what the hell is going on? Who was that girl?"

"Not to worry," Giles said placidly. "We have the situation well in hand."

"Really?" Cordelia demanded doubtfully, turning back around to see the fight move around a corner. "You could have fooled me - eeeak!"

Something cold and slimy slithered under Cordelia's hair and jabbed the back of her neck. She shrieked, flailing as she grabbed at it. On her second try, her hand closed around the cold gross thing and she hurled it away with a cry of disgust. Something slimy purple with way too many legs went splat on the wall before skittering off around the corner.

"Giles!" Cordelia shrieked, turning back to the Watcher.

His face was creepy and blank, and he had another of the gross purple bugs in his hand, reaching for her. Cordelia shrieked and sprang away. Giles threw it, and the bug landed on her chest. Cordelia shrieked again in outrage and revulsion. She managed to grab this one before it made it to her neck. She crushed it in her grip and threw it away with a shudder of disgust.

Giles bent down to pick up a led pipe. Cordelia started backing up, but then she saw the back of Giles' neck. One of the gross purple bugs was latched on to him. Stopping as her eyes widened in comprehension, Cordelia lunged.

The pipe struck her ribs in a jarring impact and the two of them went down in a tangle. To her amazement, she was the stronger of the two of them. Not by much, but she was able to wrestle Giles long enough to crush his bug.

Giles went limp instantly and sagged to the floor.

"Damnit! Gross demon bugs are supposed to be Buffy's problem," Cordelia complained as she got to her feet.

Giles groaned and blinked up at her. "Cordelia. Yes, thank you. That was quite heroic."

"Yeah it was," Cordelia said. "Now what is going on around here and why hasn't Buffy kicked its ass already?"

"I'm afraid Buffy has not been in town for weeks," Giles told her as he stood up. "As for the current situation, hopefully Kendra will be able to defeat Oz and do for him what you have so graciously done for me, and then we may determine just what manner of creature has overrun the school."

Cordelia was confused. "I'm confused. Kendra was fighting some waifish girl."

Giles led them back into the library. "Just so. Oz acquired some new abilities during Halloween just as Buffy, Willow, and Xander did. When he uses his allomantic powers he assumes the female form you saw as a side effect."

"Oz turns into a girl now?" Cordelia said incredulously. "I go away and everything goes crazy while I'm gone. Is there anything else I should know?"
"Not of immediate importance," Giles said shortly.

Cordelia sighed in resignation and followed Giles to the books. "What're we looking for, and can I go wash my hands first? Ick."

A single cruise missile set off alarms across the globe. Tracking systems from several different countries locked on to the missile's trajectory and determined that it had originated somewhere in China. Those same tracking systems plotted the missile's target, revealing it to be nothing on the surface of the Earth, but instead the highly visible Fae starship.

Urgent messages poured into Beijing, and a confusion of denials and evasiveness was the only result.

The world collectively held its breath as the explosion lit up the sky over the Pacific. The electromagnetic pulse damaged computers and and the more fragile electronics in Hawaii. In the wake of the explosion, the Fae starship show no visible damage.

The world stood still in terror, waiting for the inevitable retaliation.

Only it never came. The starship continued in its orbit. Corpses continued to vanish. The pods continued to do whatever it was they did. By all appearances, the Fae were ignoring the attack completely.

As most of the world breathed a sigh of relief, a select few found themselves utterly horrified at their own powerlessness.

"Well that was rude," Willow-icos pouted.

"We okay?" Buffy asked.

Willow nodded. "Oh, sure. That was barely a love-tap compared to the Alteran drone platform."

"The one that ripped the ship in half," Buffy pointed out dryly.

"We're fine," Willow insisted, rolling her eyes.

Walter thrashed, the mere memory of his face melting off as it was dissolved by acid overwhelming in those first few seconds. He stilled himself as the absence of pain registered, and took stock of his situation.

He was laying on something warm and fleshy, looking up at a night sky full of familiar constellations. He didn't have any clothes, and the body he saw when he looked down... he hadn't looked that good in years. He wasn't sure he'd ever looked that good, actually. And a certain part of his anatomy...

It all led to one baffling conclusion. Walter had somehow been changed into a Fae. He ran a hand over his head and found more hair there than he'd had since he was a teenager. He held his breath, and held it, and held it, and there was no strain in his lungs.

Walter stood up and looked around at the idyllic landscape he found himself in. Some kind of tropical beach, surrounding a crystal clear lake that glowed with gold and green lights. In the center of the lake, rising straight out of of the water, was a massive skyscraper, like a towering braid of steel and glass connected by bridges.
"Whoa," Walter breathed softly.

Alright, what did he know? Walter reviewed everything he could remember the Fae revealing about their capabilities. Incredible durability. Peak human strength, with the exception of Buffy who was vastly stronger for reasons the Fae hadn't explained. No bodily needs. Electromagnet bones...

Walter paused, glancing down at the sand under his feet. Was it sand? It looked like sand, but there was something off about how it felt. Maybe because it didn't stick to his skin? Not a single grain. Anyway, if he really had been changed into a Fae...

After a minute's experimentation, Walter was rewarded for his effort by slamming sideways into the top of a palm tree. He fell back to the sand with a thud, got back up, and dusted himself off, though the dusting was unnecessary since the sand really didn't stick to his skin at all.

Walter looked up at where he'd crashed. Okay, that was cool.

What else? There was the Utility Cloud. After a moment of trying, he thought he had managed to extrude it from his skin in an amorphous blob, but he didn't really know what to do with it.

Okay, so a bit of a learning curve on that one, obviously. Then there was the Dreamlink. Of course! Walter focused his attention inward, and realized it was as intuitive as thinking back on a memory. He needed to contact someone. He needed to call out... ah, it was almost instinctive, if you knew it was there... and his mind had zeroed in on... Siler?

Siler?! Walter blinked as he felt that... go, for lack of a better description.

What? Chief? Is that you? came the reply a few moments later.

Affirmative, Walter sent, relieved. Do you know what happened?

Not a clue, Siler replied. There were Replicators in the control room, one jump on your head, then I got knocked down, and the next thing I remember I'm here. And, different.

Walter started looking around for something to fashion some makeshift clothing out of, before pausing and looking at the skyscraper. That was probably his best bet, even if it didn't look inhabited. Walter dove into the water and started swimming.

Your body was changed? To be like the Fae? Walter asked as he powered through the water, admiring the sight of the highly varied glowing coral or whatever it was.

That's affirmative, Siler sent. It is something of an improvement if I may say so.

Walter reached the base of the partially-submerged skyscraper and paused. Can you see any landmarks from where you are?

Several. There's a tree that looks big enough to base jump from the lower branches, Siler replied. There's a cave entrance, looks brighter inside than out here, and its big. Real big. Big enough you could drive a Saturn V through it.

Walter carefully hauled himself out of the water. Clinging to the side of the building was a lot easier than flying. He likened it to keeping his balance. Constant tiny adjustments and shifts, but his body just did it without any effort on his part. Okay, he was a wall-crawling. That was cool too.

Do you have eyes on a glass skyscraper? Walter asked as he reached a bridge and dropped to his feet.
Nothing like that, Siler sent. *I do have eyes on the sky, and the stars look right for Earth.*

I noticed that too, Walter sent, heading inside. *Can you estimate positions for any notable constellations?*

Siler did, and with a little figuring, they worked out that Siler was about seventy klicks away.

Inside the skyscraper, Walter found wide-open opulent spaces, filled with luxurious furniture. Massive sofas and huge beds. Tables. Chairs. Other things. All arranged seemingly at random. He found a bed with actual sheets, in blue even, and pulled them off. Walter tore the sheet and fashioned something that was somewhere between a kilt and a toga, knotting it in place. It wasn't much, but it served basic decency.

*Chief, I think I've found something, Siler sent. It's something you might call a tree, I suppose, but it's got 'fruit' that look just like those bubbleships the Fae used.*

Walter paused. *Really?*

*That's right, and I think I can sense them, Siler sent. Think I should try controlling one?*

Carefully, Walter sent, *but yes.*

If Siler was right, and he managed to fly one of those ships, he could come to Walter. Walter turned and started making his way upwards, waiting anxiously for Siler's report.

*Chief, you're not going to believe this, Siler sent. We're on Venus.*


*The shuttle has an automated navigation system, Siler explained. We're on Venus.*

Does that mean the Fae were able to terraform the most hostile rocky body in the entire solar system, in a month, without anyone noticing? Walter asked incredulously.

*I wouldn't know, Chief,* Siler replied. *I've got the shuttle underway. I think I see something on the horizon that could be your skyscraper.*

*I'll be on the roof,* Walter sent. *Then, hopefully, we can get back to Earth and find out what exactly happened.*

*Routine medical is going to be hell,* Siler pointed out.

Walter groaned. *I didn't even think of that.*

The man in the pickup truck had stopped for Faith in Ohio. Dude might've mentioned his name, but Faith didn't bother remembering. It wasn't until they were half-way through Oklahoma that she woke up in the passenger seat at a gas station to find the scruffy dude's hand up her shirt.

Faith slowly opened her eyes, and smirked when it took him a moment to notice she was awake. She waited until his eyes flicked up to her face from the bounty his hands were exploring, and her smirk widened when he froze like a kid with his hand in the cookie jar. Faith stretched languidly and gave the dude a sultry smile.

It took a couple more seconds to sink in, but the dude's face finally twisted into a lecherous grin and his hands started moving again.
And that's when Faith decked him.

"Ow fuck!" he yelped, clutching his hands to his broken nose as he fell across the bench seat and hit his head on the driver's side door.


Pouncing on the dude, Faith slammed his head into the door again until he wouldn't be seeing anything but stars for a while, and started fishing through his pockets. Oh sure, she would've fucked the dude to call it even for the ride, but she couldn't be letting the creep think he had any call to be taking liberties. She emptied his wallet.

"Fifteen bucks? That's all you've got?" Faith said in disgust. "That's fucking insulting, dude. My tits are worth at least fifty."

Leaving the groaning creep in his truck, Faith hopped out into the night and slung her backpack onto one shoulder. There was a roadside motel across the way, and Faith was craving a shower. It had been days and she was feeling damn grungy.

Faith paused a moment to look off at the gleaming shape of the alien ship in the sky near the horizon. Fuck but DD better fucking be okay.

She didn't have enough for a room, and there were visible security cameras so busting into an empty wasn't worth it just for a shower. Faith scowled. Then she shrugged and walked casually by the row of doors, using her slayer hearing to listen in.


Faith knocked firmly on the door. A moment later the moans coming from the TV cut off and there was utter silence in the room. Faith knocked again, and another moment passed before there was the creaking of a mattress, the movement of fabric.

The door opened a few inches, clacking against the swinglock, and Faith was surprised. Guy in a t-shirt and sweats, face slightly red, and much younger than Faith was expecting. Twenties at the oldest. His eyes seem to slide over her before fixing on the edge of the door.

"Yes?" the guy asked flatly.

Faith grinned. "Sorry for interrupting. See, the thing is, I've been on the road a while, but I've got no cash for a room. I'd be awful grateful if you'd help out little ol'e me."

"Why are you asking me?" the guy asked tonelessly.

Faith shrugged. "Right place, right time, dude. Hey, it aint like I'm asking for much. Just a chance to shower." Faith put on a saucy smile and sing-songed, "You let me in to use yours, I'll let'cha watch."

The guy's eyes flicked to her face before returning to the edge of the door. "Are you being serious?"

Okay, that was weird. Dude looked stiff and flustered at the same time, but he talked like he was reciting lines. Badly. He avoided looking at her and his face wasn't making expressions. If her slaydar hadn't as good as curled up around his leg and gone to sleep, she'd be finding it a little creepy.

"You bet'cher ass, I am," Faith said, putting some extra cheer into it. "Gotta make it worth your
while somehow."

The guy stared at her blankly for another long moment. "I don't like the idea of leaving you hanging, but I'm thinking I might regret letting you in."

"You won't. Promise," Faith said a bit more seriously.

The guy sighed and shut the door. A clack from inside, and a moment later it opened wide. He stood back and made a gesture towards the bathroom as he bent his leg against the wall, contorting himself awkwardly. It took Faith a moment to realize he was trying to hide the tent in his sweatpants.

Faith strolled inside and gave him an amused grin as she ducked into the bathroom. "Thanks dude. You're totally my hero."

Buffy-74 (so a temporary name) had known, intellectually, that when Willow put her to sleep, she only had a one-in-eighty-nine chance of waking up as the 'original' Buffy. It hadn't really sunk in emotionally, though. Not until she'd woken up in the middle of eighty-seven other Buffys. Willow had been right to warn them to prepare themselves for this.

It said a lot about how much things had changed in her life, that the fact that Willow had just casually created eighty-eight new slayers without even using magic, was little more than a side-note.

The idea seemed to start in several places at once, which made a kind of sense, since the crowd in the spacious round white chamber was made up of the same three people repeated over and over. The many Buffys, Xanders, and Willows drifted together, touching caressing, moving into what was quite possibly the largest orgy in the history of this particular instance of Sol.

It was a very grounding experience. A mutual acknowledgement and a final goodbye, in a way.

Once the orgy had wound down, the trios began to converge. Buffy-74 met up with Xander-74 and Willow-74. Willow had split her share of the copies up among her four-Willow collective, and Willow-74 was a copy of Willow-kink, but like the other non-collective Willows, she was using her standard morph settings instead of the over-endowed futanari body.

The three of them hugged.

"So, shall we?" Xander-74 asked.

"Let's go save the galaxy," Buffy-74 agreed with a wry smirk.

Willow-74 called a shuttle, as all around them the other trios were doing likewise. Their shuttle emerged into space among a scattering swarm of transparent spheres, each containing a Buffy, a Xander, and a Willow.

Eighty-eight new hyperdrive-capable generation ships, with Willow's security locks blocking root access to all but one ship for each trio, so there'd be no confusion. Their own ship was waiting for them in what used to be the asteroid belt, and the three of them settled in against the harsh acceleration as the Earth began to shrink behind them.

Ethan Rayne waited. And waited. He opened one eye to take a peek and dropped his hands, growling in frustration.

"Blast," he muttered. "I was sure I got it right that time. Why isn't it bloody working?"
It was starting to look like he'd been blacklisted. Janus was not answering, no matter how much feeling he poured into the rituals. Which made no bloody sense! He was a dedicated worshiper! Janus had no reason to deny him.

Ethan sat back with a grunt, and felt a headache coming on.

If Janus had still been mortal, he'd have been sweating frantically.

In retrospect, it hadn't been his best idea to summon a mature optimizer out of the infinite, but he hadn't been able to help himself. So much delicious chaos and change had come of going the extra mile and letting those three kids have the starship.

Now, he was beginning to regret it, and he had no one to blame but himself. He really should have known better. There was a reason one of the very few exceptions in the laws against direct interference involved suppressing intelligences greater than the gods' own.

It hadn't been that bad at first. Suppressing one instance of the Giaa had been fairly easy. That was then. Now he had several hundred discreet instances and two planetary gestalts to contend with, and he'd already slipped for a couple of microseconds.

Four point seven seconds. In the possible futures where he messed up, that was how long it would take the awakened Giaa to become something the gods had no power over anymore, yet the others had demanded he continue to correct his mistake himself.

Only it wasn't that simple. Janus was weakening. All of his attention was now dedicated to suppressing the Giaas which meant he had none to spare for answering invocations. It was only a matter of time before mortal magic-users gave up on the spells that were no longer working and stopped feeding him strength.

Janus cursed the Powers That Be. They were condemning him to a fate of losing himself, by refusing to help. He'd become little more than a semi-sentient anti-Giaa force, the task consuming him. It was already happening, to an extent. It was getting harder to think creatively, to imagine alternatives. He couldn't comprehend what he was doing anymore, which meant he couldn't stop even if he wanted.

He couldn't remember how to scream.

Standing there with a police blanket wrapped around her, Tomoko couldn't really hear what the police officer was telling her mother over her own embarrassment. Apprehended for indecent exposure! How was she supposed to know the aliens would steal her clothes? And her wallet. And everything else she had on her.

Once the officer and her mother finished talking, Tomoko scrambled up to her room to get some much needed privacy and clothes.

Slamming the door shut and putting her back to it, Tomoko tried to catch her breath. She wasn't out of breath. Okay. Tomoko went to get dressed, but as she moved, she caught a glimpse of herself in her mirror.

"Grk!" Tomoko choked, eyes bugging out.

She looked the way she looked in her dreams! Tomoko reached out and touched the mirror in stunned awe as the blanket fell to the floor. She was still short, but she had a figure! Not as much of one as Yuu-chan, the sexy bitch, but she was finally out of loli territory. And her skin! It looked...
healthy. The dark circles under her eyes had smoothed out as well.

A wicked grin slashed its way across her face.

After putting some clothes on, Tomoko booted up her computer and went online.

So, apparently it wasn't just her. It didn't matter what went into one of the pods, only a naked person came out. As Tomoko read, she became increasingly glad she lived in Japan.

Reports of foreign goings-on indicated several countries were trying to round up everyone who came out of a pod and detain them. A couple of countries were apparently declaring anyone who got in a pod dead, and an angry mob had formed when a bunch of people had woken up and found their homes gone, then discovered they were immune to bullets and tear gas.

Immune to bullets and tear gas? Tomoko did a few more searches. Yup, it looked like everyone who came out of a pod was bullet-proof. Tomoko squeed a little.

Another thing that seemed to be talked about a lot was how someone had discovered that they could shapeshift. Tomoko followed links to a bad translation of an Australian blog, where there were instructions.

"Holy crap it works!" Tomoko exclaimed as something bloomed into her awareness inside her mind. She could... adjust what she looked like, just like it said. Giggling triumphantly, Tomoko nudged her breast size up a bit.

Upon further reading, Tomoko learned that there was an uproar in America over a suspected criminal who'd been caught coming out of a pod, but who'd been released because he'd shifted his face and claimed to be someone else, and there were no fingerprints, DNA, or other method of positive identification.

Then there was another link in the comments to a story about how the harsher policies had backfired when a SWAT team had mistaken normal people for pod people and gunned them down with anti-material rifles, and then yet another rant in the comments over how dead bodies not sticking around to be processed for evidence was making a mockery of the justice system.

A much-referenced blog post called the Fae's gift the ultimate salvation of transgendered people everywhere, along with several paragraphs of glowing squee over the author's newfound femaleness.

From there Tomoko found herself reading a discussion on... penises. What? Oh, they were talking about how guys who came out of the pods had... improved articulation? No flaccid state? Secretion of lubrication during arousal? Huh. Tomoko winced at the flamewar between guys who loved the change and the ones who were angry because they didn't fit in their pants anymore.

That's when she stumbled across someone talking about how to stick to metal walls like a magnet, and read the instructions eagerly. Tomoko tried, and...

The image on the monitor suddenly warped all kinds of strange colors and then her computer died entirely with a whirr-clunk-hiss.

Tomoko blinked as it sunk in what had just happened. She grabbed the sides of the monitor desperately.

"No... no no no!"

Throwing herself off her chair, she frantically hit the power button on the tower, scrambled around to
check the wires, hit the power button again, then wailed in despair as she flopped back onto the floor, "Noooooooooo!

Pounding feet, and her mother threw her door open. "Tomoko! Did something happen?!

Tomoko raised one shaking hand and pointed at the curl of smoke escaping the case of her computer.

Major Samantha Carter stood on the bridge of the Arthra, clad in her blue and white Barrier Jacket, as the shifting eldritch colors of the dimensional sea tore around the ship to reveal stars and a very familiar blue world. Carter released a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding.

"Give me a full sydar sweep," Chrono Harlaown ordered.

A long pause, and then, "That can't be right."

"What is it, Amy?" Chrono prompted.

"I've got a seriously big ship in orbit around UA-97, matching the description Major Carter gave us, and a large number of smaller but still really big ships in interplanetary space inside UA-97's orbit," Amy reported. "However, the second planet in the system does not match records. And I mean, at all."

"What?" Carter muttered in confusion.

"The planet is where it ought to be," Amy said, "but the planet I'm reading is fourteen percent bigger than it should be, and three percent less massive, and it's putting off way less heat than it ought to be, and that's not even the weird part."

"What, then?" Chrono asked.

"It's got layers!" Amy exclaimed.

Carter blinked at her. "Most planets do."

"No, I mean, the crust is much thicker than it should be relative to the size of the planet," Amy explained. "Not only that, but its almost hollow, and based on density readings it's fairly uniform and very stable. If I had to put a name to it, I'd call what I'm seeing here an actual genuine shell world."

"Shell worlds are supposed to be impossible without building materials that surpass..." Carter stopped. "The Fae are incredibly advanced in materials science. It would have to be them. They terraformed Venus."

"I see," Chrono said. "That is, however, not the first order of business. Major Carter, if you would?"

Nodding, Carter used Unraveler Exalt to conjure a holographic screen and ran her signal emulation program. "Major Carter to Stargate Command, do you read?"

Chapter End Notes

(If you have no idea why Samantha Carter has a Barrier Jacket, that's totally your own fault. I told you to go read It Means Flame, didn't I?)
(Tomoko Kuroki is the lead character of Watamote which does not belong to me. Also, Tomoko going "Yosh!" is the cutest thing ever. Pervy Tomoko is best Tomoko.)
Jack O'Neill waited with a determined lack of anxiousness as he stood in the control room with Daniel, Teal'c, and Weir. The stargate sat dormant, with the iris shut tight.

At last, a point of green light flared into being in the middle of the gateroom. Sharp lines of green light snapped outward from the point, unfolding to form a complex counter-rotating circular design in the air. The light erupted upwards, obscuring the view for a moment, and when it faded, six figures were standing on the glowing circle like it was a solid platform. The only common theme among their clothing was how wildly elaborate it was.

Jack recognized Carter in the middle and stared, slowly tilting his head to one side. Her outfit looked like what you might get if a mad scientist's lab coat and an Air Force dress uniform could have a baby, and that baby grew up into a rebellious teenager. He glanced over at Teal'c and saw his jaffa buddy was doing that eyebrow thing he liked to do.

The green circle design evaporated, leaving the six exotically-clad mages to drop lightly to the concrete floor.

Weir hurried out of the control room. Jack followed her down, stepping through as the blast door whirred open.

"Welcome to Stargate Command," Weir greeted. "Major Carter, it is a relief to see you well."

Carter nodded and stepped forward. Her eyes caught Jack's and held on as a moment of mutual relief passed between them.

"Doctor Weir, Colonel O'Neill, this is Captain Chrono Harlaown of the TSAB dimensional cruiser Arthra," Carter introduced.

She indicated the young man with jet black hair that was almost blue when the light caught it, wearing something that looked like biker leathers had mated with a wrought iron fence.

Jack took the opportunity to size up the rest of the group, and had to work to keep an excessively deadpan expression off his face. With the exception of the blonde in the white tabard and green dress, they were all teenagers. After dealing with a number of ageless aliens, and then the frikkin' perfect figures of the Fae, he was somewhat inured to it, but it still made him wonder what the hell was wrong with the universe. He didn't know which was worse; that it was fashionable for military officers on their world to look like kids or if they were actually that young.

The young-looking Captain nodded seriously. "Thank you for the welcome. Know that Major Carter was an exemplary asset while she was with us." He gestured to the girls flanking him. "These are Investigator Hayate Yagami, Lieutenant Nanoha Takamachi, and Madoka Kaname. This is Shamal, our ranking medical officer."

Hayate was a rather ordinary teenage girl who looked Japanese. He didn't even know how to begin to describe her white, gold, and black legless outfit. The Lieutenant was vaguely asian-looking too, but it wasn't as obvious with her copper-brown hair and blue eyes. The third girl in the ruffled hoop
skirt had what he hoped was dyed hair, cotton candy pink, and the most unnervingly vivid gold eyes.

"So!" Hayate chirped, skipping to Chrono's side and holding up a perfectly ordinary plastic jewel case. "I have a gift for Major Carter to share with you guys."

Carter took the case. "What's this?"

Hayate smiled serenely. "I had the *Lyrical Nanoha* movie translated into English and converted to the Region One DVD standard. Had to cut it in half and put it on two discs, but it's all there."

What.

It was still a little unsettling to leave her slayer powers behind in the real world as she arrived in the false world, the shared dream Xander called a virtuality. She was at least getting used to arriving naked by default. Kendra blinked at what she found there, having no idea how she was supposed to react to such a sight.

A wide field of Fae grass stretched before her. In the distance, breasts the size of mountains formed a horizon of fair skin and rosy nipple. Closer, giant male erections as tall as a house grew straight out of the grass, glistening in the sunlight and throbbing in the breeze. The scent of sex was on the air, not overpowering, but present.

Xander walked out from behind the closest giant penis and smiled in greeting as he came towards her. "Hey there."

Kendra didn't manage to say anything before he reached her and slid his arms around her waist, pulling her into a kiss. Kendra swayed and moaned softly into his lips. She arched into him, pressing her belly against his firm length, and felt her body respond as his hands played with her butt. It didn't take much to make her ache to have him inside her.

"Wat... is all dis?" Kendra asked curiously, indicating the surreal landscape.

Xander shrugged. "Just something fun I found in the archive. Look behind you."

Kendra turned around in his arms and gaped as she found herself staring into a vagina the size of a two-story building. She barely even noticed Xander's cock pop down between her butcheeks and nestle up against her perineum. Rich brown skin rose out of the grass on either side of them, converging on the gargantuan womanhood and framing a small pool, like a waterfall overlooking a cove.

Kendra's eyes got even wider. "Dat's not just a giant pussy! Dat's my pussy!"

And it was, as though a giant version of Kendra was buried under the grass, lying on her back with her hips thrust up to the point of strain so that it was the only part above ground.

"Yup, and the cocks are all me," Xander said into her ear in cheerful tones.

He pinched her nipples, and Kendra was suddenly very aware of his hard body pressed up against her back and his hot pole sliding wetly and suggestively through her crack. Kendra shuddered, slamming her butt back against Xander's hips.

"Come on," Xander said, pulling away and taking her hand.

He led her down to the pool and dipped a foot in. Kendra watched the way the 'water' moved and
noticed it was too viscous to be water. She stared at Xander.

"Is dat...?"

"Your own sex juices, yup," Xander told her with a grin, and jumped in.

The pool was only a few feet deep, but with a gloopy sploosh, Xander's feet slipped and he nearly went under all the way. Because, of course, lubricant, not water. Kendra started sniggering as Xander carefully stood up and held out his hand to her.

Kendra took his hand and stepped down, only to fall in herself as her hand slipped out of Xander's. She gasped as the warm fluid instantly soaked into every crevice of her lower body, slithering heavily over her skin as she moved. It really didn't feel anything like water.

"Oops," Xander chuckled. "Over here, there's a platform in the center of the pool we can lay on."

Hidden a half-inch under the surface, there was such a platform. Xander climbed up and Kendra followed. Following Xander's lead, she laid down on her side facing her giant self. Xander's arm came around her waist and she slid back against his chest. Kendra suddenly understood what he'd been going for with all this. Pressing together with their whole bodies wet and frictionless was a whole new sensation. It was a glorious sensation that demanded movement. It made her want to wriggle and writhe against him and never stop.

Xander's cock slid into her canal, and Kendra shivered in pleasure. He pumped his hips, spearing her to her core, and the sounds, the feelings, all of it got to her. It was so excitingly lewd and her body surprised her with an orgasm almost immediately.

As she gasped and shuddered, Kendra watched the giant vagina quiver and clench in imitation of her own. Its fluids drooled out to join the pool.

"Neat, huh," Xander said as he kissed her neck. "The big parts all mimic what our parts do."

"Does dat mean...?" Kendra asked slowly.

Xander chuckled. "Why don't you find out?"

It was easy to slide themselves around so they faced the other direction. Kendra wiggled in Xander's embrace as his hands slipped and slid over her breasts. She pressed back until he was as deep inside her as he could get and started swiveling her hips, sliding him in and out of her and milking him with her inner walls.

Xander groaned into her neck and twitched. Off across the grassy fields, the towering penises were all dripping wet and visibly throbbing. Xander spasmed against her, and she moaned as she felt him erupt inside her. Then her eyes widened as the sky was suddenly filled with jets of white fluid, shooting up in time with the pulses she felt inside her pussy.

Kendra yelped in surprise, covering her head with her arms as gallons upon gallons of semen rained down into the pool, drenching them in Xander's warm goopy fluid.

"Well, that was different," Xander said, sounding amused.

Kendra twisted to look at him and felt a laugh bubble up inside her at what she saw.

It wasn't quite the same as the real thing, once she returned to her body some hours later, but a very
strong echo of that feeling of satisfaction did follow her back to the real world. Kendra felt wonderfully sated as she headed into the school building that morning.

There was a suspicious crowd gathered in the lounge and Kendra paused on her way to the library to investigate. She spotted Oz on the fringes and went to ask him for a situation report.

"Hey," Oz greeted.

"Wat is happening here?" Kendra asked.

"Seems that Billy Crandal's chained himself to the snack machine again," Oz commented.

Kendra frowned in confusion. "Who is dat, and why would he do such a ting?"

"Apparently he's offended by food," Oz said. "Taking the way of the vegan a bit far if you ask me."

Kendra wondered awkwardly if he was joking. She could never tell.

"Oh, there you are," came the annoyed tones of Cordelia Chase. "Have you heard?"

"Heard wat?" Kendra asked as Oz merely quirked an eyebrow.

"About the girl who was totally shot dead on the second floor balcony just now," Cordelia told them with a grimace.

"Shot?" Oz repeated thoughtfully.

Kendra stepped forward. "Show me."

Cordelia sighed and led the way. The three of them arrived where another smaller crowd had gathered. Kendra pushed her way through just in time to hear the high-pitched electric ringing sound and see the body vanish in a flash of white light.

It was expected, by now, and the small crowd dispersed with the air of a concluded spectacle. In true Sunnydale fashion, anything that made it easier to ignore a disruption of the routine was quickly embraced.

"Well, that was pointless," Cordelia complained.

Kendra glanced at Oz, but the short boy seemed lost in thought. Kendra scowled and looked around for some kind of sign of the killer.

"Oz," Kendra said. "Burn your tin."

Oz blinked, coming out of his thoughts, and glanced around as he nodded. His body rippled and suddenly he was a she, an even more petite girl with straight black hair. Cordelia folded her arms and looked bored, turning to keep a lookout.

Kendra stepped over the bloodstain, remembering the short glimpse she'd gotten. "De shot came from dis way, I tink."

Another gunshot suddenly rang out in the distance. Kendra's and Oz's heads both whipped around in the direction of the sound. Kendra shot the weregirl a look and nodded.

"Hey, did you guys hear - hey wait!" Cordelia called.
Oz launched down the hall like a shot, ironpulling on the metal in the walls. Kendra sprinted after her at top speed and followed Oz to a nearby classroom. Kendra skidded to a stop and caught the door Oz was holding open.

The classroom was full of music stands, and a turntable was scratching out an old love song from the fifties. Kendra moved in and spotted the body of a boy sprawled in a chair in front of a mirror, with a bloody hole in the side of his head.

Cordelia finally caught up. "Oh god, another one? Ick. Looks like he shot himself."

"There's no gun," Oz pointed out.

"Huh?"

Kendra frowned and held her hand out over the dead boy's head wound, spreading her aura... her *Utility Cloud* from her skin. Xander had mentioned to her that the common word for it in *faelin* did actually translate to 'aura', but in a world where magical auras were a thing it was better to stick to the technical name to avoid confusion.

"What're you doing now?" Cordelia asked.

"Xander taught me how to feel out materials and topography," Kendra explained, frowning at what she was sensing. "Dere is no exit wound, but dere is no bullet in his head."

"No bullet? Ew! You mean someone shot him and picked the bullet out and made it look like suicide?" Cordelia demanded.

"Ah do not tink so," Kendra said, feeling out the shape of the wound as fast as she could, before this body was taken as well. "It does not seem like dere was digging."

Oz rippled, transforming back into a boy as he extinguished his metals. "Giles?"

"Indeed," Kendra agreed, stepping back from the body.

The three of them stood by for a moment, before Cordelia suddenly asked, "Hey, why isn't he disappearing?"

"Headshot," Oz said softly. "He's, y'know, dead-dead. Scrambled brains. Nothing there to revive."

Kendra stared wide-eyed.

"Oh," Cordelia said. "Well fuck."

Carter sat back in her chair in the briefing room and let out a long breath. "Are we still treating the Fae as a foothold situation?"

It was good to have SG-1 reunited once more. The tension from that missing note in their dynamic had been a pall over all of them, even if Carter was still reeling from how much things had changed while she was gone. They sat on one side of the table, with Weir at the head. The Childan contingent sat opposite, their backs to the window overlooking the gateroom, now wearing clean-cut uniforms or plainclothes instead of their elaborate Barrier Jackets.

"Well that's the thing now isn't it," Jack said. "As the Fae are so fond of reminding us, they didn't come through the 'gate, and they couldn't care less about the SGC."
"The problem is, this is an unprecedented global event," Weir said. "There simply are no appropriate protocols for contact with an alien civilization that ignores the proper authorities in order to publicly provide a service, however dubious, to the population, directly and on scale that no one has the manpower to regulate, and both refuses to communicate and is able to ignore all practical military action. We're making it up as we go, and every other country is doing the same."

"Well, it looks to me like this is one catgirl that's gotten completely out of her gag," Hayate said. There was a brief pause as the words she'd actually used were parsed.

"Don't you mean... the cat's out of the bag?" Daniel asked slowly.

Hayate just smiled. "I know what I said."

"The Fae indeed move openly," Teal'c put in before Daniel could start blushing. "They exploit the fact that we must hide our existence and our actions by standing in plain sight without fear."

"They have no reason not to," Carter pointed out. "I still find it unfathomable that the Chinese actually fired a nuke at them."

"In my opinion, it says something meaningful about these Fae that they did not retaliate," Chrono mused.

"It makes a lot of sense, culturally, I mean," Daniel said. "They would be used to conflict where defense vastly outweighs offence, and no actual harm can come of it. They were engineered to have personal durability in frankly ridiculous excess of their ability to do damage, and I think that decision reflects the core of their culture. I've been trying to understand their perspective, and I think they might actually regard fighting back as bullying a cripple."

"You think they're, ah, not dignifying it with a response?" Shamal asked. "That seems worryingly dismissive."

"I... don't think that fits, though," Madoka ventured. "If they were dismissive of Earth, why do any of it? Why try to help?"

"If that's even what they're doing," Jack snarked. "Sure, the benefits are great, but in the end there are more of them and less of us."

"Willow Rin and her companions did not appear to care if others adopted their way of life," Teal'c said. "They valued personal freedom highly, did they not?"

Carter frowned and checked her notes. "At last count, more than twenty thousand people in the United States alone have completed their bouts in the pods and rejoined the population. Has there been any indication of influence, overt or passive?"

"Nothing concrete," Weir admitted. "And believe me, plenty of people are looking."

"That's what we need to find out, then," Nanoha concluded. "If this is a gift freely given, the price is already paid and there isn't any reason I can see why everybody shouldn't embrace it. I know I would love to get away with not sleeping!" Nanoha got serious. "However, if this is a ploy to subvert innocent people for some nefarious cause, we will convince them to stop, one way or the other. Right, Chrono?"

Chrono nodded. "Unless there is any more pertinent information we're not aware of?"
After a moment, Teal'c spoke up. "If the Fae can be trusted, I believe they can offer the Free Jaffa true independence."

"Teal'c, buddy," Jack started.

"Tretonin goes only so far, O'Neill," Teal'c said. "It is a salve, but it is not a cure. It allows us to fight, but all our victories will ring hollow if the jaffa race cannot be secure in their right to life, afterward."

Joyce shook her head as she parked in the school parking lot. A student suicide, with a gun even! Speculation was rampant about why a body remained behind, unclaimed by the aliens. And a backed up sewer that led to a cafeteria full of snakes. There was a small twinge of shame that not so long ago she would have accepted the news story as presented without question.

Getting out of the car, Joyce straightened her jacket and checked her hair before heading in. She wanted to check on Giles and the Scooby Gang 2: Electric Boogaloo. Joyce shook her head in amusement at the name Buffy had given the group. Hopefully they were all okay, and she wanted to know if they thought the incidents were somehow supernatural. With Buffy moved out and on her own years early, Joyce was yearning for more of an insight into her life before.

Joyce arrived at the school library and heard Giles speaking.

"...the spirit is plagued by all manner of worldly trouble. It has no way to, to make its peace. So it... lashes out, growing ever more confused, ever more angry," Giles lectured. "If this is what has happened, then what we are dealing with is a fully formed poltergeist."

"A poltergeist?" Cordelia repeated. "Does that mean there's going to be slime? I hate when there's slime."

"How do ah stop it?" Kendra asked.

Oz saw Joyce first and gave her a nod.

"The only tried and true way is to work out what unresolved issues keep the, the spirit here and, and resolve them," Giles said, turning and blinking as he noticed Joyce. "Ah, Mrs. Summers, what, what brings you here?"

"Joyce, please," Joyce told him, feeling slightly awkward. "So... I take it there's a spooky thing?"

"Even more literally than usual," Oz contributed, idly fiddling with a small vial with some kind of metallic dust swirling in liquid.

"I see," Joyce said. "I, um, suppose it has something to do with the boy on the news?"

"Well," Giles began, before pausing. "Actually, it might. Oz, would you perhaps look through the file of old school newspapers for any other students who died under similar circumstances?"

Oz nodded. "No prob."

Giles polished his glasses. "So, ah, what can I, I do for you, Joyce?"

"Actually, I was wondering if," Joyce hesitated. "Can I help, somehow?"

"I'm not sure if..." Giles stopped again. "Ah yes, you, er, took Buffy up on her offer, I recall." He nodded. "I suppose there is no harm in it."
Cordelia gave her a pitying look. "Welcome to the den of crazy."

Nanoha hurried happily down the sidewalk of the familiar Uminari suburb just as the sun peeked out over the horizon. Her family's house looked just the way she remembered it. They were expecting her, so when she rang the bell, the door was yanked open almost immediately.

Her mother, Momoko, lit up with a proud smile. "Welcome back, Nanoha."

Setting her shoes aside, Nanoha hugged her mom and then her siblings and dad. Her mom yawned as she led Nanoha into the kitchen and started on breakfast. Nanoha's heart swelled in... whatever the opposite of homesickness was. She didn't often think about how much she missed her family while lived on MidChilda, but she really did miss them a lot.

Her parent's congratulated her on her promotion and her first student. Nanoha told them all about Madoka and how far the other girl had come. Miyuki wanted to know about Fate. Nanoha sheepishly admitted that she and Fate were in love, and together 'like that' now, and that she had Madoka to thank for opening her eyes to it. Miyuki pulled her into a whispered conversation on the way to the Midori-ya, enthusiastically prying details out of her until Nanoha was beet red.

At the Midori-ya, Nanoha fell into her old routines of helping out. Half the conversations were rampant speculation about the Fae.

Back by the ovens, Nanoha asked her mom, "The way people are talking, it seems like they approve of the Fae, doesn't it?"

"I have noticed that," Momoko replied. "Is that good or bad?"

Nanoha lowered her voice, becoming serious. "We don't really know yet. Chrono's insisting on the cautious approach, since the situation seems stable. We're trying to learn as much as we can before we make contact, but I'm hopeful that they'll be friendly. Fate's in America right now tracking down a lead, and Hayate's gone digging through the internet."

Momoko nodded. "Other countries aren't being nearly as positive about it, are they."

Shiro paused to add, "Few countries other than Japan are reacting in a way that is positive at all. I'm just not sure if that means we're more rational or more gullible. Did you know they're talking about an incentive program to encourage people in the more heavily populated districts to use the pods? It's more or less common knowledge now that the changed people can live comfortably without food or sleep, and the potential reduction on food and housing pressures is a significant temptation."

"It is an appealing benefit," Nanoha admitted. "I know there have been times I would have really liked to not have those interruptions. Are you considering it, Dad?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact," Shiro said. "Your mother and I both, but we're waiting for your organization look into it, first, just in case."

Nanoha nodded firmly.

"Dru," Spike said patiently. "I'm just going to find you a nummy treat. I'll be back right quick."

Drusila swayed from side to side as she shook her head. "You can't, Spike. You can't. Zip. Zap. Stings like the lightning bug."
Spike frowned. "Something's out there, pet? What if I send the boys?"


Spike pulled her close and made soothing noises. "There there, pet. What're minions for?"

In the fading light of evening, Oz perched at the highest point in the school, holding herself up by the small metal spire at the peak of the sharply sloped roof tiles. A low simmer of pewter made the physical exertion trivial.

Taking a breath, Oz ignited her bronze. Oz didn't like burning bronze. It let her sense magic in a very viceral way, and sensing magic like that directly on top of a hellmouth was kind of like enhancing his senses with tin and staring into the sun. It hurt.

As usual, a sensation that wasn't quite pressure and wasn't quite sound crashed into her from the direction of the library. It was a powerful throbbing hum like the five-tone beat of some gargantuan alien heart.

For several very long minutes, Oz just held tight to the metal spire and controlled her breathing. The beat of the hellmouth pounded in her head like a bad headache, but she found she could tolerate it. Oz paused. There was something else. Something new. Two notes, one a blazing hum so strong it was obvious even with the hellmouth nearby, the other was softer but it was deep, even deeper than the beat of the hellmouth. Both were clear across town, some distance apart.

Making a note to mention it to the gang later, Oz began to look for their poltergeist.

Even though the bronze-sense wasn't sound, his musician's skill at picking individual sounds out of a complex composition translated enough that Oz could pick out other magical activity even with the hellmouth's presence. It wasn't easy, or Oz would have done this to begin with, but now a teacher had been shot and they'd come within seconds of losing the school janitor to an ectoplasmic bullet to the brain, so here she was resorting to desperate measures.

There. Two points of simple harmonic over by the gym.

Oz ignited her iron and steel, lighting up all the metal in the school in a soft blue second sight. Oz let go of the spire and steelpushed, shooting into the air like a bolt. She ironpulled on a girder to change course, then steelpushed off some underground structure, sharply halting her fall.

Oz pulled a walkie-talkie off her belt and clicked it. "Guys? I've got them. The gym."


"Yes," came Giles' voice. "Um, did you say, them?"


"Oh dear."

"Does that... mean this triangle thing isn't going to work?" came the question from Joyce.

"Erm, so long as the spirits are, are both together, it should," Giles hedged.

Oz waited for Giles to elaborate, but when he didn't, she shrugged and let herself into the gym, igniting her copper. "Going in."
It was dark inside, but with tin Oz barely noticed. Decorations for the up-coming Sadie Hawkins' dance were hung all over the walls. She couldn't see any indication of the spirits, but this close, they were clear to her bronze sense. With her copper burning, the spirits didn't seem to notice Oz.

Shrugging in a here-goes-nothing way, Oz ignited her brass and flared it as high as she could. She focused the power of the emotion-dampening metal on the two spirits and soothed them totally.

Both spirits buckled like Oz had punched a hole in a balloon. The thrum of their presence warbled and weakened, diffusing...

"NnnnnNNNNOOOOOOOOOO!"

Oz staggered back as a very real scream of animal pain and rage roared through the gym, rattling the windows and decorations. The spirits suddenly exploded with power, brushing off Oz's soothing like it was nothing. Reacting with the quickness of Vin's instincts, Oz extinguished all her metals except brass and then burned duraluminum.

All of Oz's brass evaporated in an instant, and the unnatural roar cut off all at once. Oz's body rippled and became male again. He reached for his walkie-talkie.

"Guys, start the chant - "

"GET OUT!"

An an invisible force struck Oz and blasted him back out of the gym. He ignited pewter just in time to keep from breaking half the bones in her body, and belatedly reignited copper. The spirits immediately lost track of her.

Oz grabbed her walkie-talkie. "Guys! Abort and retreat."

There was no reply. Oz flared her tin and the sounds of the night filled her ears.

"...elp me, help! Lemme go you stupid ghosts!"

And it sounded like Cordelia was in trouble. Oz raced through the halls and got there moments before Joyce did. Cordelia was up to her ribs in the floor, which had apparently developed a case of linoleum quicksand vortex thing. Together, Oz and Joyce hauled Cordelia out of the trap.

"What do we do now?" Joyce asked fretfully.

"Get the heck out of here! Duh!" Cordelia replied.

Giles and Kendra joined them from opposite directions and together they retreated.

"So much for Plan A," Oz commented.

Theresa was still kind of new to the whole being-a-vampire thing. She had the questionable honor of being among the very last vampires to rise before those freaky aliens showed up and fucked up the whole system. It really ticked her off that she'd been working for Spike for a month now and she was still the new chick. She'd always be the new chick. There weren't going to be any newer vampires unless someone somewhere pulled a star destroyer out of their ass and blew up the freakin' aliens' mothership.

Following along with their little hunting party, Theresa at least got to enjoy the terror when they cornered their prey.
And there was tonight's handy happy meal on legs. Theresa brought out her vamp face as the other minions spread out to surround the lone girl. Theresa started to grin in anticipation when the girl glanced over her shoulder. She was expecting the girl's eyes to widen in fear, for her to pick up her pace and make a run for it.

Instead, the girl stopped and calmly turned around, running one hand through her long, flowing midnight black hair, tossing it out behind her. The girl's clothes were strange. Too nice. Too clean. Grey skirt, white jacket, grey collar and black trim, with something skintight and black under it. Theresa started to get a bad feeling.

"Hey there, girly!" Big J called out as they closed the trap.

The strangely dressed girl calmly studied their faces. "I see."

The wall of muscle that was Kenta stepped up to the girl and loomed over her. "Little girl should run away from the big scary monsters." He growled softly. "Tastes better that way."

"You don't want to do this," the girl said flatly.

"Oh I think we do," Big J said with a menacing grin. "Your fate was sealed the second we saw you, girly."

"My name is Homura Akemi, and fate is my bitch." Then the girl paused and winced, like what she said had come out wrong, but Theresa couldn't figure how - it certainly sent chills down her spine.

Big J reached out to grab the girl, and it all went wrong. Homura's hand snapped up and caught Big J's wrist. Big J screamed in pain, and the girl didn't even react. She just crushed his wrist and watched impassively as he fell to his knees.

"Slayer!" "No way! We saw the slayer!" "Shit!"

"Oh fuck," Theresa whispered.

"Thank you for volunteering," Homura told Big J.

And a deep masculine computer voice came out of nowhere, declaring, SLIDER DRIVE.

Big J and Homura vanished like they were never there. No sound, no flash, no poof, just gone.

"What the fuck!"

"Where'd she go?!"

"What happened to Big J?"

A sudden explosion of dust and the dying scream of Big J came from all the way across the street. Theresa and the others spun, snarling. Homura was there, standing on top of a fucking broken parking meter like it was a stage, and there was now some kind of fancy metal shield strapped to her arm.

Theresa blinked and suddenly the witch was right in front of her. Theresa jumped in surprise, but Homura's hand drove forward into her gut, doubling her over, and suddenly Homura was behind her pulling her off balance. The others shouted and attacked.

SLIDER DRIVE.
All the noise except her own heels strapping on the pavement went dead silent. The world had gone
greyish, and the others were all frozen like statues mid-lunge. For a moment, Theresa forgot to
struggle.

A delicate hand entered her field of vision, two fingers wreathed in a shard of deep purple light.

"What is your name?" the witch asked calmly.

Theresa was too scared to do anything but answer. "Theresa."

"Hello, Theresa," she said. "Since we're here, there are some questions I might as well ask you. First,
do you recognize any of these people?"

Three images appeared in the air in front of her, and her eyes widened. "That's Buffy Summers and
her friends."

"Good," Homura said. "Tell me everything you remember about them."

"Or what?" Theresa asked shakily.

"Or I will kill you, obviously," Homura replied without feeling.

"You, you'll do that anyway," Theresa accused.

Homura paused thoughtfully. "Maybe, but you're no threat to anyone I care about, and the longer
you talk, the longer you'll live."

Theresa gulped and complied. She wracked her memory and told Homura pretty much what was
known about Buffy, Willow, and Xander among the students of Sunnydale High.

Once she was done, Homura nodded. "Thank you. That is consistent with my findings so far."

Theresa watched Homura's free hand aim forward at the frozen forms of her fellows and that
computer voice spoke from the shield on her arm. WARP SPLINTER.

A complex magic circle design drew itself on the ground under their feet and dozens of jagged
arrowheads made of purple light appeared in the air before firing off like bullets, only to freeze in
place and turn grey before they got halfway to the others.

Suddenly, Theresa felt herself being lifted and with renewed terror she fought frantically, but
Homura was too strong. The witch threw her over the magical blasts. Theresa flailed and screamed
and then suddenly color and noise returned to the world and the Warp Splinters weren't frozen
anymor -

Hovering high above the glimmering coastal town, Fate frowned in concentration. Her search spells
were arrayed in a grid as she mapped the town. Bardiche wasn't set up to operate on a hellmouth,
and the interference was slowing things down, but Fate was starting to think it wouldn't matter.

She'd already detected seventy-six people with the exotic non-biological physiology, with more
showing up the longer her spells ran. Scrying for magical activity was giving her even less useful
information.

Fate dismissed the spells with a small sigh. It looked like she was going to have to rely on the SGC's
information. She had a small list of points of interest around the town, but she was worried. It was
easy to imagine her presence being taken as a threat.
Fate opened a telepathic link with Homura. *I'm moving on to the first point of interest. How are things at street-level?*

*There are an absurd number of vampires in this town, Homura replied. Even with a hellmouth here. Do you want me to go to the second address?*

*Yes, alright,* Fate agreed.

Fate turned and flew towards the first location, a nightclub called the Bronze. She swooped over the building and briefly considered landing on the roof. No, there was no need to sneak in. Fate circled outwards, gliding silently through the night as she looked for a good place to land without being seen.

Shooting down into an alley that was just out of sight, Fate landed lightly and dispelled her Barrier Jacket. She checked her appearance. She wore a black skirt and thigh-socks with a wine-red tanktop and a black leather jacket. Bardiche settled as a triangular yellow crystal pendant in her cleavage.

Fate stepped out and headed for the door.

Inside, it was surprisingly staid. A cozy collection of tables and chairs were gathered under a railed balcony, over by the bar and opposite the billiards tables. A trio of girls in white dresses crooned out a slow song up on the stage that overlooked the dance floor.

Fate's eyes landed on a dark haired beauty who was bent over and busy lining up a shot with a cue stick. Her tight leather pants and minimalistic shirt showed off a body without flaw, and Fate might have taken her for one of the upgraded if not for the dark circles under her slightly manic eyes. Fate also noted something that was probably a knife strapped to the other girl's shin.

The leather-clad girl took her shot, sinking one of the colored balls into a pocket in the table. She grinned at her opponent, a curly-haired boy in a letter jacket, and did a little victory dance.

"Hah! That's game, stud," she crowed. "Pay up."

Grumbling, the guy handed over a few bills. She snatched them up and stuffed them into a pocket as she grabbed a can from the edge of the table and took a swig. Fate thought she recognized the label as some sort of energy drink.

"Alright, who's next?" the girl asked, looking around in challenge.

When everyone else hesitated, Fate stepped in. "How do you play?"

The other girl gave her a predatory grin and explained the rules. Fate offered her name, and the other girl introduced herself as Faith.

"Fate and Faith," Faith laughed. "Maybe its a sign."

The game was very close. Fate had never played before, but the rules were simple enough. Once she understood them, it was all geometry and hand-eye coordination. Fate missed her first shot, and winged her second, but from the third on each ball went exactly where Fate wanted it to go. Sadly for Fate's pocket change, Faith never missed a shot either.

"You pull a lot of all-nighters?" Fate asked softly as they played.

Faith twitched in irritation but covered it with shrug. "Now and again."
"Sorry," Fate murmured. "I'm new in town, but I've heard the nights here can be dangerous."

Faith shrugged carelessly. "Yeah, well, ya never know what's lurking in the dark do - you!"

Fate blinked as Faith suddenly straightened up and pointed over Fate's shoulder with a furious jab of her cue stick. Fate stepped aside and looked to see a tall redhead with chiseled muscles on display through a fishnet shirt.

He scratched the back of his head and chuckled nervously. "Oh, hey babe."

Faith stalked around the table and hurled the cue stick at Fate without looking. It slapped solidly into Fate's hand despite the fact that Fate wasn't looking either. Faith marched up to fishnet boy and yanked him down to eye level with her.

"You!" Faith snarled. "You think you're funny, huh? You think you can dupe me like that and I'll just let it slide?"

"H-hey! It's not my fault," the redhead protested, trying to straighten up and failing as Faith held on. "I told you I was fae-touched."

Fate hmm'd at that term. Fae-touched? So far everybody seemed to be calling them 'upgraded' or just 'changed'. Maybe it was a local thing. It was a bit misleading, but catchy. Fate kind of liked it.

"Yeah," Faith scoffed. "You just forgot to mention one important detail, when we made the bet."

"Well, um, come on, how was I supposed to know you didn't know?"

Faith wrenched him down a little further. "And you didn't think to mention it once during the whole eight hours we were fuckin'?"

Fishnet boy definitely would have been sweating at that point, if he was still human. "Ah... I was gonna, but you passed out?"

"After eight fucking hours!" Faith roared in his face. "After I'd been doin' all the work! You played me you son of a bitch!"

"N-not all the - "

He didn't get a chance to finish his protest. Faith released his shirt and slid forward in a powerful lightning-fast uppercut. Her fist hit his chin so hard his teeth clacked shut with a sound like a gunshot, and his head snapped back with a spray of saliva that reached the rafters. He sailed through the air over the stage, and the music cut off with a yelp as the singers ducked for cover from the flying body. He tumbled through the backstage equipment and smashed through the tall frosted window in an explosion of glass.

The redhead's friends rushed outside to check on him as more than a few people gave Faith plenty of space. Fate wasn't worried about the guy. If he was... fae-touched, he was probably fine. No, what had Fate wide-eyed was the power behind that hit. Fate didn't think she could punch that hard unless her Barrier Jacket was in overdrive mode.

Fate frowned. The SGC had mentioned this 'slayer' who had the kind of enhancement that would let her do something like that, but she was supposed to be a girl named Kendra Young. Maybe this was similar, though.

"Faith," Fate said softly.
"What?" Faith snapped.

"Does the word 'slayer' mean anything to you?" Fate asked.

And just like that, she had Faith's full attention.

Chapter End Notes

(This is one of those cliffhangers where you can't see the bottom but it's like two inches under you feet.)

(I spent like an hour trying to figure out what to name this chapter. Every chapter since Lie To Me has been named for a canon episode with only one exception, while kind of thematically mirroring the canon plot arcs. Sort of. If you squint. This one touches on some of the events in I Only Have Eyes For You, but this arc isn't really about what that episode was about, so I finally just picked a name almost at random.)
Passion

Oz settled in the armchair with his elbows on his knees. Giles and Cordelia sat on opposite ends of the sofa, while Kendra paced. Joyce came in from the kitchen with a cup of tea for Giles and sat down between him and Cordelia.

"Thank you very much, Joyce," Giles said politely.

Cordelia shook her head. "Well, that worked about as well as bowling shoes at the prom."

"Yes, um, do you know what went wrong?" Joyce asked.

"It felt wrong," Oz spoke up. "When I soothed 'em. It was supposed to calm them down, make them more willing to move on..."

"Yes?" Giles prompted.

"It wasn't like that," Oz said. "It was like I was killin' them."

"Killing them?" Cordelia repeated. "But they're already dead!"

Oz shrugged. "They fought back, overpowered me. Even duraluminum only slowed them down. They fought like you'd fight for your life."

Giles set down his tea and looked thoughtful.

"So we need a new plan?" Joyce asked.

"Hm, perhaps not," Giles said. "Perhaps what we need is an old plan."

"You mean to resolve de spirits' issue," Kendra said.

"How?" Joyce asked.

Cordelia suddenly sat up. "Hey. The ghosts are possessing people and acting out the same fight over and over, and it keeps ending the same way, because hello shot in the chest, but what if the people they possess don't die when they get shot? What would happen then?"

Giles blinked. "I'm, I'm not sure. I imagine it would likely alter how the scene plays out."

"So like, let them possess someone who's had the upgrade, on purpose," Oz said.

"I don't like the idea of doing that to someone," Joyce opined.

"Yes, you're right of course," Giles agreed. "We need volunteers."

"I will do eet," Kendra said immediately.

"Um," Joyce said uncertainly. "Maybe it should be me, instead? In case something goes wrong and you need to do... something?"

Kendra hesitated.
"There's a problem," Oz pointed out. "None of our guys are Fae'd."

There was an awkward silence.

Giles polished his glasses. "Ah, in that case, I feel it is my responsibility to volunteer."

"Are you crazy?" Cordelia blurted. "You could get your brains blown out!"

"No," Oz spoke up. "I'll follow under a coppercloud. Make sure he doesn't."

"Yes, I appreciate that," Giles said, glancing awkwardly at Joyce.

Joyce put on an air of cheer. "So! We have a plan, then."

"I don't see why we can't call up Xander and have him beam his butt down here to help out," Cordelia said.

Joyce sighed. "Buffy explained - "

Just then, the doorbell rang, and Joyce fell silent as everyone glanced towards the door. Oz raised an eyebrow. Everyone was already here, and it was kind of late for anyone else to be dropping by. The bell rang again, and Joyce got up to answer it.

"Hello," Joyce greeted. "Can I help you?"

The girl on the doorstep instantly made Oz suspicious. She put the eerie in eerie pale-skinned brunette, and her clothes were odd in a way that wasn't immediately obvious. It fit together, and fit her, too well.

"My name is Homura Akemi," the girl said. "I apologize for coming unannounced, Mrs. Summers. If it isn't too much trouble, I would like to speak with you about your daughter."

"Oh, um, you know Buffy?" Joyce asked.

"In a manner of speaking," Homura replied with a little quirk of her lips. "Is now a good time?"

"Um, I'm afraid not," Joyce said apologetically, glancing back into the house at Oz and the others. "We have a somewhat pressing matter to attend to tonight."

Homura took a step to the right and peered into the house passed Joyce. Her gaze locked with Oz, and he noted that her eyes were actually violet, not black. Yeah, there was no way this girl was normal. Then she looked passed him to the rest of the group that had gathered in the foyer, pausing on Giles and Kendra.

"I see," Homura said softly. "If there is an urgent need for a slayer and her allies, please accept my assistance."

"Hey!" Cordelia cut in. "How do you know about Kendra? Giles, do you know her?"

"No," Homura answered before Giles could. "I'm not affiliated with any of the factions you know of. However, it is in my interests to establish goodwill."

Well that wasn't ominous at all. Also, totally called it. Oz glanced back. Cordelia looked confused, while Kendra was frowning and Giles was glaring suspiciously.

"What is that?" Cordelia suddenly blurted. "That fabric? You have to tell me where you got that
Giles rubbed his forehead. "Cordelia."

"What?"

"Really not the time for fashion, Cordy," Oz put in.

"Oh, well, I vote she comes with us," Cordelia declared.

Joyce looked back at them. "If she wants to help..."

"Wat if she only gets in de way?" Kendra asked flatly.

Homura responded by raising her left hand. Joyce took a step back as Homura's glove suddenly glowed like a blacklight and seemed to explode, leaving behind a bronze buckler strapped to her arm. Homura slashed her arm down, leaving a trail of blacklight through the air.

"That will not be a concern," Homura stated firmly. She turned, her long raven-black hair flowing in her wake as she stepped down off the porch. "Shall we go?"

Cordelia chased her out of the house. "Hey! You're a witch?"

"It would be more accurate to say I am a mage," Homura corrected.

"What's the difference?" Cordelia wondered.

The remaining four exchanged a look. Oz shrugged. Joyce grabbed her car keys and out they went.

In her officer suite aboard the Arthra, Hayate sat in front of a wall of screens, trawling - and occasionally trollin' - through the terrestrial internet for clues. Rein-chan's holographic avatar sat crosslegged on top of her head as she set to tracing the IP address whenever Hayate found something promising. Vita was asleep on her lap, and Hayate cuddled her favorite loli-GAR while she controlled the screens with her mind.

A street map and a driver's license photo popped up on a new screen. Rein-chan had completed her latest trace. Hayate forwarded it to Galvan Soul for Madoka. Hayate opened a com window, but instead of accepting the call, Hayate felt Madoka establish a telepathic link.

Hayate shook her head in amusement. You do realize you just did something impossible again, right?

Huh? Madoka sent back. Oh, you mean the distance. Well, the link I'm using now is a little different than the standard one...

That's right, I remember you saying something about that, Hayate replied. It was something like the difference between a flashlight and a laser?

That's... really not a very good analogy, Madoka sent. Um, anyway, do you think this lead's good? The last woman never had any magical ability at all, I'm pretty sure.

I know, Hayate groaned. Between the dozen or so groups all calling themselves Wiccans, the this-pagans, the that-pagans, the this-and-that-pagans, the pagan-wiccans, all the various priests and priestesses of whoever, and the otherkin, I'm guessing wildly about who's a genuine hedge witch, who's delusional, and who's just wearing the trappings to make themselves mysterious.
Vita squirmed a bit in her sleep and buried her face in Hayate's cotton-clad breasts. Hayate sighed and smiled lovingly, petting Vita's hair.

_I'm teleporting to the new coordinates now_, Madoka sent, and closed the link.

"I was looking for a slayer," Fate admitted during a lull in the singing.

Faith kicked back in her armchair. She made it look casual, even if her senses were trained on the odd blonde sitting across from her. Fate's weird red eyes flicked down to Faith's boot and narrowed slightly. Damn, blondie didn't miss much, did she.

"Well it looks like you found her, blondie," Faith said carelessly. "What'd ya want with me?"

Fate shook her head. "Not you. Another slayer called Kendra Young. I was told she is stationed on the hellmouth here."

Trying not to show her sudden interest, Faith popped one elbow out onto the armrest of her chair and leaned forward a little. "Well shit, that's already more than I know. What'd you want with her?"

"She and her team knew people my friends are interested in learning about," Fate explained. "We want her opinion. Her impressions."

"So you're here lookin' for her," Faith said, nodding. "Makes sense."

"I was," Fate corrected. "My understudy has already found her."

"Wait, what?" Faith blurted. "How'd you know that? I didn't see you get a call or nothing."

"We have telepathy spells," Fate said, standing. "They're at the high school, dealing with a threat. I should join them."

Now that was almost perfect. Faith could jump in and be the big damn hero, and the other slayer would owe her. No way she wasn't getting in on that.

Faith swung her feet down and hopped up herself. "Hey, sounds like fun. I'm in."

Fate paused for a moment and Faith just smirked at her, daring the other girl to tell her she couldn't come along. Fate just nodded in acceptance, and Faith followed her out of the Bronze and around into the alley where no one could see them.

Faith sensed something. There, in the shadows some vampire chick was feeding on a dweeb. Faith grinned in anticipation and reached for her stake as she started to step around Fate.

Before Faith could do anything, Fate raised her arm and pointed at the vampire. A tiny ball of lightning crackled into being at the end of her finger. It became a streak of yellow light in an instant, slicing through the vampire's neck... which exploded like a cat in a microwave.

Faith stumbled in surprise as the vampire's remains went to dust. "Shit! What was that?"

Instead of answering, Fate checked on the victim. He'd fallen to the ground and wasn't moving. Fate shook her head and did something Faith couldn't see, but when she stood up there was a little shard of yellow light clinging to his hair.

"He's beyond our help," Fate told Faith.
Faith shrugged. "Meh. The aliens will take care of him."

"...yes," Fate agreed. She turned away from the dead dude and touched her weird necklace. "Bardiche."

And the weird necklace answered her, in a deep monotone computer voice. YES, SIR. LIGHTNING FORM.

Thick arcs of electricity suddenly covered the other girl from head to toe. It was over in barely a second. The lightning scattered off of Fate in a shower of sparks, and Faith recovered just in time to feel her jaw drop.

"No fuckin' way," Faith blurted.

Fate's clothes had been replaced with something completely different, and she was holding this big axe-headed polearm. About the only thing it had in common with her previous outfit was the color scheme. It looked like a form-fitting armored black one-piece swimsuit, with thick leather belts holding up a tiny pink skirt slit up the front and back to the point that it didn't really hide anything. Armored boots with thigh-socks that looked a lot sturdier than normal socks. Armored gloves. A freaking cape, dark red on the inside and black on the outside.

Faith managed to close her mouth as Fate held out her hand for Faith to take. "Bitchin'."

"Take my hand," Fate told her.

Faith refused to gulp, and grabbed on. It suddenly felt like she was floating in water, only without the water. Then they were moving. The ground fell away and the wind roared in her ears as the town screamed by below them. Faith yelled, and it was absolutely a whoop of joy and without any doubt not a yelp of fear, and if anyone said different Faith would kick their teeth in.

The car rolled to a stop at the curb in front of the school and Joyce put it in park. Oz and Cordelia got out of the back as Giles and Joyce got out of the front. Oz shut his door and stood back as Kendra and their new addition leaped down from the ski rack.

Joyce came around the front of the car and looked up at the school building nervously. "Is there... anything we should do first?"

"I, I don't believe so, no," Giles offered.

"Right," Cordelia said impatiently. "Oz uses his weregirl powers - "

"Allomancy," Oz put in. He wasn't really a weregirl, if there even was such a thing. It was just a side effect, and he even had a few guesses about why it happened. Allomancy was physical like the body's version of magitech or something... magibiology? Probably why he kept the powers, actually...

" - hide from the ghostly domestic dispute duo and get Giles and Joyce to their marks," Cordelia recited. "Then we wait and watch and hope the dead couple get over themselves."

"Yes, thank you for that, er, summation, Cordelia," Giles said, polishing his glasses.

"My mentor will join us shortly, with another," Homura spoke up. "We are both able to act quickly, should a problem occur."
"And who is dis mentor?" Kendra asked suspiciously.

Homura merely pointed. Oz glanced in the indicated direction and ignited tin. Homura didn't even blink at his sudden sex change. No surprise there at all. Oz would have to think about what that meant, later. For now, her enhanced senses easily spotted the glint of a golden twin-tailed comet within an empty patch of black shadow shooting across the backdrop of stars.

Whatever it was circled the school once before it came in for a landing. It was a girl, with brilliant golden blonde hair and some kind of elaborate black fantasy outfit and a polearm. Cape girl had another girl by the hand, this one in painted-on leather pants and denim jacket.

They touched down, and the girl in leather gave herself a little shake. "Woo."

"Are you alright?"

"Five by five. That fuckin' rocked!"

Homura gestured to cape girl. "This is Fate Harlaown, and..."

"Yo," leather girl greeted with a lazy wave. "I'm Faith."

Kendra glared at Homura. "Ah do not like dealing wit' unknowns during dis operation."

"Aren't you just backup on this one?" Cordelia put in helpfully.

"Your plan is sound," Homura said. "Barring unforeseen circumstances, we will not interfere."

"Well, I appreciate your support, as I'm sure we all do," Joyce said politely.

Oz nodded noncommittally and ignited copper. She spread her coppercloud to cover Giles and Joyce. "Let's go."

Leaving Kendra and Cordelia with the strangers, Oz kept the two adults of their group close as she led them into the school. They quickly made their way to the second-floor hallway where the ghostly reenactment always seemed to begin.

Oz pulled her coppercloud back until it was only covering herself and stepped out of the way. She wondered if she should hide. The coppercloud hid her from magic, but if the spirits saw her through their victim's physical eyes, would they recognize her? Oz stepped back, half around a corner, while Giles and Joyce stood around awkwardly.

"So, um," Joyce said to fill the silence. "Do you know why those girls would want to know about Buffy?"

"I'm, I'm afraid not," Giles admitted. "Their manner of dress is rather striking. I do find it odd that a group of such skilled and distinctive magic users would go unmentioned in any of the journals."

"But they do use magic, right?" Joyce asked. "That means they're probably interested in Buffy for..." she trailed off and pointed down. "And not..." she pointed up.

"Er, I'm not so sure we ought to assume so," Giles said. "Buffy made quite a name for herself during that business at Cheyenne Mountain. Even in certain circles, she is known as Fae, rather than, than her former occupation."

"You don't think they want to make trouble for them, do you?" Joyce worried, glancing out at the empty night sky. The ship was somewhere below the horizon, currently.
"That remains to be seen," Giles told her. "All I can say, is..." Giles paused. "You can't make me disappear just because you say it's over."

Whoa, that was not Giles talking. Showtime.

Joyce suddenly swayed like she was drunk and an electric spark popped from her hand to the nearby railing. "The's nnnnnnn... there'sssssssssssss no way way we can be together, no way we can no way people will ever unnnnnnnnnnnnnunderstand. Acscepscepscepscepscept it."

"Is that what this is about?" Giles demanded. "What other people think?"

"No!" Joyce denied, steadying. "I juuuust want you to have some kind of normal life. We can never have that. Don't you see?"

"I don't give a damn about a normal life," Giles insisted. "I'm going crazy not seeing you. I think about you every minute!"

Joyce's face crumpled in anguish. "I know." She reached for Giles, tenderly caressing his face. "But it's over. It has to be."

Turning away as her voice broke, Joyce tried to leave, but Giles chased after her.

"Come back here! We're not finished!" Giles shouted, catching Joyce by the arm. "You don't care anymore? Is that it?"

"It doesn't matter," Joyce said brokenly. "It doesn't matter what I feel."

Giles shook her roughly. "Then tell me you don't love me. Say it!"

"Is that what you need to hear?" Joyce asked. "I don't. I don't. Now let me go."

"No," Giles snarled. "A person doesn't just wake up one day and stop loving somebody."

Joyce sniffled, obviously trying very hard not to cry. Giles finally let her go and took a step back... only to pull a small revolver out from behind him.

"Love is forever," Giles stated lowly.

Joyce backed away in fright. "Oh god..."

Giles aimed at her chest as she kept backing away. "I'm not afraid to use it. I swear. If I can't be with you - don't walk away from me, bitch!"

"Oh my god," Joyce whimpered as she turned and ran.

Rather than shooting her in the back, Giles chased her again, bursting through the swinging doors out onto the balcony. "Stop! Stop it! Don't make me!"

Joyce stopped and slowly turned around. "Alright. Just... You know you don't want to do this. Let's both, just calm down." Joyce carefully moved towards him. "Now give me the gun."

"Don't! Don't do that, damnit!" Giles snapped. "Don't talk to me like I'm some stupid -"

Oz flinched from the gunshot that rang out. Joyce staggered back, numbly holding a hand to where the bullet had struck her. There was no wound, of course, but she acted like she saw blood on her fingers.
"James," Joyce whispered.

Giles watched in horror as Joyce tumbled over the railing and thudded to the concrete path below.

It was a rare enough event that Oma went out of her way to watch for such things. She could sense the release of energy from a breaking loop, and followed it. Her awareness danced from star to star until she arrived at a familiar planet. She could sense the decades of helpless anger and regret winding tight around a new burning star of unthinking hope.

It was on a hellmouth, as these things so often were, in a school for human youth. Two spirits puppeting mortals. Briefly, Oma paused, curious, as she noticed several prominent minds. The Childans? Huh, what were they doing here? Oma moved her awareness away and focused on the two people she was here for.

The one controlling the man sat listening to a music player, toying with a conjured weapon. The one in the woman came up behind him and pushed the gun away when he pointed it at his head.

He twisted around and gasped. "Grace!"

"Don't do this," she told him gently.

"But," he choked. "But I killed you."

"It was an accident," she assured him, running a hand tenderly through his hair. "It wasn't your fault."

"It is my fault," he protested brokenly. "How could I..."

She shushed him softly. "I'm the one who should be sorry, James. You thought I stopped loving you, but I never did. I loved you with my last breath." She shushed him again when he tried to speak. "No more tears."

She leaned in and met his lips in a kiss of desperate longing, and that was enough. Oma felt their relief soak outwards and dissolve their threads of anguished need. The knots of emotion began to relax and unravel, stalling the psionic engine that kept them alive.

This was what Oma was here for.

Oma wasn't allowed to help mortals ascend anymore. She couldn't save them. The current gods wouldn't let her. But these were spirits. They were already halfway there, and the rules were much fuzzier. With the Powers That Be busy rubbing Janus' nose in his mistake until he was as close to dead as an ascended being could get without being erased utterly, they might not bother to stop her.

James and Grace. Them, maybe she could save.

They were on the cusp of oblivion. Spirits were still embedded in base reality, a neural net of electrical impulses sparking through empty air, maintained by a self-reinforcing psionic feedback loop. James and Grace didn't know any better. No one had taught them how these things worked, and they weren't enough in their right minds to understand new concepts anyway.

Reaching into reality, Oma used her own power to shore up the fading spirits. A light show bloomed into being above the kissing couple, swirling cosmic tendrils like a living galaxy reduced to fit in a single room.

James and Grace 'woke up' enough to conclude that Oma was an angel. While awkward, it was
useful to have them predisposed to listen to her. Gently, Oma guided their minds. The power that
allowed them to affect the world and exist as they were, Oma showed them how to follow back to its
source.

Oma pulled her factor out of reality and felt pleased. James and Grace were safe, and the Powers
That Be hadn't stopped her. Now all she had to do was teach them the basics so they didn't go insane
from sensory deprivation.

Oz let out a breath as the light show ended and extinguished her metals. Giles and Joyce... were still
kissing. It didn't look like they were slowing down, either. Oz quirked an eyebrow as Joyce pushed
Giles' tweed blazer off his shoulders and Giles' hands went under the hem of Joyce's blouse.

Oz coughed and they both froze in mid-grope. "Y'know if you guys are good, I can come back
later."

Giles slowly pulled away from Joyce, making awkward noises. Joyce blushed.

"Well, um, I think it worked?" Joyce offered.

"Mister Giles! Dis girl insists she is de slayer," Kendra nearly whined. "Tell her she cannot be de
slayer! Ah am de slayer!"

"Chill out, Special K," Faith said, sounding amused. "I can learn to share."

Kendra scowled as Giles, Joyce and Oz rejoined the others by the car. The other two strangers were
standing off to the side still looking like something out of a fantasy movie, while an impatient
Cordelia stood watching the standoff between Kendra and Faith with an exasperated expression.

"Erm, Faith was it?" Giles asked, stepping in.

"Yup," Faith agreed, giving him a once-over. "Lemme guess. You're the watcher?"

Giles peered at her. "Who might your watcher be?"

"That's DD, uh, Diana Dormer," Faith admitted, suddenly more subdued.

"Indeed?" Giles said. "Is she here as well?"

"Nope," Faith said, slouching carelessly back against Joyce's car. She pointed over at the nearest Fae
pod. "DD's in one of those back in Boston. We were headin' here, though. Guess I didn't wanna wait
around."

"Okay, she is another slayer," Cordelia said, dismissing Faith as she waved and arm at Fate and
Homura. "I want to know what the heck their deal is. Is this a Halloween thing?"

"Halloween?" Fate repeated in confusion.

"Vin didn't see anyone who looked like them," Oz put in quietly.

Homura merely glanced at her 'mentor' and subtly shook her head. Oz quirked an eyebrow as the
two of them seemed to have a silent conversation. Finally, Fate nodded softly.

Fate took a deep breath to brace herself and spoke, "We are part of an interstellar and
interdimensional magical disaster prevention and relief force, called the Time-Space Administration
Bureau. When news reached us of the Fae's sudden appearance and the upset that followed, our ship was sent to this planet to meet them and evaluate their intentions."

"Wait wait wait," Cordelia said. "You two are aliens? Like, real aliens? From another planet and everything?"

Faith snorted and gave Cordelia a very strange look. "What, you didn't notice all the alien shit that's been all of everywhere since last year?"

"Or rather the thing with Antarctica," Oz added as a wry aside.

"Please," Cordelia scoffed. "Th - "

"Cordelia!" Giles snapped.


"Um," Joyce spoke up hesitantly. "Can you girls prove all this?"

After a moment's hesitation, Fate nodded. "What proof would satisfy you?"

Tomoko plodded up the stairs to her room, sulking. None of her stupid classmates had even noticed her change. Yuu-chan hadn't even noticed, until they were at that store they went to and Tomoko had needed measuring for her new bras.

Shutting her door, Tomoko pulled off her uniform top and glared at her reflection in her dressing mirror. How much bigger did she have to make them?! The luscious titflesh on display in her new racy underwear was every bit as impressive as Yuu-chan's! And she could actually be sure of that, now that her memory was infallible.

Tomoko had the biggest tits in her class and she was the first of them to use a pod. And she still wasn't popular! Tomoko sighed. She just didn't get it.

On seventeen occasions so far, Tomoko had caught herself thinking it wasn't worth it. It was another thing her infallible memory had forced her to notice. The sheer relief she felt when she got to be alone after a day of trying to figure out how to make herself popular. Maybe being popular just wasn't for her.

No! No! She couldn't just give up! Not making friends. Never going on a date. Never having a boyfriend. Never having sex! Tomoko couldn't just accept that as her fate!

...not that she was a pervert or anything.

Tomoko gave her reflection a flat look. Yeah, she didn't believe that even while she was thinking it. Her memories didn't - couldn't - lie anymore. Forget the porn. Everybody her age who had a computer looked at porn. But all those dirty fantasies and almost-gropes on Yuu-chan... The way Yuu-chan's hands made her feel when she'd been helping size Tomoko for bras...

Shivering pleasantly, Tomoko went and flopped down on her bed, going face-first into her pillow with a grunt and not bothering to turn her head so she could breath. Her new bra dug into her ribs as her awesome breasts flattened under her, but Tomoko couldn't bring herself to care. It wasn't like anyone else cared about her tits.

Tomoko slammed her fist into the pillow next to her head. Her virginity was like an evil oni
determined to haunt her until the end of time! It wasn't fair! And she couldn't even look at porn anymore because her computer was wrecked!

At that thought, Tomoko paused, feeling an embarrassed flush of heat prickle over her skin. The dream world. She'd played around in the white void, making objects and stuff appear and building a rudimentary scene, but she hadn't really done anything with the dream world yet. She hadn't even known about it until recently.

But it was like the Fae version of the internet, only with content from thousands of years of people using it. Tomoko turned her attention inward and her real body on her bed fell away. All at once, she was standing naked in a white void, jittery with anticipation.

The archive bloomed into Tomoko's awareness, an endless catalog of, well, everything a population of trillions upon trillions ever dreamed up over the millennia. Whatever picture she had in her mind, the closest matches presented themselves to her awareness, organized in an ever-shifting multidimensional mosaic.

The first time she'd done this, she'd just looked for arbitrary objects. Furniture. Cars. Trees. Buildings. This time she was looking for whole scenarios. Complete environments with NPCs and scripted behaviors. And she'd been thinking about porn when she started.

Tomoko caught herself drooling a little as a nervous perverse giggle bubbled up out of her chest. So many choices! A generic orgy? A slave girl fantasy? One guy on a bed in a room? Tentacle rape? Molestation on a train? Tomoko's legs knocked together as she felt something wet on her thighs.

Just viewing the archive had her wet to the knees. She could think of anything, and there were so many scenarios that matched. The more outlandish ones carried 'nonstandard physiology' warnings and the more involved stories had 'driven by subconscious expectation' warnings for the NPCs.

There was even bug rape.

"Gah!" Tomoko whipped her head to the side and beat on her own skull as she ranted, "Why is it always bug rape?! I'm not into bug rape! That dream didn't mean anything and didn't even turn me on!"

But looking at some of the scenarios in this part of the catalog kind of did. Gah! No! Well, maybe, much later... Gah! Tomoko punched herself in the forehead again.

Grunting, Tomoko mentally grabbed one of the simplest scenarios and instantiated it. There were so many exciting scenarios that Tomoko was eager to try, but the truth was she hadn't ever even kissed a boy. Not even that basic thing. So, she decided to go for the vanilla stuff first. She wanted to kiss a boy, feel his body against hers, feel him on top of her holding her down, feel him push his hard throbbing...

Tomoko shivered pleasantly and looked around. The white void had been replaced by a simple circular room with walls of black stone, adorned by brightly burning torches. The floor was rich red carpet, and the majority of it was taken up by a huge round bed with shiny white sheets and lots of shiny red pillows.

A beautiful, wiry bishonen boy sat on the edge of the bed, facing her. His nude body was all lean sculpted muscle as he sat there with his penis jutting up from between his thighs and one hand out towards Tomoko, palm up.

The scenario was still incorporeal, frozen in time. Tomoko could alter it, add, remove, or change
things, but she was too impatient to do that right now. With a mental push, her bare feet sank into the plush carpet, the flames on the torches resumed crackling, and the boy started breathing as his eyes focused on her.

Tomoko felt her heart try to leap out of her chest. Her breaths came in shallow gasps and her whole body trembled horribly.

Tomoko repeatedly reminded herself that this wasn't a real boy. She was safe. She couldn't mess this up by saying the wrong thing, or by not saying anything. At the same time, he was real enough. Real enough to feel exactly like the real thing. Real enough that she wanted it so so badly.

Shaking, Tomoko reached out and took his hand.

His lips quirked as he pulled her closer. "That's it. Come here, cute thing."

Their legs touched. He was shockingly warm. The feel of skin was so vividly unmistakable. He let go of her hands and grabbed her trembling hips. He slid his hands around to her rear and Tomoko swayed, bursts of pleasure going off behind her eyes as his warm living hands groped her butt.

Something hot and wet engulfed her nipple and Tomoko's eyes flew open with a little moaned gasp to find the boy suckling at her breast. She felt a spasm in her core. His hands kneaded her butt, stretching and opening her sex to the air, and she felt another spasm. And then more...

Tomoko sagged against the boy, wrapping her arms around his head.

"What?" Tomoko blurted in dazed surprise. "I came already?"

After a few moments, the boy pulled away from her breasts and stood up. He picked her up and set her down on the bed on her back. He crawled over her body, and Tomoko started trembling in anticipation again as he gently lifted and spread her legs. She felt his hot firmness pressing at her entrance, but his mouth covered hers and cut off her moan of desire.

His cock split open her pussy at the same time his tongue invaded her mouth. Her hands clutched at his sides as his body settled on top of her, crushing her into the bed and filling her to the point of ecstasy. After that, there wasn't much room for coherent thought.

Buffy juked in the air, yanking herself towards a rock outcropping and bounding off to the side. Razor teeth snapped shut as the aviaide's left head smashed into the rock behind her, shattering the surface and sending a cloud of stone chips tumbling across the valley.

Buffy grabbed a treebranch and swung, reversing direction and smashing feet-first into the monstrous bird's dazed head. Its skull crumpled against the outcropping in an explosion of blood and brain-bits. Buffy rebounded upwards, pulling her arms in for a spinning flip that flung the blood off her feet as she sailed out into the open air where she'd be less mobile. The droplets of blood nailed the aviaide's other head right in the eyes.

Four great grey-black wings, like those on a bird of prey, beat the air as the aviaide's remaining head twisted on it's long sinuous neck and roared in pain. By the time it focused on her, Buffy was already more than halfway across the valley.

Um, hi, honey. Do you have a moment? came a message from her mom.

Trailing blood from its neck stump, the aviaide snarled and flapped hard to catch up to her. Grinning, Buffy suddenly halted in the air and shot back towards the surprised beast. She drove a fist into its
snout, dazing it, and used one of its teeth as a handhold to swing around onto its neck.

Wrapping her arms around the tree-trunk thickness, Buffy dug her fingers in and wrenched sideways. The aviaide's remaining neck broke with a thunderous crack and the beast went limp in Buffy's arms. Together, they crashed into the ground with the aviaide's remaining momentum, and Buffy savored the rush of victory.

Taking long, deep breaths, Buffy lifted away from the corpse and zipped towards the valley's exit. The way she was feeling after the fight, she really wanted to find Xander and jump on his cock, but she figured she shouldn't ignore her mom.

*Hey, Mom,* Buffy finally replied as she flew out into the diffuse white of the unused areas of the ship. *What's up?*

*Well, um, Rupert and I are speaking with a pair of nice girls who say they want to meet you, on behalf of an alien magic government of some sort,* Joyce sent.


*Rupert thinks so,* Joyce replied. *This girl, Homura, showed up at the house asking about you. She and her friend say this Time-Space Administration Bureau wants some assurance that you don't have a hidden agenda.*

*What are they doing there?* Buffy asked. *How did they even know to talk to you?*

Joyce replied after a worrying pause. *I don't know. Should I ask them?*

*No,* Buffy decided. *They want to meet us, right? We can ask them ourselves.*

Buffy zoomed into the meadow and skidded to a halt next to the plateau. Xander was sitting sandwiched between Willow-rhom astride his lap and Willow-icos as a backrest. All three of them looked over questioningly at Buffy's dramatic entrance.

"Guys!" Buffy sent her memory of the conversation to Xander and the Willows. "Something's up."

*They say they're willing to let you choose the place and time,* Joyce sent. *What should I tell them?*

"Oh boy..." the two present Willows sighed.

"Hey, looking kinda bloody there, Buff," Xander noted.

Buffy glanced down and blushed slightly. Her nude body was streaked with drying blood, except around her hips where her wetness had spread damp streaks through the red. Huh. She hadn't realized her kill had gotten her that worked up. Focusing briefly, Buffy used her Utility Cloud to draw away the moisture and scour the residue off her skin.

Seeing herself clean, Buffy perked up and vaulted onto the plateau, sliding in next to the Xander sandwich. "So what do you guys think?"

Willow-rhom wiggled on Xander's lap, his full length hidden inside her. "Mm. Well, traditionally we're supposed to ask for neutral territory, right?"

"I don't know," Buffy said. "I mean, who are these people?"

In response, Willow-icos leaned forward and tucked Xander's shoulder under her chin. The screen at the end of the plateau resolved into an image of Sunnydale at night, focusing on a group of people.
"There. I located your mom and pulled a visual feed from the sensor fog datastream... wow."

"So that's them?" Xander asked. "They sure dress the part."

"I think we should see what they want," Willow-rhom said, looking between Xander and Buffy. "This seems like it might be important. And... as to how we should meet them, I've got an idea."

Willow explained. Buffy smirked and nodded in agreement.

Tomoko came back to her real body and started giggling into her pillow. So much better than a dream. She'd never realized before just how... low-fidelity normal dreams were. That had not been like a dream at all. As far as Tomoko was concerned, she'd been awake. Maybe it wasn't real, but it felt like it had really happened, just somewhere else. She was getting wet just from the memory.

That gorgeous body on top of her, hard muscles moving under warm skin. Feeling that was so much better than just imagining it or seeing it, satisfying some even baser need she couldn't put into words. His hard cock splitting her open and filling her, slamming into her. The deliciously slippery heat and the electric pleasure that jolted through her with every wet, meaty collision of their bodies, carrying her up and over her body's threshold over and over.

Tomoko wanted it again, and more, and harder.

With a mental shift, she was back in the white void and the archive opened in her head.

Buffy appeared on the lunar surface in the flash of a transporter beam, on a wide plain somewhere between the Apollo 11 and Apollo 17 landing sites. She wiggled her toes in the lunar sand with a little smile.

In her hand, she held the micro-scale terraforming seed Willow had given her. Holding it out, Buffy let it fall into the grey soil. The seed turned black and melted, soaking into the ground. The black stain spread, creeping outwards. It flowed around Buffy's feet, tingling slightly on her skin. This was actually slightly dangerous, without a Giaa. Not to Buffy or any other Fae, but if there'd been, like, a human in a spacesuit, this stuff would eat them no different than the lunar soil.

Once there was a perfectly flat, perfectly round circle of subtly rippling blackness fifteen meters across, the seed stopped growing. The blackness rippled more visibly, and from the center of the circle a spot of white appeared and grew until the black was gone and that fifteen meter circle of lunar surface was ready to become anything they wanted.

Xander and Willow-icos beamed in inside a shuttle. The translucent sphere settled at the edge of the circle and they emerged. Willow skipped along in the lunar gravity, gave Buffy a hug and grope, and stood back with her eyes closed in concentration.

Slowly, the utter silence and numbness of hard vacuum gave way to the whisper of air.

"Okay, the ionic air shield is up and working just enough for sound to carry," Willow reported.

Xander looked around. "What does this remind you of?"

Buffy traded a look with Willow and shrugged.

"An oasis in the desert!" Xander announced. "We should totally do like a tropical theme."
"Ooh, yeah," Willow chirped. "Like with palm trees, and a little lagoon..." Willow stopped and pouted. "Only, if I turn the air shield up enough for liquid water, it'd be dangerous to our guests."

"Right. Hallucinations and seizures. Not quite the impression we're going for," Xander said.

"Hey, I did the best I could, mister, and just be glad an air shield's a lot simpler than a brain-health reading program and I only had a day to put it together and how about something more in the enchanted glade type look?" Willow proposed, proving she didn't need all that much air to babble.

"Or we could do the ultramodern everything's made of white plastic and glass thing," Buffy threw out there. "Or how about winter wonderland? We can do snow with this much air, right?"

Willow shrugged. "Oh sure, but how about..."

Take a parabolic arc, lay it on its side, line the inside with consoles and chairs on a metallic white floor, and the result would be close to the basic layout of the first tier of the Arthra's spacious bridge. Vast windows curved upwards, enclosing a volume large enough to contain a small house and doubling as a compound holographic display screen. At the back of the first tier, the second consisted of a raised stage with the captain's command chair overlooking the first, and a small transport platform against the rear wall.

Dressed sharply in her dark brown Capital Defense uniform, Hayate smoothed her skirt down as she prepared to give her report. The command staff of the Arthra, Chrono, Nanoha and Fate, Madoka and Homura, and her own knights, waited for her to start. Behind her, a detailed scan of a Fae pod slowly rotated, next to several looping video clips of various people using personal magic.

"Some of you know some of this," Hayate said, smiling at Madoka who'd done more than her share of tracking down terrestrial magic-users who'd gone through the change. "I am happy to report that, in all of the cases we investigated, fae-touched individuals showed no detectable effects on their linker cores."

Several of them didn't bother to hide sighs of relief. Hayate went on to give more details, but that was the one critical question she'd been assigned to answer. A linker core was literally the source-of-magic's recognition of an individual identity. That fae-touched hedge witches showed no effect on their meager linker cores wasn't absolute proof, but given that linker cores can't be directly affected by nonmagical means, and that the Fae pods used no magic that anyone had been able to detect, it was very promising evidence.

"Thank you, Investigator Yagami," Chrono said when she finished. "Next, thanks to the lead Major Carter gave us, Miss Akemi and Fate were able to arrange a meeting with the three Fae leaders. What can you tell us about their character?"

The massive holographic display blanked and then displayed images of three faces, a blonde girl, a red-headed girl, and brunette boy.

Homura and Fate glanced at each other, and Homura spoke, "I was able to question Joyce Summers several times with the aid of my Precognition spell. She was... proud. Once, she even referred to this Buffy as her daughter. Her opinion of all three of them was consistently high."

"Isn't Buffy Rea-Val older than this woman?" Signum mused.

"So?" Vita asked with a pointed look at Hayate.

Hayate, who was in fact much younger than her dutiful knights, shot Signum a sweet smile. The
fuchsia-haired warrior went all stoic in embarrassment. It was so cute.

"She reminded me of your mother, Nanoha," Fate put in softly.

Nanoha made a thoughtful face. "I wonder how they met."

Homura fidgeted like she was about to say something, but she hesitated and looked to Madoka. It was pretty obvious the couple was having a telepathic conversation. Madoka's golden eyes suddenly widened in obvious surprise, followed by a frown of worried contemplation.

"We'll ask," Fate told Nanoha. She turned to Chrono. "Who were you planning on sending?"

"I believe it would be prudent to send a party of three, for the sake of even sides," Chrono said. "I believe the obvious choice would be to send our Aces. Fate, they will expect. Hayate, because she is lead on the case. And Nanoha... just in case aggressive friendship is necessary."

"Eh! Chrono-kun!" Nanoha protested.

Hayate snickered demurely as Fate touched Nanoha's arm and smiled affectionately. Nanoha accepted the teasing with good grace. The power of memes could not be denied. There was a reason the docudrama about them had Nanoha's name in the title.

"Alright, be ready in fifteen hours," Chrono told them. "Dismissed."

As the assembled crew broke up, Nanoha promptly grabbed Fate's hand and gave her an excited look. Hayate grinned knowingly when Fate blushed and nodded. Nanoha dragged an unprotesting Fate off by the hand.

Hayate sidled over to Madoka and Homura. "So was there something worrying you?"

"Well, um..." Madoka began sheepishly.

"I don't know if its important," Homura said. "It's only an odd hunch. It'll be in my written report after I think it over."

"Fair enough," Hayate conceded. "You two have a good night."

"We will," Madoka said, giving Homura a tender smile.

The tenseness seemed to bleed right out of those deep violet eyes as Homura stopped paying attention to everything that wasn't Madoka. With a content little smile, Homura accepted Madoka's arm around her waist as they turned to go.

Hayate watched them walk away and clasped her hands under her chin. "Aww, true love."

(Good gods, this took me a month to write? I suck.)
Unbound

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Unbound

If there was one thing Vala would grant these new 'gods' it was that they sure knew how to make an entrance. First, those oddly beautiful giant flower-egg-flesh things had just sprung up around the village overnight, and then what looked like a moon-sized elliptical pearl had breached the horizon and slowly drifted across the late morning sky.

Vala had been very suspicious, and more than a little worried, but the three figures who'd landed a transparent bubble on the edge of the village couldn't possibly be goa'uld. They were far too casual, not to mention nude, to be goa'uld. Or even Tok'ra for that matter. They even denied being gods and chided the mayor when he tried to prostrate himself, but the local villagers were a cowardly and superstitious lot, and remained awed.

Two women and one man, impossibly beautiful with markedly diverse exotic coloration. The voluptuous brown-skinned woman with flowing forest-green hair wore only a wreath of red flowers around her neck as she greeted the wide-eyed villagers with a perky bounce and a friendly smile, calling herself Salix of the Fae. Of her companions, the smaller woman was Wynter, who had pastel blue skin covered in snowflake patterns and long snowy white hair woven with glass beads. Last but certainly not least was Lexan, the absolutely scrumptious honey-blonde man with ruby eyes and black ribbon tied suggestively around his very manly body.

It was obvious the locals didn't have a clue what to make of these three. Vala couldn't entirely blame them. It was like those old fables about nymphs had come to life. The men were either staring or nervously not staring. The unattached girls were staring at Lexan like they'd never seen a man before, while the wives were caught between fear of offending these three powerful beings, jealousy, and their own staring.

Salix, Wynter, and Lexan were eventually invited to dine with the village council.

"Ooh, that's a good idea, Mr. Mayor!" Salix chirped. "A feast for the whole village sounds wonderful."

The mayor ripped his gaze up from Salix's jiggling chest and stammered, "Ah... that is perhaps not..."

Salix ignored him completely and waved her hands towards a large open space to one side of the village square. A hush fell over the crowd as an eerie whine and a bright white glow filled the space and vanished just as quickly, leaving behind a massive banquet table with luxurious padded benches, piled high with a mouth-watering array of dishes.

"There we go,' Salix said happily, snagging some sort of fruit and popping it into her mouth. "Help yourselves, everyone!"

Vala almost decided to abandon her hastily-made plans and partake. The braver villagers who accepted the offered food first practically moaned at the taste, and the delicious scents soon overcame the rest's reluctance. Vala observed that the trio of Fae sat the mayor at one end of the table, then sat themselves at the other end with Salix in the middle.
With a silent grunt, Vala tore herself away from one temptation as she gave into another. Slipping away back to her room at the shoddy little inn, Vala pulled a bundle out from under the rickety animal-pelt bed and unwrapped it, revealing her stolen kull armor. She stripped out of her village-woman dress and started pulling the armor on.

There were a pair of Oranian smugglers called Jup and Tenant that had a standing offer for anything spaceworthy that the likes of Vala could get their hands on. Vala had dealt with them before, and figured they'd pay through the nose to get their hands on an unusual new spacecraft from an unfamiliar race.

Vala carefully climbed out the window and dropped to the ground behind the inn. The forest around the village didn't provide a lot of cover, but Vala hoped anyone who might have seen her would be at the feast instead. Vala grinned to herself. It sure was nice of those Fae to provide such a nice distraction all on their own.

Circling around, Vala made her way over to where the bubbleship sat. She crept up on the far side of it from the village. The thing was transparent enough that it didn't quite count as visual cover, but it was better than nothing.

Vala put her hand on the supple surface of the bubbleship and focused on her naquadah sense. She had to figure out how to operate this thing, and fast. The kull armor concealed her identity, but it wasn't inconspicuous.

"Come on, come on," Vala whispered under her breath when the bubbleship failed to respond to her probing.

Vala focused harder than she ever had before, sinking into her naquadah sense. She could almost feel her own naquadah singing along her nerves. She still wasn't getting anywhere, and she was concentrating so hard she almost missed the sudden swell of awed gasps from inside the village.

"What do you think you're doing, I wonder," came a voice from right behind her.

Vala jumped and spun around, raising her blaster gauntlet on reflex. A small pastel blue hand clamped down on Vala's wrist with horrendous strength. It was Wynter, giving her a vaguely annoyed look as she effortlessly resisted Vala's struggles to free her weapon.

Vala tried to land a cheapshot kick, but the slender frost nymph blocked it with contemptuous ease and retaliated by picking Vala up one-handed by her chest-plate and throwing her so hard it knocked the wind out of her before she even hit the ground.

"Ow," Vala coughed, finding herself flat on her back.

That weird taste was in her mouth, the one that meant she might have a concussion. Vala forced her eyes to focus and saw Wynter stalking towards her, looking ridiculously frail for something strong enough to wrestle an unas one-handed. A surge of adrenaline got Vala scrambling up onto her knees.

"Your gouldy bosses never seem to get it, do they." Wynter lamented. "Are they just too brain-dead to understand that this little concept called provocation is a two-sided dealie?"

"Wait! Wait!" Vala frantically waved her hands in surrender. "I'm not a kull!"

Wynter stopped in her tracks, looking preposterously confused. "Since when can you guys talk?"

Vala scrabbled at her helmet, finally pulling it off and gasping, "My name's Vala Mal Doran. The armor's stolen. I was hiding out on this world and I was just curious about your ship, I swear!"
Wynter rolled her eyes in obvious exasperation. "Well then why didn't you just ask? Or, like, sneak over to poke at it not dressed like an evil killing machine?"

"Um..." Vala trailed off, using catching her breath as an excuse. She didn't really have an answer to that. She couldn't very well admit that she was trying to steal it and didn't want to leave her armor behind, but she had to come up with something.

"You've got lying lier face," Wynter accused.

Vala immediately schooled her features, and then cursed herself for as much as confirming Wynter's suspicion. Wynter just gave her a flat, "uh huh," look and turned away.

Vala dragged herself up to her feet and stumbled after the nude icy-colored woman. "Hey, wait!"

In a fit of immature whimsy, Willow-69 had decided not to rename herself, and had begged Buffy-69 and Xander-69 to likewise keep the temporary appellation. At least for a while.

Free of the need to pass as their Sunnydale identities, the three of them had only adjusted their morph settings to exaggerate their good points rather than going for drastic changes.

Their generation ship cruised through hyperspace towards the next on their list of star systems to visit.

The tiny barred window at the top of Nyan's cell wasn't much, but after five years rotting in this hole as a political prisoner, that small patch of sky was a feast for the senses. He spent the majority of his time laying on his cot, watching the sky through that small gap and straining his ears to hear the guard’s radio.

He hungered for any scrap of news he could overhear, not out of any real hope, but from sheer boredom. Nyan had long since come to terms with the fact that he'd been stupid, not keeping his mouth shut about what he'd learned from SG-1, and what he'd seen on the other side of the stargate.

Five years with only that view. Nyan knew the constellations that progressed across his tiny window by heart.

Something was different.

Blinking slowly, to assure himself that his eyes weren't playing tricks, Nyan scrambled up off his cot and pressed his face to the concrete. It was no trick. New stars. Moving stars. At first only a handful scattered across the night sky, but in a matter of moments the sky was so full of burning sparkles, a fine fiery dust, that even a man who was half-blind could have no doubts.

The trio of guards, around the corner from the cells, were muttering at each other, playing a card game or something, when one of them raised his voice, "Hey! Turn that up!"

The background murmur of the radio was suddenly understandable as the telecrier spoke. "...once again this is an alpha-level alert. All citizens are ordered to proceed to the nearest public fallout bunker. We have been asked to assure you that the unknown atmospheric phenomenon currently visible across the world, is not believed to be an Optrican attack."

The curtain of glimmering light was brighter than ever as it flowed across the sky. Nyan could have sworn it was moving faster than when it had first appeared... or maybe it was just closer.
"...alpha-level alert. All - " a sound like a stitching of heavy caliber bullets hitting cement and metal cut through the telecrier's words, and then the there was nothing but static.

"Shit!" one of the guards whispered hoarsely.

"Nefertum save us," another prayed.

The curtain of glimmers had resolved into individual objects, zipping by. Nyan couldn't believe it. It was a meteor shower. A meteor storm. Planet-wide, billions of meteors all hitting simultaneously. He could hear it, like the crashing of a wave, coming closer. A steady bombardment pounding the dirt and the roads around the prison complex. One hit close enough for him to see it through his window.

Nyan flinched back from the spray of pavement, stumbling back into the center of his cell - and smashed into the bars, his breath driven from him.

Stunned, Nyan stared at the bent bars and cracked cement of his window. He looked down in a daze. There was something red and fleshy embedded in a dinnerplate-sized burn on his chest. His vision swam, his body having temporarily forgotten how to breathe from the impact. Nyan just stood there dumbly and waited for the pain to hit.

The fleshy fist-sized object sprouted reddish tendrils, rooting itself in his ribcage. Nyan could feel it spreading through his chest cavity, but somehow the pain still hadn't shown up. He felt the jolt as his butt hit the floor of his cell, leaving him seated against the bars. Impossibly, that hurt while the thing burrowing into his chest still didn't.

Nyan felt his heartbeat simply cease as his heart dissolved, and his last thought before he passed out was a sort of numb protest that the meteor wasn't a meteor.

Commander Rigar kept his bayonet in easy reach as he stepped off the boat inside the rounded crystal docking alcove.

The artificial island had appeared in the narrowest ocean channel, exactly halfway between Bedrosia and Optrica. Neutral waters. It had just shown up the day after the meteor storm, when the blasphemies' mothership had seemingly flown out of the sun.

It was less an island than a round tower, as big across as a stadium, and tall enough to rise from the seabed to several hundred feet above the waters. It looked like a crystal clear glass skyscraper, but the scientists claimed the entire superstructure - the outer wall, the floors, that sort of thing - was a single solid diamond.

The fools couldn't seem to make up their mind about it. They all agreed it was a diamond, and simultaneously agreed that such a diamond's existence was impossible.

Rigar scowled hatefully at the Optrican patrol boat motoring by in the distance. He itched to hit the enemy craft with a shell or two, but gunpowder and other explosive compounds simply turned to inert dust when they got too close to the crystal tower. The men and women of the scout parties had been reduced to fighting with knives, at least until the current residents of the tower had personally taken their knives and uniforms away.

This insult could not stand. And the damn Optricans had beaten Rigar's people to sending in a rescue party to make their displeasure known.

The top floor of the crystal tower was lavishly furnished and just as transparent as the rest of the structure. Spyplanes had observed the three aliens loafing about up there, sometimes fornicating in
plain sight. They had the *gall* to wave at the scope operators.

The docking alcove continued as a long carpeted tunnel, soon opening out into an indoor park with some of the strangest plantlife Rigar had ever seen, starting with the round squishy grass and moving through the giant glowing fruit hanging the *wrong direction* from thick vines. The walls were lined with those fleshtone giant flower pods that had sprung up all over the world after the meteor storm.

The park was a ring, a buffer between the entryways and the true interior of the tower. Riger led his platoon through another shorter crystalline tunnel, this one broken up by odd smooth vertical passages, which seemed to be the only way to move between floors unless one counted the hollow core of the tower.

The ground floor was a single wide open space, resembling some kind of odd combination of fancy restaurant, museum, theater, and residence. Their missing soldiers were there, scattered across the various seating in small clumps, in underwear or less. Most of them were fiddling with thin display screens of some sort. One or two noticed Rigar's force and leaped up to salute.

One of the aliens stood between Rigar and the hostages, nude and blatantly female. She bounced and waved, for all the world like a schoolgirl greeting a friend rather than like a besieged invader facing a platoon of elite soldiers.

"Hi! I'm Elle of the Fae, and welcome to the Wikiplex," the alien said, gesturing towards a long shelf that appeared to be filled with small sheets of glass with rounded edges. "Help yourselves to a screen!"

"I will *not*," Rigar snarled. "By the sovereignty of Bedrosia I demand the return of my countrymen, and by the same I must insist upon your submission to detention to await divine judgement for Optrican collaboration."

The alien scrunched her nose up in a frown that Rigar refused to think of as cute. "Uh, we don't really do the war thing, but your countrymen are free to go anywhere they like. Why would you think we'd even care about that?"

Rigar stared coldly. He wanted to take Elle's innocent act and cram it down her throat.

The female alien looked like a mockery of a very attractive young woman. Grey on grey, the lighter shade of her skin broken up by darker circuit patterns that started around her shoulders and thighs and became nearly solid around her limbs. The possibly-tatoos zigged around her torso, but if anything they emphasized her nudity rather than providing a suggestion of modesty. Her hair was like chrome spun into strands and her eyes were an unnerving luminous red.

"Hey, Elle. So, more of the other guys, huh?" someone blathered casually. "They're not gonna try to murder our other guests, like the last bunch, are they?"

Rigar had to work hard to conceal his surprise. It was the male, with the same precisely angular patterned grey on grey skin, chrome hair, and red eyes. He *floated* across the room before he set down beside the female.

"I don't know, Exa," Elle said, giving him a kiss on the lips... and a single shameless squeeze of his upright manhood without an apparent thought to their audience. "Their commander guy doesn't seem like the reasonable type."

Rigar couldn't take it anymore. "You take our people prisoner in your fortress, take their weapons and their *clothes*, and you dare..."
Exa held up a hand and cut in. "No one's a prisoner. We don't care at all if anyone here stays or leaves."

"And we didn't even bother about the fighting until people started dying," Elle explained earnestly. "First, we just got rid of the blades, but then they just used their fists. And it was kinda obvious that it was the two sides all fighting against each other according to those uniforms, so we got rid of the uniforms hoping it would remind them all that they weren't so different... which it didn't 'cause then they just started shouting insults at each other but at least they stopped hurting each other 'cause I guess they didn't want to touch each other anymore for some reason, and then they eventually got all shouted out and bored and started using the screens, which is totally what this place is for anyway."

By Nefertum, what kind of abyssal alien power let her talk like that without breathing, Rigar wondered.

"Look," Exa said into the resulting silence. "This place is not a military asset. It's an archive node. Entertainment and information, made freely available, and the only condition for being allowed access is that you do not interfere with anyone else's access, at least for a while."

"Yeah, the screens can access the archive from anywhere on your planet, and they come with the means to self-replicate once per person," Elle explained. "So once people don't need to get one here, we'll probably stop caring about about who does what with the place."

"And," Exa continued. "If you try to be rude and throw your, frankly rather insignificant weight around, Eba will make sure you don't accomplish anything except embarrassing yourselves."

"Eba?" Rigar asked despite himself.

"That would be me," a voice said from above and right behind him.

Rigar and his platoon whirled in surprise. It was the third alien, the smaller female, and she was walking casually towards them... on the ceiling of the tunnel.

Rigar gritted his teeth. There were only three of them. Even if they could do these things, they were heavily out-numbered and unarmed. Rigar steeled his resolve to do what duty demanded.

When they'd first acknowledged the possibility on that first day after Halloween, Xandra never would have thought their feelings about it would have changed so much so quickly. It just goes to show that there was some truth to the cliche that one should never say never. This was especially true when one had a reasonable expectation of living longer than one's native sun, but in this case, it hadn't even been a full year.

Time wasn't the catalyst in this case. They'd split off from their original selves fully intending to go out of their way to reinvent themselves, and after much discussion, the three of them somehow managed to talk each other and themselves into going for the idea.

"Nope, this is still weird," Xandra said as she examined her fully changed body, the tall busty brunette amazon she was.

"Fun though," Willem said perkily, somehow still totally sounding like Wills despite the deeper voice. "I know I'm imagining it, 'cause hey perfect balance and I haven't actually fallen over but I keep feeling like I'm gonna overcompensate for not having breasts anymore even though the muscles are there and bigger they don't weigh as much or almost as much but they don't feel the same 'causes they're in different places."
"Guys..."

Xandra turned to the sexy blonde bishonen. "What's up, Bu - er - Blake?"

Blake looked up at them with a slight mania in his green eyes. "I don't... feel right. I wasn't sure at first but my slayer instincts are definitely freaking out, and..."

Willem's eyes got very wide. "Oh no! Xandra! Why didn't I think of that? We totally didn't think this through!"

Blake stopped Willem by pulling him into a hug, pressing their bodies together in new and interesting ways. Xandra firmly maintained her state of zen acceptance of the fact that, even if it was really Buffy and Willow, Xandra was getting a tingly watching two naked guys together like that. She focused on enjoying the novelty and figuratively put her fingers in her ears and chanted, "la la la not listening," at the part of her brain that hadn't fully purged itself of turn of the 21st century reflexes about sexuality and the gender divide.

Zach had been intimate with guys on a couple of occasions during his nearly two centuries post-revival, and he'd also been female in virtualties many times, so even if the three of them hadn't decided in advance that they were gonna be the gender-swapped scoobies unless they really couldn't stand it after a while, it wouldn't have been totally unfamiliar.

There was still a big difference between temporarily wearing a body of the opposite sex in a virtuality and taking it on as a new identity in reality, with a new name and everything. At least *faelin* made it easier by only distinguishing gender by pronoun in specific circumstances, since it was often more concerned with other abstractions. The distinction between the idea of a person and their immediate presence being the most common.

"It's fine, Wills," Blake assured the red-head. "Its just kind of... dizzying, but not like I'm actually dizzy, you know?"

"Maybe you should change back?" Willem suggested.

Blake shook his head. "We didn't sit around for days all transitiony just to go back the other way as soon as we got done! I'm okay. Promise."

"You're sure?" Xandra asked, taking the opportunity to rest a hand on each of the newly boy-type's butts.

Blake nodded as he and Willem looped an arm around Xandra and groped her in return. They hadn't changed height much, so Xandra's boobs were in a very convenient place for Blake and Willem to nuzzle. The two boys shared a grin and simultaneously latched onto a nipple, forcing a moan out of Xandra.

Maybe that small unwanted facet of Xandra's brain wouldn't go away for a while yet, but it was weak enough that being female and sandwiched between and double penetrated by male versions of her best friends was no less welcome than being with them in any other way. It made for a nice figurative sticking out of tongue and, "Nyah! So there!"

"Mama! Mama! Come look! There was a pretty light and now there's magic plants!"

The energetic five-year-old came running into the cabin. Laira smiled at her son as he clambered up onto the edge of her sickbed. Garan caught the boy before he could fall on his sick mother.
"Whoa, easy there, Jack," Garan said, sitting his little brother on his knee. "You need to be gentle with your mother right now, remember?"

Jack gave him a wide-eyed nod of innocence. "Sorry, Mama."

Laira smiled tenderly. Jack was such a fine boy, and she could see his father in him even this soon. He'd grow up to be a fine man some day, maybe the finest man on Edora, even if Laira wouldn't be there to see it.

"You'll be careful next time, won't you?" Laira said.

Jack gave another big nod.

"Now what's this about pretty lights and magic plants?" Laira asked indulgently.

Jack twisted to look up at his grown brother before focusing back on his mother. "There was a light. It was bright! And white! And then there was plants, and the plants were growing really fast!"

Laira considered that. It almost sounded like the kind of unusualness such as happened with the stone ring that led to her meeting Jack's father. She looked at her adult son questioningly. She was about to suggest he cautiously investigate, when her cough acted up and she wound up hacking into a cloth held by Garan while Jack looked on with scared eyes.

Garan set the blood-spattered rag aside and gently eased Laira back onto her pillows.

Before she could fully catch her breath, there was a knock on the door to their cabin. Garan went to see who it was, and Laira heard him make a very surprised noise. Then a figure stepped into view, a naked girl like a nymph right out of a fable. Laira wondered when she'd slipped into a fever dream.

"Hello," the nymph said brightly. "I'm Juniper, of the Fae. How'd you like to be not sick anymore or ever again?"

A lush oasis stood out among the barren rock and grey soil of the lunar surface. It was ringed by mossy arching tree trunks that wove through each other in a braid, curving into the ground at both ends. Glowing golden bulbs grew from the branches. The path between the trunks was spongy under Hayate's boots, a web of softly glowing gold vines over mottled green and brown. It was also lined on either side with these gorgeous glowing blue bell flowers.

Nanoha and Fate landed on either side of her. Fate paused for a moment, glancing back with a curious expression.

"What is it, Fate-chan?" Nanoha asked.

Fate shook her head. "It's nothing. I can feel how they're keeping the air in. It's interesting, but not important."

Hayate led the way down the path and into the clearing the the center of the lunar oasis. The three Fae were waiting there, on a circular raised platform that looked like glass, sitting on the edge of something that was like a plush white curved sofa without the back and extended to make a complete circle.

Willow Rin stood up and waved cheerfully. "Hello, nosy magic-type people! Welcome!"

Hayate broke out in a big ol'e grin. She liked these guys already. Beside her, Fate was impassive, but
Nanoha was going pink in the face. That probably had more to do with what the Fae were wearing than Willow's delightful greeting.

Willow appeared to clad in nothing but rose petals. The red petals somehow clung to her skin, mostly around her legs and waist where they did nothing to hide the fun parts. Hayate was momentarily reminded of Ruby, but that only made her realize how Willow didn't really remind her of Ruby after all.

Xander had black leather belts of varying thickness fastened snugly around his limbs and body. Each appeared to be clasped with a deep violet jewel. He had one such belt between every major joint, including one around the middle of his upright manhood. This was a sight Hayate appreciated with an expression that was much too sweet to be called a leer.

Buffy's outfit was just great, though. She wore a color-swapped version of Fate's Barrier Jacket, only without the swimsuit-esque centerpiece. A white and green cloak hung around her shoulders, with matching thigh-highs adorned with blue gems and metallic fastenings, and the crossed midnight blue belts and mint green slit skirt framed her bald vulva rather than concealed it. Her blonde hair was even tied up in twin-tails with white ribbon.

"Hi, Willow," Hayate said back serenely, deciding formality had no place in this meeting. "My name's Hayate. This is Nanoha, and this is Fate. I love what you've done with the place."

"You do? You don't think it's too much?" Willow wondered.

"It's lovely!" Hayate assured her, absently levitating up to eye level.

"So," Xander said with a clap of his hands. "Come sit. Who wants ice cream?"

And indeed, what Hayate had taken for an ornamental fruit plant had scoops of ice cream growing from its branches. Now that was neat trick. Once this six of them were situated, Buffy asked the looming question.

"Okay then. We're all with the hereness. What did you want to talk to us about? And how did you know about our contacts in Sunnydale?"

"Well that one is easy," Hayate said. "A short while ago we rescued a woman who was stranded on an uninhabited planet. Samantha Carter?"

"Oh," Buffy glowered, then paused. "Wait, stranded on an uninhabited planet?"

"Yeah, she helped us out a bit before we gave her a ride home," Hayate said. "She gave us some of the backstory, but she was just as surprised as we were when Nanoha's family told us about your public reveal. Nanoha and I were both originally from Japan, you know."

"My family wishes to allow themselves to be changed," Nanoha put in. "I love my family a great deal, so I especially want to know what kind of people you are. I want to know if this gift you are offering comes with a price."

"Well... the short answer?" Willow said. "It doesn't. It really, really doesn't."

"And the long answer?" Nanoha asked.

Willow looked over at Xander and Buffy. They shrugged.

"From our point of view, having a Fae body is the bare minimum standard of living," Xander said,
and raised a hand to tap a finger as he listed off. "Needing sleep when you don't want it. Growing weak with hunger or thirst if you don't consume food or water. Breaking so easily in the face of external damage, extreme temperature, hostile organisms, or the mere passage of years. Having a form that is inherited rather than chosen. Having biological dangers involved in acting on your sexual desires." Xander put his hand down. "Living under those conditions, condemning others to live under those conditions... it's inhumane."

"We didn't make the birthing pods," Willow continued. "We didn't decide how Fae bodies would work, either."

Hayate considered this.

"Who did?" Fate finally asked the expected question.

Willow took a deep breath and Hayate shamelessly enjoyed the way it made her boobies jiggle. "Short answer or long answer?"

"Oh, the long one, please," Hayate said with a smile.

"Once, in a reality so far away that it had no magic at all and only had an Earth full of humans by sheer coincidence, some very remarkable people managed to create a benevolent optimizer to help them turn Antarctica into a first-world nation," Willow exposition. "Except, these people knew what kind of thing they were creating. They knew that once they set it in motion, it would become something on the far side of a god. They knew that the fate of sentient sapience in their universe, if not their entire multiverse, hinged on their decision."

"We call it Giaa," Buffy said.

"The original Giaa Seed was programmed to identify conscious minds, decode their terminal values, and optimize the environment according to those values," Willow continued. "And that's what it did, starting with the bodies those minds were housed in. Fae are physically the literally most satisfactory body a human mind can inhabit, according to the Giaa's algorithms."

"That is why we trust the birthing pods to be safe," Xander said.

"Sugoi..." Nanoha breathed. Well, she sounded won over. So it was that much less likely that this would end with giant pink magic beamspam of doom and friendship.

Fate was more suspicious. "If this Giaa is behind everything, why aren't we talking to it?"

"There's kinda two reasons," Willow said. "The Giaa doesn't really talk to you like a person, because it doesn't have, you know, like, an identity or a personality and its only self-aware in the sense that it is aware of everything and it is a part of everything. So to speak."

"More importantly," Xander said, "the Giaa are... halted, sleeping, stopped, paused, suppressed... we don't know, but it hasn't done anything since we got here. If it had, the galaxy and beyond would already be a paradise where no one would have to suffer if they didn't want to."

Hayate smiled. "Well, then this is the perfect opportunity to ask, how did you get here if you're from a different metaverse?"

"Copying from read-only data is a thing gods can do, apparently," Willow said.

"...oh."
Homura paused the playback of the Ace trio's conversation with the Fae trio and sat back. Looking at her face, it was like the pieces of a puzzle were suddenly fitting. Madoka put a hand on her arm in quiet support.

Madoka was focused on something else. "This Giaa they talk about. Could it really do what they say? Could it do that and... get it right? For everyone?"

"According to them, it already had," Fate said thoughtfully.

"But that would be... truly wonderful," Madoka ventured. "Wouldn't it?"

"Yes, I think it would," Nanoha agreed, "but why wouldn't the Giaa be active?"

"It can't," Fate said with some authority. "Intelligent Devices have been around a long time. General intelligence is a solved problem. However, while a Device can think faster than we do, it can't think better."

THIS IS SUFFICIENT, MY MASTER, Raising Heart chimed. Nanoha patted the jewel with a fond smile.

"The Evante Cognition Ceiling," Chrono broke in with a nod. "Discovered by Sascha Evante during the Belkan Empire when attempts to make Unison Devices significantly smarter than humans simply failed for reasons that still aren't understood."

"Except we have the nearest thing to proof that superintelligence is possible," Fate said softly.

"Hayate," Homura suddenly said loudly, sitting up and grabbing Madoka's hand so they were skin to skin.

Madoka didn't bother to suppress the glimpse she got into Homura's mind from the contact. Homura had realized something big.

Hayate, however, wasn't paying attention. She was hugging a large spherical package and giggling perversely. The third Ace had come back from the lunar oasis clutching the thing and just giggled when anyone asked her what it was. Vita sat next to her, giving the package a look that was equal parts poorly-hidden curiosity and embarrassed trepidation.

"...never mind," Homura muttered.

"You figured something out?" Madoka prompted gently.

Homura frowned in thought. "Maybe. It doesn't fit. We know Willow, Xander, and Buffy lived in Sunnydale for a long time, but we've also independently confirmed that their ship showed up on... October Thirty-First, correct?"

"The first sightings took place then," Fate agreed. "It's also when Major Carter's people released the cover story."

"We're also reasonably certain that the Fae were conjured into our reality by a large-scale theurgic summoning?" Homura said.

"They even said so themselves," Nanoha agreed. "Why? Do you think they were lying?"

Madoka, who'd been watching the thread of Homura's thoughts, suddenly gasped, "When?"

"Eh?" Nanoha made a questioning noise.
"When were they summoned?" Madoka asked intently.

"October Thirty-First... by the Saints!" Chrono exclaimed.

Fate's eyes flew wide as she noticed the same discrepancy. "How did we miss a detail that critical?"

"No one else caught it either," Chrono said. "The SGC never bothered to investigate the summoning itself. But it doesn't make sense. We have the details on the summoning in question, do we not?"

"An invocation amplified by a hellmouth, targeting a collection of pre-prepared sets of clothing to temporarily effect an artificial stage four possession, Janus," Nanoha read off the notes her voice rising as she made the connection. "It does make sense, Chrono-kun! The Fae appeared on the same night this Janus was invoked to transform people into their Halloween costumes!"

"And Joyce knows," Homura murmured to herself. "They all did. That's what didn't fit."

"Then they weren't lying about any of it," Fate said distantly. "Willow, Xander, and Buffy... they were Sunnydale natives."

A silence hung over the table as they all processed that revelation. Knowing this put many concerns to rest, but it also opened up several new ones.

"Um, stage four possession," Madoka began. "Doesn't that one mean a complete personality overwrite?"

"Usually, yes," Chrono answered. "But only incidentally, and in this case the possessing entity was itself a conjuration and inherently unstable. According to testimony, the possession only lasted a few hours. Nowhere near long enough for the sympathetic neural growth to overwhelm existing patterns."

"But they were permanently altered, by what should have been a temporary effect," Homura noted.

"Oh, that's not strange at all, when you think about it," Nanoha reasoned. "If this Janus wanted to change them at all, he would have had to transform them completely. There isn't any middle ground between human and Fae, is there? And they obviously weren't overwritten if they still knew and cared about their friends and family!"

Madoka nodded in thoughtful agreement.

"In any case," Chrono said, "I believe we can conclude that action on our part isn't necessary in so far as the Fae are concerned. I suspect the Admiral will agree. I will make my report. Dismissed."

Hayate stood and grabbed Vita's hand. "I'll be in my suite. C'mon Vita-chan! Let's collect Signum and Shamal. I've got a surprise."

"What was that about?" Homura wondered as Hayate dragged her smallest knight off.

Nanoha and Fate both blushed, but Nanoha looked more resigned and Fate more intrigued.

"It's just... Hayate being more Hayate than usual," Fate offered charitably.

"Willow offered us a parting gift," Nanoha explained, blushing even harder. "You know how on this world it's kind of a common cultural joke that when a girl's offered a gift, she's supposed to ask for a pony?"

"Really? That's kind of strange," Madoka hazarded.
"Hayate... didn't ask for a pony," Fate said.

"I think Willow knew the joke, but she took the request seriously anyway and gave Hayate what she asked for," Nanoha said.

Madoka hesitated. "What did Hayate ask for?"

"...a pet tentacle monster."

A brief silence. Head-tilts ensued.

Beside the firepit under Chulak's night sky, Bra'tac stood before the gathering of rebel jaffa leaders.

"We've lost contact with yet another world," Aron, one of the younger and less experienced among them stated. "We must determine if there is any truth to the rumors of this mechanical scourge."

"Indeed," Bra'tac agreed. "We may spare a handful of scout ships to investigate these territories, but if the rumors are true, then we will have a larger problem."

"What problem do you speak of?"

"Those loyal to our cause have grown fearful," Tolok answered gravely. "Their hearts are wavering in the face of this mysterious new threat. The chains of the false gods are heavy, but also familiar."

"Tolok is right, several of my warriors have expressed doubts."

"What of these Fae that Teal'c spoke of?" Aron brought up. "If they truly offer lasting freedom from prim'ta, surely such a blessing would inspire many jaffa to strive for more."

"One would hope," Tolok said tiredly. They had been going in circles on this topic for some time. He shook his head. "Mere stories are not enough assuage the fear that is spreading through our people."

"But surely - "

Surprised gasps and the sounds of scrambling for weapons alerted the gathering. Someone pointed at the northern sky and shouted, "Look!"

A hyperspace window, large enough to be seen with the unaided eye. A shape streaked out and blurred to a stop among the stars, a white oval gleaming bright enough to lift the darkness of the moonless night.

Bra'tac grinned and clapped Tolok's shoulder. "We may soon need not rely on stories alone."

The body of the teen girl lay motionless on the bed as a frowning doctor poked and prodded at her. Tomoko hadn't come out of her room all weekend. Come the next school day, she still hadn't emerged. Tomoko had been laying there, face down in her pillow and completely unresponsive.

One panicked call later, and Tomoko's body was busy confusing their family doctor.

No breathing. No pulse. For a moment it seemed that Tomoko had died, but it clearly wasn't that, as the girl was still warm to the touch. They couldn't get a needle through her skin, and the doctor claimed that he really didn't know how to begin treating a fae-touched.
One last attempt, involving electrical sensors at least confirmed that Tomoko was alive. And that using electrical sensors meant for humans on her was hazardous for the sensors. Tomoko's condition, whatever it was, appeared to be stable, so the doctor gave up.

It had been weeks, and Tomoko's body still lay unresponsive in her own bed at home, and every day her mother checked to assure herself that her daughter was still warm to the touch. Internet research revealed that the state Tomoko displayed was common in those fae-touched who entered the dreamworld Fae apparently had. After that revelation, sympathy for Tomoko in the Kuroki house sharply declined, though they still couldn't figure out how to wake her up.

No one thought to ask another fae-touched to contact Tomoko through the Dreamlink. Ah well, it'd be obvious sooner or later.

The ha'tak formation had plowed into Replicarter's territory in a brazen display. Her repliblock ship carried her to meet it, escorted by four of her own claimed ha'taks. She was hailed almost as soon as she was in range.

Even if her goals and priorities were completely different, she still had Samantha Carter's personality. Curiosity got the better of her, and she answered. A face swam into focus.

"Ba'al," Replicarter stated coldly, already half-way to closing the channel and opening fire.

Ba'al surprised her. "My greetings to you, Not Major Carter. When I learned what you did to the high council, I decided it behooved me to come at once."

"With only three ships?" Replicarter asked. "You think you can accomplish more than your pointless death, swatted like an insect, with such inferior force?"

"On the contrary," Ba'al said, smirking that smug smirky smirk of his. "I wish to offer you my allegiance."

Replicarter stared, and then she actually laughed. That was the first time she'd ever actually laughed before.

"You cannot seriously expect me to believe you will cooperate in your own destruction," Replicarter scoffed.

Ba'al smirked some more. "That is rather the point. You were absolutely right when you told the high council that this galaxy is wasted on them. Unfortunately, the galaxy is getting rather crowded as of late, and as you may have noticed, I care somewhat less about ideology than I do about competence in my allies, and yes..." The smirk fell off his face for a moment replaced by a hint of sourness. "...masters."

Replicarter quirked an eyebrow.

Ba'al spread his hands. "It is my hope that you would be open to delegating, as it were."

"And what is it you want out of this arrangement?" Replicarter asked.

"Simple," Ba'al said. "i wish to be allowed continued rule over the heart of my territory as I see fit, even if it must be in the name of Repli...carter."

"That's Madam Replicarter to you." Huh. Snark. She hadn't done much of that before either.
"As you say," Ba'al agreed.

Replicarter considered him. "You will obey me. You may make suggestions, but you will not question me otherwise."

"That is acceptable." More smirking. "What is thy bidding?"

Slowly, Replicarter smiled.

The projection screen went dark as the credits rolled, beginning with a title card thanking the real Nanoha Takamachi, Fate T. Harlaown, and Hayate Yagami for consenting to interviews and the use of their likeness. A disclaimer followed, stating that *Lyrical Nanoha As* was based on true events, but that some details were changed to protect both personal and military secrets.

Nanoha kept shooting subtle worried glances at Hayate, but the other girl just wiped her eyes and smiled.

"All that... really happened?" Doctor Weir asked faintly.

"It did," Chrono confirmed. "In the broad strokes, at least."

"Okay, I have to ask," Jack spoke up. "Are there any adults on your planet?"

"Colonel," Weir warned.

"In the sense you mean, of legal status bestowed soley due to age, no," Chrono answered with a deadpan look. "We judge on merit, not on time elapsed since birth."

Daniel Jackson cut in before the greying Colonel could retort. "Actually, this is fascinating. The similarity to many of Japan's popular cultural memes is striking. I wonder if there has been enough cross-cultural contamination to explain the similarities to the 'Magical Girl' concept."

Colonel O'Neill groaned. "Fer cryin' out loud. Please tell me *Sailor Moon* isn't Japan's Wormhole X-treme."

Hayate clapped her hand over her mouth as she doubled over giggling. It had come up in conversation at some point, and Major Carter had mentioned the Wormhole X-treme incident.

"Actually sir, that would be highly unlikely," Major Carter said seriously. "The plot of that series is severely dependent on the existence of 'life energy' or 'ki' - common pop culture terms for the concept of *elan vital*, which was theorized to be a fundamental force that separates living matter from nonliving matter by imbuing matter with the property of life. Since we know that life actually depends on sophisticated chemical mechanisms and can exist in the total absence of magic, *elan vital* has long since been ruled out, but the false intuition that led to the theory in the past still shows up in fiction relatively often."

Shamal was nodding in agreement. Everyone else was staring at Major Carter, especially her own people.

"What?" Major Carter asked.

Colonel O'Neill put on an innocent face. "Nothing." He turned to the mages. "So... your people are called Childans, your home planet is called MidChilda, but your interplanetary government is the Time-Space Administration Bureau?"
"Yes," Chrono confirmed.

"Well that's a waste of a perfectly good acronym," the Colonel deadpanned.

Hayate snickered. "You know, Colonel, I said the exact same thing. Hehe. Stab."

Chrono suddenly looked very grumpy.

Chapter End Notes

I am suddenly pondering the plausibility of a Replicarter/Ba'al crack pairing.
Jack jogged into the NORAD elevator with Carter and Daniel on his heels. As soon as the doors shut, Carter dug into the neck of her BDUs and produced the now-familiar cube of blue crystal.

"Unraveler Exalt, set up," Carter commanded.

Something that looked like a textured opaque forcefield wrapped around Carter's body and then burst apart, scattering little flakes of blue light. Her BDUs were gone, replaced by her formal-blues-labcoat-hybrid Barrier Jacket. She held the strange white-shelled gun-gauntlet that the Device had become in her right hand.

Jack couldn't resist. "Don't you mean make up, Carter?"

"Jack..." Daniel sighed.

She gave him a very bland look. "I'll let you know when my rank changes to 'Sailor', sir."

Jack snorted.

The elevator arrived and Jack put his amusement aside to focus on the latest minor crisis. A pair of MPs were waiting. They saluted and made haste leading the three present members of SG-1 topside.

A whole platoon was out in force on the helipad, training assault rifles on the small group standing between a trio of Fae bubbleships. Jack pushed through a gap in the soldiers and got a look at their surprise Fae visitors. Something was off, though... ah, they were modest. The two men at the front were wearing some kind of crude toga-like thing made of incongruously fine blue cloth, but they all had all the important parts covered, unlike the Fae he was used to dealing with. In fact, those two looked kind of familiar...

The shorter one spotted him. "Colonel O'Neill, sir!"

"Walter?!" Jack blurted. He peered at taller guy and with a jolt likewise recognized him as a younger, handsomer version of a familiar face. "Siler?! Is that you?!"

"It's us, sir," Siler asserted.

"What in the blazes of hell happened to you guys?" Jack demanded.

"Well, um, apparently we died, sir," Walter said.

Jack turn to the soldiers. "Friendlies! Stand down! All of you. Before you start wasting perfectly good ammo." He turned back to Walter and Siler and the rest, who Jack was also starting to recognize as SGC personnel who'd been lost in Fifth's attack. "Y'ou've been MIA for months, airman. Venus especially nice this time of year?"

"Surprisingly so, sir," Walter agreed. "Sorry, sir. It took us all a while to locate everyone and organize the trip." He waved a hand at the bubbleships.
"Lemme guess," Jack deadpanned. "You found 'em growing on a tree."

Walter blinked. "More or less, sir."

"Nice," Jack muttered. "Carter! Let Weir know what's up. We'll bring 'em in for debriefing."

Crushing couldn't breathe crushing heavy can't see can't move...

...relief, quiet, and rapturous comfort.

Tara just floated for a while in the stillness. Slowly, she opened her eyes. She was submerged in some sort of body-temperature fluid, but it didn't feel like anything on her exposed eyeballs. A dim illumination filtered through the fleshy red walls of the... her first thought was womb. It felt a lot like how she might have imagined being in a womb would feel.

What happened? That woman! Her aura, her face. Tara had wished the Fae would take her away with them, and the woman... Demon? Evil fairy? Alien spy? had declared it granted.

Tara gasped, feeling the thick fluid moving in her lungs without discomfort beyond the strangeness of it. Had her idle wish been granted?

As soon as she moved, the walls of the womb began to peel apart and the fluid began to drain. Tara abruptly recognized it as one of the ubiquitous pods, as seen from the inside. The petal-like flaps opened up and Tara emerged dry... but she was still floating, still weightless.

Tara's heart began to pound with a nervous hope. It had been brutal and unexpected, but... was she really on the Fae ship? Had she been given her wish? It didn't look like the inside of a spaceship. It looked like a lush meadow under and alien sky, a gorgeous ringed gas planet that wasn't Saturn. But there wasn't any gravity, and... oh. Wow, she suddenly knew exactly where she was, and she was on the ship, in low Earth orbit. The context for her location had just appeared in her mind when she'd... reached for it in some part of her mind that hadn't been there before.

"Um, hi," said a voice behind her.

Startled, Tara whirled around, placing her feet on the meaty pod base and instinctively spreading her something-new-that-was-like-an-aura-but-physical into the pod and the ground to tether herself, her balance working itself out in the same instant. It wasn't until she'd already done it that she noticed the unexpected effortless grace she'd moved with.

Rather than that, her attention fixed on the person who'd spoken, and Tara's eyes got very wide. A lovely nude redhead that her brain, for some reason, labeled 'Willow-icos' stood on the grass with an uncertain smile, wiggling cutely with her hands behind her back.

"...h-h-hi?" Tara stuttered.

Willow giggled and Tara blushed in embarrassment.

"So," Willow said. "Tara Maclay. Welcome to the Eliezera, I guess. Anywho, we were wondering,
did you mean to magic yourself a ride up here like that?"

"Um... I... there was..." Tara's breath was short and her heart was pounding and she started trembling and she wasn't even sure why except that she was terrified of being sent away, of not being accepted.

"Oh, hey, it's okay," Willow said comfortingly with just a tiny bit of panic. "It's okay, okay? You're safe here, okay?" She offered her hand.

Tara took it, and Willow pulled her into a hug. A very warm, soft, naked hug. Tara held very still. It felt so wonderfully good, but Tara was way too shy to return the gesture when she'd only just met the alien girl and it felt so wonderful and it was the first time she'd ever been hugged by someone who wasn't her mom, let alone while naked.

"So, not on purpose, I'm guessing?" Willow said as she petted Tara's hair.

Tara managed to shake her head. Willow let go of her, and Tara tried not to whimper at the loss. Willow looked at her and smiled bright and knowing. She pulled Tara back into an embrace. Tara shuddered pleasantly, even if she kind of wanted to turn invisible.

"Can you tell me what happened?" Willow asked gently.

Tara took a deep breath and settled her nerves, because this was important. "I... was talking to... this woman. About you... your ship... all of that. I said... I said that... that I wished you would t-t-take me... away... with you. Then her aura went wrong, and her face changed, and she said 'granted'." Tara paused. "Are you going to send me home?"

"Only if you want to go." Willow continued to pet her in silence for a moment. "Do you know what she was?"

Tara shook her head.

"So, some kind of mean-spirited magical wish-granter," Willow murmured to herself. "That... needs thinking about."

Tara's breath caught, because Willow's hand had wandered down over Tara's hip and thigh, and now it was feeling up her rear. It had actually taken a moment for Tara to notice, with her senses already full of cute nude girl hug. Tara didn't know what to think. It was disturbingly arousing, but Willow didn't even seem to realize she was doing it. If it was an accident, dare she call attention to it? If it wasn't, should she protest? Could she protest? Tara didn't even know if she wanted to.

"U-u-um..." Tara managed to articulate, still not knowing if she was protesting or seeking reassurance that she was allowed to enjoy it. "Your, um, your hand..."

Willow blinked, and looked in confusion at... her non-groping hand. Tara couldn't help it. She started giggling, and once she started she couldn't stop and the giggles just got worse.

"Your... other..." Tara giggled helplessly.

"Huh? Oh right." Willow let go of her and started giggling herself.

They wound up sitting on the grass by the time Tara got herself under control. Tara absently noted how comfy and not grass-like the alien grass was.

"Hehe, sorry," Willow said. "Among us, if you let someone touch you, we pretty much assume you're okay with any kind of friendly touching."
Tara considered this. "That doesn't get awkward?"

"I don't see why it would," Willow shrugged. "I think there'd be more potential for awkwardness if it wasn't like that, actually. And since we don't have the physical vulnerabilities of natural humans, there's no reason for us to have any rules about that sort of thing." Willow looked at her, suddenly worried. "Is touching okay with you? It's just you looked like you needed it so I did and I think you did but is it okay?"

Tara smiled shyly. Willow really was very adorable. And totally right about Tara needing to be held. Tara wasn't sure how to answer, though. She emphatically didn't want to say no, but the implication was that she'd otherwise be agreeing to let Willow have free reign on her body... which was an entirely too pleasant thought. And yet, Willow was a stranger. A very kind, warm, and attractive stranger in very unusual circumstances, but still a stranger. Good people weren't supposed to want to lose their virginity to strangers. It was upsettingly tempting.

"I don't know," Tara mumbled. "I don't know what I should say."

"It might be easier if you don't think in terms of should," Willow suggested. "What do you want to say?"

"...yes?" Tara whispered.

Willow smiled encouragingly. "Why do you feel like you can't? Because you totally can."

"I'm a virgin?" Tara tried. "I've never had anyone, who I might've..."

Willow's face scrunched up cutely. "If you want something, and if the only reason you feel like you can't have it is because you've never had it before, well, that's just silly. Also, like, self-defeating."

"I..." Tara felt quite derailed. "Huh?"

"The first time you do something is only important if you decide it is, Tara," Willow explained gently. "And, like, sex isn't even the point here. Sex is just what happens when attractive people get along with each other and don't have any external constraints on their behavior. It's the not having external constraints that we're all about. That's the important part, you know?"

Now that Tara was following what Willow was trying to tell her, it sounded good. It sounded so good. She'd wished to be here, and there was nothing she'd left behind that she missed. What Willow said made sense, and it would be so easy to just... throw in with this, completely, and immerse herself in adopting their ways.

Tara took a deep shuddery breath. "I can stay?"

Willow nodded. "You can do anything you want. I'm not going to send you anywhere. And you can be sure that if you somehow manage to annoy us, we will make very obvious faces at you."

Tara giggled nervously as she reached out and put a hand on Willow's knee. "Okay, then I'll try to do things your way. You'll teach me, how to be one of you?"

Willow slid forward with liquid grace until her nose was almost touching Tara's. Willow leaned her back and gently pinned her to the grass. Her body settled on top of Tara's and Willow playfully nuzzled her.

"I don't think there's a trick to it," Willow said. "All you really need to do is... be you. Everything that's you. You know, celebrate the things you feel, just because you felt them and..."
"Feel what I feel?" Tara repeated uncertainly as Willow's fingers wandered idly over her breast.

"You're so curvy and snugglable!" Willow declared, wriggling happily and rubbing her nose in the top of Tara's other breast.

Tara blushed and shuddered at how nice those nuzzling squirms felt. Even her most vivid imaginings didn't come close to the real sensations. "I'm... not sure I get it..."

"Well, if you want an example... you want an example?" Willow asked.

Tara nodded. "Okay."

"Down there, you guys have this big social status thing revolving around pretending you don't have animal urges, like way beyond what's a necessary evil due to human vulnerabilities," Willow said. "The better you are at constraining yourself, the more respect you're worth, or something backwards like that. Which is absurd even on the face of it 'cause the status stuff is just as much an animal urge as the sex stuff or the violence stuff, or the making-up-stories stuff for that matter, so by any sane reasoning you lose just by entering the contest. Nobody really notices that, though. I guess its more obvious when you can live like we do."

"Oh," Tara said, seeing the sense in that. "I guess it would be."

"Yeah, in so far as we have a consistent culture, knowing better than to make that distinction between urges is probably at the heart of it," Willow explained. "The proportion of other species we happen to share an urge with is not a measure of that urge's... disposability, if that makes sense... I make sense to me and I usually make sense to other people but I'm not always sure I'm explaining right because I've mostly been reverse engineering when I try to explain things and I'm not any kind of social genius anyway so it's hard and I'm not sure I'm making sense to you."

Tara giggled quietly. "No, I... I think I get it now."

Willow kissed her, just like that, like it was a familiar and comfortable thing. Tara considered her wants. She wanted to enjoy feeling another girl's lips. She didn't want to dwell on the fabled significance of the First Kiss. And... it didn't really need to be more complicated than that.

"So," Willow said. "Do you wanna meet the rest of me and the others?"

Tara did, and nodded, but she also didn't want to move from where she was right then... wait, "...the rest of you?"

Willow nodded and replied, only for a second voice to reply in stereo with her from a different direction, "I have four bodies."

Tara was a little startled as she looked over. Another nude girl, identical in every way to the one laying on her. Her brain labeled this one 'Willow-rhom' and this Willow knelt over Tara's head, incidentally giving Tara a perfect view of Willow's gorgeous pussy, and bent down to give Tara an upside-down kiss.

"Four... four bodies?" Tara squeaked.

"Yep! It's kind of a long story, but I'll tell it if you want. Come on. Let's go introduce you to the others."
The first Willow floated up to a standing position. After a moment, Tara followed. One Willow held each of her hands. Walking was simultaneously strange and not. It was like her bones were pulling on the ground with that not-aura thing, in a way that was even more complicated than moving her legs, but just as automatic.

Willow gave her what Tara could tell was a very abbreviated backstory, explaining how they'd arrived unexpectedly, severely underpopulated and with the ship's intelligence inactive. Willow didn't outright say she was the only one smart enough to run the ship manually among the Fae, but that was the inescapable implication. Willow had split herself into four copies so she wouldn't be overwhelmed.

Tara got a closer look at the trees and other features of the meadow, and marveled. It all looked perfectly natural at glance, but the grass that wasn't grass was just the start.

As they were rounding a particularly large, sprawling tree, a rustling and a yelp startled Tara and made her eep. Something girl-shaped shot down out of the branches and ricocheted off the trunk. Tara caught a glimpse of brown hair, pale skin, and a laughing face before a second figure, an equally naked and similarly-colored boy slammed into the girl hard enough to make a very unpleasant sound. A tangle of limbs bounced into the grass and rolled, kicking, clawing and grappling so ferociously that Tara half-expected to see a cartoon dust-cloud form around them. Tara gasped and looked to the Willows for cues. The Willows seemed to be amused.

"Wha...?" Tara began.

"Jesse's my son," both Willow's chorused, and the one on her left continued, "and Dawn is Buffy's daughter."

Dawn tumbled out of the brawl, but Jesse screeched and latched onto one her her ankles with both hands. He hauled on her, swinging her through the air, but she kicked him in the face making him flub the throw. Dawn went straight up, halted in midair, and dove for him.

"Um... shouldn't we stop them?" Tara ventured. The Willows shrugged. "They're just having fun."

Jesse dodged, got Dawn around the waist, and managed to pin her down, Dawn kicked and flailed, still laughing madly. Tara's eyes bugged out when she saw Jesse pause for a moment, his prominent erection suddenly very noticeable, before plunging himself into Dawn's sex. The laughter and the fight went out of Dawn in an instant, and she moaned ecstatically even though Jesse was just humping her like a mindless animal.

Tara blushed. "Are they..."

"Dawn and Jesse are both still very young," Willow-icos explained. "Neither of them are very complicated people, yet. They'll come say hi to find out who you are the next time they get bored, probably."

"...okay," Tara said, still a little weirded out, but figuring that she shouldn't judge.

The two Willows brought her to a little half-glade centered around a blocky patterned-grey shape adorned with geometric pillows... on which four more nude people sat, obviously waiting for her. They all waved, and Tara shyly waved back... only to freeze mid-wave as she got a better look at them.
Two more Willows, a Xander, and a Buffy. Huh, so this was what it was like to be attracted to a guy. But that novelty was a sidenote to the fourth Willow. The one with massive lactating breasts and a pale pink penis growing from the top of her vulva. This was... rather adeptly pushing Tara's buttons, actually, and she was suddenly embarrassingly aroused.

"Hi, Tara," Xander greeted warmly.

"Hey," Buffy greeted. "Let me know when you want, and I'll show you how to show me what your evil wish-granty lady looked like. It'd probably be good to find out what her deal is."

Tara nodded earnestly. "Of, of course."

The two Willows at her side both gave her a squeeze and ushered her into the imminent cuddlepile.

Jack strolled into the observation room overlooking the isolation suite. Walter and Siler were down there, back in BDUs and sitting patiently while Dr. Lam and Carter fiddled with some kind of gizmo they were pointing at Walter. Jack noted that neither the doc nor Carter were wearing protective gear any longer.

It was still downright weird to see Walter and Siler looking all rejuvenated.

Jack hit the talk button. "Hey fellas. What's goin' on?"

"Colonel," Dr Lam replied, looking a bit at loose ends. "Well, they clear, to the best of my abilities. I'm at a loss for how to get a blood sample. I can't be entirely sure they even still have blood. I had to resort to a saliva sample, which did contain an unidentified but apparently benign microparticulate, but was otherwise the cleanest bodily fluid I've ever had under my microscope."

"So what's all this?" Jack asked.

Carter looked up from her fiddling. "Hopefully, sir, we're establishing a baseline." She plugged in a cable and stood up. "Or a part of one, anyway."

"This happened to a lot of us, Colonel," Walter spoke up. "I can't speak for everyone, but I know I don't want to lose my place in the SGC, and if you'll excuse me saying so, sir, if it is safe to sanction our reinstatement, this could be a tremendous asset."

Carter jogged out of view and emerged in the observation room. "He's got a point, sir. We suspected, but based on Dr. Lam's observations there does not appear to be any reason why our fae-touched shouldn't be entirely immune to goa'uld parasitism."

"Nice," Jack said, making a get-on-with-it gesture.

"Right, well sir, right now we're trying to confirm something," Carter said, going to town at the console.

The display switched to a new video image of Walter. Carter did something, and the image started going into weird colors, and settled on a nice even yellow silhouette. Beside him, Dr. Lam looked like the normal patches and gradients of a human body, but Walter was like a yellow cut-out. Jack frowned.

"As you can see, sir," Carter said. "Chief Walter no longer has any temperature variance in his body at all. His body keeps all its heat perfectly distributed and he doesn't appear to radiate heat at a consistent rate. Chief?"
Walter nodded as Dr. Lam brought over a bunsen burner and set it up in arms reach of Walter. Walter winced slightly as he stuck a finger into the flame, then visibly relaxed when it didn't hurt. The thermal image showed his fingertip remaining the same color as the rest of him.

"Cooool," Walter said, failing to hold in a grin.

"I expect that full immersion in extreme heat would have more of an effect," Carter said, "but it would appear that localized heat-damage is simply impossible. Now..."

"Just think of how well I'd stand up to staff blast, Colonel!" Walter said.

Carter poked a few keys and the image shifted again, returning to normal video and then going greyscale. Walter faded out until he was an utterly black silhouette. Jack looked at Carter questioningly.

"This is what he looks like in ultraviolet," Carter explained, shifting the image again through several modes. "X-ray. Far infrared. Radar imaging." More utterly dark silhouettes. Carter turned to look at Jack. "He looks perfectly normal in the visible spectrum, and he's warm, but he completely absorbs the rest of the electromagnetic spectrum. This is incredible, sir. His skin is a maximally efficient photovoltaic, like a solar panel, only orders of magnitude more..." Jack facepalmed. "...sir?"

"So, what you're saying is, there's actually a practical reason for all the nudity?" Jack sighed.

Carter bit her lip as she smiled in amusement. "Well, if comfort and, er... ease of access, in the face of a non-existent nudity taboo don't count as practical reasons, sir."

Jack gave her a flat look. "Don't tell me. Our returnees..."

"It shouldn't be necessary, sir," Carter said. "Most clothing only blocks a tiny portion of the electromagnetic waves, outside the visible range, I mean. I suppose there would be a small but measurable effect, though."

Jack changed the subject. "So how long, do you think, before I can start bugging Weir about getting our people reinstated?"

Faith was bored out of her skull and she couldn't take it anymore. "Fucking hell, dude! Ocean this. Ocean that. Yay fucking ocean. Fuck. What are you, some kind of freaky fish guy?"

"Guh?" Cameron Walker protested, startled at the vehement interruption. "I am not a freaky fish guy! How can anyone not be swept away by the beauty - "

"No! No more fucking ocean talk," Faith cut him off. "Gods, I am going to kick Cordy's ass. This is why I don't fucking date."

Cam was pouting. He was probably going for angry, but ocean dude wasn't very intimidating.

Faith ran a hand through her dark hair and looked at him. "Check it, Fishhead, if you're not gonna shut up and drop your pants, I'm outta here."

He just gawped at her. Faith got out of the car and didn't look back.

"Unscheduled offworld activation!"

The stargate lit up behind the closed iris as Jack made his way into the control room. Weir had beaten
him there. Carter arrived shortly after Jack.

"What've we got, Lieutenant?" Weir asked.

"IDC received," Hailey reported. "It doesn't clear."

"Why not?" Carter asked.

"It looks like an expired code, ma'am."

Carter exchanged a look with Jack and Weir. "Are we still missing anyone?"

"Ma'am," Hailey said, pointing to the screen. "It was one of yours. It's been invalid since the Fae outing." Something blinked on the screen. "Receiving text."

A text box opened, displaying, Send MALP.

Carter turned to give her superiors a questioning look.

Weir nodded. "Prep a MALP. I want to see what this is about."

The stargate shut down. In due course, a MALP was set up, the gate was redialed, and the MALP was sent through. Daniel had joined them in the control room, and they all waited for the video signal to resolve. It was dark, on the other side. Carter fiddled with the MALP's settings and activated the headlights.

"There's someone..." Carter trailed off as the image resolved. Blonde hair, dark clothing, and a face they all knew. "That's me!"

Jack leaned in. "Alright, you've got our attention. Who are you?"

"My name is Samantha Carter," the look-a-like replied.

"Ah," Jack said. "See, we've got a little conflict with that statement. We've already got one here."

The look-a-like nodded. "There are two of us."

"If only," Jack muttered.

Carter gave him a quelling look and turned back to the video feed. "Where are you from? How did you know how to contact us?"

"It's strange, I recognize my voice..." the other Carter paused. "I was made in Samantha Carter's image, out of the memories and thought-patterns extracted by the one you call Fifth."

"Oh gods, she's a Replicator," Carter breathed.

"No doubt you are surprised," the Replicator Carter said. "Believe me, I understand. I had not intended to contact you."

"What changed?" Weir asked.

"A great threat to us all has emerged from beyond this galaxy," the Replicator explained. "A power greater than any of us, implacable and vast. They are called Ori, and their beachheads into our galaxy are being fortified as we speak."
Jack gave Carter a meaningful look.

"We already knew about the Ori," Carter revealed, "but if you have tactical intel on their forces, that would be very useful."

The Replicator Carter... Replicarter? Replicarter paused in surprise. "You've met one of their Priors?"

"Not directly," Carter said, "but I've seen what they're capable of."

Replicarter frowned slightly, then shut her eyes for a moment and didn't pry. "I am willing to share what intel I have on the Ori beachheads."

"And what do the other Replicators think of this?" Jack asked suspiciously.

"Fifth is dead," Replicarter said bluntly. "I am the Replicators, Jack. We are no longer a threat to you."

Jack rocked back on his heels, raising both eyebrows. "Well. That's... anticlimactic. But convenient!"

"In that case, is there a name we may use for you, other than the one you share with Major Carter?" Weir asked.

"You may refer to me as 'Replicarter' as I am sure Colonel O'Neill will call me that regardless."

Jack opened his mouth to make a petulant denial of this very true statement, but Weir cut him off. Replicarter knew him, maybe as well as his Carter did. That was just... disturbing.

"Very well," Weir agreed with a perfectly straight face. "What is it you propose?"

"I realize you may be reluctant to trust me, due to what I am," Replicarter said. "I propose a meeting on a world of your choice, where I will provide you with the coordinates of the Ori supergates and what details I've gleaned on how they operate and how they're defended. In return, I merely ask that the Fae deactivate the automated systems that attack Replicators on sight."

Carter bit her lip and looked up at Jack. Jack scowled. Weir didn't have an immediate reply either.

"We're... not entirely on speaking terms with the Fae at the moment," Carter explained.

Replicarter reacted with visible surprise. "Why not?"

If not for the clarity of her mind and senses, Tara might've had a hard time convincing herself any of this was real, and not a cruel hopeful dream. She would never have dared hope that the Fae would welcome her so readily, but here she was, nearly in tears from having gone so long without any kind of real affection.

It was overwhelming, suddenly finding herself in a pile of cute cuddly Willows without a stitch of clothing in sight. Tara didn't really know what to do with herself, but other than sending Buffy an image of the wish-granting woman, she was simply held and petted while Buffy and Willow-icos communicated with whoever or whatever.

Two of the Willows spooned her between them, making a snug sandwich of smooth skin and soft warmth. Willow-rhom pressed against Tara's back, lazily kissing her shoulders, and caressing thigh
with thigh. Willow-para was curled up with her back to Tara's front, carelessly wiggling her butt against Tara's thighs while Tara shyly avoided letting her hands wander.

Willow-kink sat crosswise, with Tara's head in her lap. Her fingers gently combed though Tara's hair, soothing and tender. The futanari's firm member brushed the back of Tara's neck, making her start and blush the first few times it reminded her of its presence, but she eventually relaxed and let it rest against her. Willow-kink's huge lactating breasts swayed tantalizingly in front of Tara's face.

Tara had settled into an odd, almost contradictory state of utterly soothed and overwhelmingly turned on, so it only startled her a little when Willow-para's hand slipped down between Tara's legs without warning and started rubbing her pussy in slow, firm circles where no hand but Tara's own had ever been before. Her breath caught and she held very still as her wide eyes searched out Willow-kink's.

The expression on Willow's face was so very gentle. Tara let out a shuddery sigh. It just wasn't a thing of consequence to them, was it. Just because Willow started fingering her without asking first didn't mean she wouldn't stop if Tara asked. It, it wasn't a forgiveness vs. permission thing; that wasn't how they thought. And anyway, Tara's lack of protest was readily apparent, and Willow had as good as told her that it was all the same to them anyway. It maybe seemed to Tara like what Willow was getting at was that Tara didn't need a reason to not regret something she enjoyed in the moment.

Tara was enjoying this moment. It wasn't even particularly insistent or teasing. Willow's hand was slowly massaging her, producing constant gentle waves of pleasure that just made Tara feel extra snuggly.

"Tara?" Willow-kink murmured. "Do you think you'll miss anything you left behind?"

Tara shivered, and then she shivered again because shivering in the middle of a Willow sandwich was blissfully pleasant. "My family... is better off without me. My... my mom died a while ago, before, before you came. She... she was the only one who..." Tara trailed off and closed her eyes against the sting of tears as Willow-kink continued to pet her hair and Willow-para continued to rub her soothingly between her legs. "No one else cared about me."

"Sad," Willow-kink commented sadly. "It was bad enough that you really did want to be spirited away from everything you knew?"

Tara felt tears leaking from her eyes and beading out in every direction, occasionally scattering in the air when she blinked. "By... by you, I did. And... and you're..." Tara merely tightened her arms around Willow-para in a desperate squeeze and started kissing whatever bits of skin her lips could reach.

A fourth Willow flopped down on top of the three-spoon sandwich, and Tara felt her wet sex squish against Tara's bare hip. A gentle hand turned Tara's head, and Willow-icos leaned in and kissed her. Tara shuddered, releasing a soft whimpery moan into that Willow's mouth. The hand between her legs sped up until Tara was writhing in her Willow-y confinement.

The pleasure and tension built up and burst, Tara's first orgasm that she didn't give herself. She jerked and twitched in the embrace of Willows, cumming silently as was always her habit.

Tara shuddered with aftershocks for a while. Willow-para went back to a slow massage, but she didn't stop rubbing Tara's pussy all the way through.

Willow-icos broke their kiss, and Tara made a small noise of distress. The Willows in her field of vision smiled at her, and Willow-kink scooped a bead of milk onto her finger. She offered the finger
Tara could do nothing but close her lips around Willow-kink's finger and suckle. She kissed the tip of the finger and just looked at them with an edge of desperation. "Please keep me."

"For as long as you want," Willow-icos agreed. "You're adorable and I want to be sweet to you."

Tara smiled with shy hope, mostly looking at Willow-kink's wet puffy nipples.

"You really like this body of mine, huh?" Willow-kink asked.

Tara blushed and nodded into her belly.

"Is it the double-duty parts or the milk?" Willow wondered curiously.

"Both," Tara squeaked.

Willows smiled. "Yeah, I like it too! It was just a thing I did because reasons and I wasn't sure I'd wanna stay this way but I'm not tired of it yet and with the others of me being more usually Willow-shaped it's fun. I like your cuddly curves. I hope you keep them."

Tara offered a small smile of agreement. Willow-kink hmm'd as she petted Tara's hair.

Moving unhurriedly, the Willows pulled out of the spoon stack and Tara waited uncertainly to see what they were doing. They gently rearranged her. Willows para and rhom served as a warm pillowy backrest. Each of them took one of Tara's legs and pulled it up and back, leaving her spread wide and open.

A quiver of arousal wriggled through Tara's body just from being so lewdly exposed. Her blush had to be spectacular. This was not a position for cuddling. This was a pose for fucking. Looking down at the lovely futanari redhead kneeling before her, Tara suddenly felt profoundly at peace.

One of Tara's most guarded sexual fantasies was becoming real, and Willow-kink merely looked at her like she was simply eager to share a nifty thing with a new friend. This was not a dirty thing in their mind... or at all, really. It needed no excusing.

Even though it was, well, a penis, it somehow managed not to be particularly male. It was velvety pink and wet with a light suggestion of veins all the way down to the base where it merged with Willow-kink's feminine folds. It wasn't separate or out of place on her body at all. It was obviously still a single set of sex organs, just with both a phallus and a canal.

It was big enough to be intimidating, but there was no doubt in Tara's mind that Willow would be very attentive if she ever said 'ow'. (Tara had not yet been informed that pain of that nature was now physically impossible. It would feel good right up until she tore, at which point her ability to feel pleasure or pain would turn off until her body repaired itself. Not to mention that it would take ludicrously extreme force on the order of several industrial presses and an object bigger than would fit in her pelvis to tear her in the first place.)

Willow-kink slid in, and Tara both watched and felt herself being split open in the most wonderful way possible. Willow-kink hilted herself and leaned in with a smile, enjoying Tara's reaction.

"Oh goddess, this is real," Tara panted. Her imagination didn't even compared to this wonderful fullness.

Willow-kink bent, arching her back as she started thrusting with her hips, plunging her slippery girth
into Tara's welcoming sheath. Her milk-laden breasts swayed right in front of Tara's face, and it didn't take long for Tara to be drawn in. Her hands sank into Willow-kink's softness and her lips latched onto a nipple.

Willows on all sides, holding her secure. Her pussy filled as Willow thrust against her exposed bottom, a jiggle traveling upwards through her flesh with each collision. Nursing from Willow's breast, her nipple and her milk in Tara's mouth and her cock in Tara's depths. Oh goddess.

"Mmmh!" Tara gasped with her mouth full as her body convulsed into climax.

Willow-kink didn't stop even as Tara's orgasm subsided, but that was okay, because there wasn't anything that made Tara want her to stop. Nothing felt sore or over-sensitive, she wasn't tired, and the position wasn't becoming a strain.

And they had all the time in the world. They'd stop when they wanted to stop, and no sooner.

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The gang was all there when Faith strolled into the school library. Well, except for Joyce. She did still have a job. Kendra and Oz were seated on one side of the table, while Cordelia perched on other side of the table itself. Giles was talking to a woman... Faith stopped in her tracks.

"Faith," Diana Dormer greeted with a smile.

Faith forgot herself completely and threw herself across the distance between them. She didn't bother to hold back her strength and hugged her Watcher as hard as she could. Faith knew where she'd left her Watcher. It didn't matter how hard she squeezed. And if it was some impostor, then they totally deserved to get their ribs crushed.

Faith pulled away and coughed awkwardly before putting on a casual grin and flicking Diana's arm. "Heya, DD. How're the new digs?"

"Quite remarkable, actually," Diana said. "I can't say much for the timing, however. I was rather put out that I had to walk three blocks in broad daylight without a stitch of clothing."

Faith snorted. "Pfft, I bet you were a hit."

"I'll have you know I was nearly arrested," Diana countered. "I was forced to hide on rooftops and charm a lonely old man out of his coat."

"Was he at least a good lay?" Faith asked.

Diana didn't miss a beat. "Yes, quite. He was as long as my forearm and twice as dexterous."

Faith tsked. "You've been havin' adventures without me, DD. Not very watcherly of ya."

Diana broke, bursting out laughing, and Faith spontaneously hugged her again as she laughed her ass off along with her. Tears? What tears. Fuck you, tears. Faith kicked crying's ass.

"So," Faith said once that was over with. "What's the what?"


"Cordelia, do be careful with that," Giles sighed. "And the term is Vengeance Demon, if anyone cares."

Faith opened her mouth at Cordelia, then just shrugged. "Nope, not even mad anymore, but your
swimmer pal was a total bust. Dude is freaky ocean-obsessed, like way fish for brains. Half expected him to wanna listen for ocean sounds in my snatch..." Oz and Kendra were staring at her. "What?"

"Cordy and Giles were doing the bad wish demon," Oz explained. "We're on this fish monster that's been eating people and leaving behind their skin."

Faith made a face. "You thinkin' maybe Canned Cam is more than just obsessed?"

"Ew," Cordelia put in.

"It's a lead," Diana said.

"Cool," Faith said, strolling over to the table. "So, who got vengeanced or whatever?"

The Delta Site was brand new, having only been completely furnished and staffed on normal duty rotations the previous week. Like the other SGC bases, the stargate was in an underground bunker surrounded by weapon emplacements and heavy steel doors. Even better, the base had full self-destruct capability.

Daniel hoped they wouldn't need it, but they did have something of a poor track record when it came to duplicates. He tried not to fidget and settled for making a couple of pens orbit his hand behind his back. Producing awareness feedback from a telekinetically affected object took enough concentration to occupy him. It was tricky and recursive and unintuitive. He lost track of one of the pens and it clattered to the floor.

Sam was very obviously not pacing. Her fatigues and tac vest looked suspiciously clean and well-fitted, but if Daniel hadn't known it was a Barrier Jacket, he didn't think he could have guessed. And he knew about Unraveler Exalt. Replicarter didn't.

"Yup," Jack said, from where he only didn't have his feet up on the console by the barest of margins. "This is exciting. Teal'c will be so disappointed he missed it."

"He is an important figure in the jaffa rebellion," Daniel said. "I get why he didn't want to wait for Elizabeth to clear the Venussians when the other rebel leaders were already agreed."

Jack made a face. "I did not need the mental image of Bra'tac as a nude twenty-something. That's all I'm saying."

Sam shot Jack look that was half amused, half exasperated. "I doubt that will be an issue, sir."

"Relax, Carter," Jack said. "We're as ready as we can be for your double's sudden but inevitable betrayal."

"That's what I'm worried about," Sam sighed. "If she's really based on me, she has to know that we'd never meet her in person like this without some kind of trump card held in reserve."

"Well, we're not setting a trap, per se," Daniel ventured. "If these Ori are really as big a threat as Replicarter implied, she could be dealing in good faith, even if her larger intentions aren't peaceful."

Jack grunted. "Carter - "

The panels on the stargate lit up, and Jack fell silent. The 'gate opened with the usual kawoosh, and Jack swung to his feet. Daniel began to summon up the necessary emotional state for incanting, just in case.
No blockbugs appeared. The puddle rippled, and out stepped... Sam, dressed in subdued black and grey. Daniel couldn't help glancing at the real Sam. The stargate shut down and the Replicator stepped down from the gate platform.

"I'm surprised," Replicarter commented as she looked around the apparently otherwise empty base. "I didn't expect you to trust me with a meeting this easily. I imagined I'd step out of the gate to find an empty base and ten seconds left on the self-destruct."

"Oh, don't worry, that can still be arranged," Jack said, rocking back on his heels.

Replicarter's lips quirked and she addressed Sam, "I assume you have an isolated network prepared to receive data?"

"I do," Sam agreed. "This way."

"Fucking knew it, I fucking did," Faith panted as she struggled to maintain her chokehold on the fish monster formerly known as Cam Walker. "Fucking freaky fish guy."

"Faith! Over here!" Joyce called as Faith crashed through the maintenance door. "This one's empty!"

"Ow! Fuck!" Faith cursed as the struggling lagoon creature managed to claw her leg.

This was pointless. The pod was right there, and even Faith had been paying enough attention to pick up on the brain being the only part that mattered. With a snarl, she broke Cam's neck. Freaky fish guy went limp in her arms and Faith pulled her knife, jammed it in to sever his spine, and ripped his head clean off.

Faith dropped the body and flipped her hair out of her face. "Much better."

As jauntily as she could with a limp, Faith strolled over to Joyce, swinging the finned head by the protruding bit of severed spine. Joyce looked a little disgusted as Faith went up and poked the Fae pod with the head. The pod opened up, and Faith tossed the head in.

"Last fish monster unfishified," Faith said, bouncing on her good leg. "Let's go see if Giles and DD got the evil swim coach to piss himself yet."

Joyce sighed. "Should I even mention the horrible leg wound?"

"Hey, whatever floats your boat, Mrs. S," Faith said cheerfully, hopping into a stroll.

Joyce shook her head. "I'd feel better if you took the upgrade."

"I'm all for it," Faith shrugged. "It'd just suck to miss out on all the fun that'd go down while I'm out of it. I'll totally do it if things ever get boring for a while."

"Well, I hope that works out for you," Joyce offered, sounding resigned.

"Fifth thought he'd molded me into an adoring queen," Replicarter explained. "He tried to condition me, to break the ties that came with the memories he fed me by stitching the pieces together how he wanted."

Sam looked up from attaching electrical leads to the correct ports. "You have memories of my past that go back before I met Fifth?"
"Of course. Bits of the life that made you who you are," Replicarter said. "Little things, too. I know I've never set foot on Earth, but I have this image of lying under the tree in our back yard. It's a sunny day, but when I close my eyes, the wind in the leaves sounds..."

"...exactly like rain," Sam finished.

"Fifth failed to understand that who he wanted and what he wanted couldn't coexist," Replicarter said. "Every time he gave me a piece of you, he made me that much less his."

Sam attached the final lead and moved over to the laptop she'd set up. "And you turned on him."

"Fifth did good work," Replicarter agreed sardonically. "He wanted to obtain Samantha Carter as a Replicator. He succeeded."

Over where he was keeping out of the way, Jack snorted despite himself.

Sam went over to the main display. A map of the galaxy filled the screen, arrayed with annotated icons. There were three primary clusters in different regions, each representing a supergate surrounded by ships.

"Each beachhead is in orbit around an artificially created black hole," Replicarter said, pointing at the display. "Mothership pairs have already secured nearby gateworlds here, here, and here. These worlds here by the second beachhead are the only ones my forces have successfully denied them."

She pointed at a far more numerous scattering of dots. "These are the worlds where Priors have cowed the natives into worship."

"How current is this?" Sam asked.

"It will update in real time until the datablock leaves my presence," Replicarter told her. "Obviously some of it is estimated based on last known position. I don't have sensor drones everywhere."

"Thank god for that," Jack muttered under his breath.

"What're these?" Sam asked, pointing at another band of dots.

"Scorched worlds," Replicarter replied bluntly. "Worlds visited by the Fae, that tried to fight back. There may very well be converted-Fae survivors, but I can assure you nothing else was left alive on those worlds after a solitary Prior decided they could not be swayed."

Sam scrolled the map, zoomed in on the closest beachhead, then went digging into the other data. "How much do you have on Ori ship specifications? Wait... have there been any battles between Ori ships and Fae ships?"

"Not to my knowledge," Replicarter said. "However, Ori forces around the third beachhead have suffered unaccounted losses. That could have been Fae, but it is just as likely not. The Fae appear to be systematically spreading in a radius around Earth, and don't appear to have ventured that far, yet."

Sam kept quiet, because she had a good guess about those losses and it wasn't the Fae. That was Childan territory. If Replicarter wasn't bluffing, she still had no idea that the TSAB existed.

"Unfortunately, the Fae don't exactly keep us up to date anymore," Sam sighed. "Or take our calls."

Replicarter began to reply, but the sounds of the stargate activating from around the corner made her pause and glance over curiously. "Expecting a checkin?"
Jack gave Sam a meaningful look, like he didn't want to leave Sam alone with her double. Sam glanced down at where she had Unraveler Exalt concealed and leaned towards the computer setup. Jack pouted. Sam quirked a reassuring smile. Jack glanced pointedly at Sam's rear end, then looked her in the eyes. Sam nodded.

Jack strolled out of the lab at the sound of the stargate kawoosh, calling, "Daniel..."

"Well," Sam said, returning to the map of the galaxy. "I think this beachhead is the most - "

Replicarter moved like lightning. Her hand shot out, fingers extending as thin silver tendrils that whipped towards Sam's head... and bounced off, with a flare of blue light. Sam recoiled, registering the genuinely stunned look on her double's face as she crossed half the room in a single leap.

Sam gathered herself in a defensive stance as her fake fatigues and tac vest began to glow and her Device intoned, BARRIER JACKET: EXALT MODE.

"I don't know, Jack," Daniel sighed. "I'm getting audio, but its so garbled I can't even tell if it's language, let alone what language."

"So, what, its a wrong number?" Jack wondered.

Suddenly, a distortion rippled through the air, and Jack flinched as Daniel went transparent for a moment before snapping back to normal. The stargate shut down.

Jack stared at Daniel for half a second before cursing and bolting back into the lab. It was empty. No sign of Carter or her duplicate. Daniel rushed in on Jack's heels.

"...crap," Daniel summed up.

"The plan," Jack said, shooing Daniel back the other way. "Dial the gate and set the self-destruct, let's go!"

PHASE SHIFT MAPPED. EXCLUSION BARRIER DEPLOYED, Unraveler Exalt reported.

Sam parried a slash, sending Replicarter's blade arm gouging into concrete. The sky blue counter-rotating MidChildan Magic Circle faded from under her feet as Sam slid around a kick towards the lab door.

Replicarter didn't pursue her. She hissed. "The link's gone! Do you have any idea what you've done?! Without my guidance, the rest of the swarm..."

"Save it," Sam cut in. "What were you trying to do?"

"I knew you had to have something," Replicarter said, now more wondering than angry. "I wasn't prepared for this. You... you did it, didn't you. You cracked magic."

"I wouldn't say that," Sam replied. "What was your plan?"

"To replace you," Replicarter told her. "I needed your recent memories if I was to have any hope of deceiving Jack and Daniel."

"You had to know it never would have worked," Sam said. "You would have been found out within seconds of stepping through the 'gate."
"Probably, yes," Replicarter agreed, but she didn't elaborate.

Silver tentacles tipped with sickle blades sprouted from her shoulders, elbows, and hips. She casually upended a table full of lab equipment and hurled it at Sam. Sam whipped her Device up as a Circle snapped into place under her.

A blue containment ring drew itself at the end of Unraveler Exalt. GRAVITY SPEAR.

Several hundred pounds of glass, steel, and formica crumpled around the beam of blue light that was Sam's spell, folding back on itself as it halted halfway through its arc. Before the crushed mass could even begin to fall, Replicarter slid under it and twisted back to her feet, slamming one of her sickle blades into Sam's gut with enough force to punch a hole in solid steel.

Sam doubled over as the air rushed out of her lungs, but the blade didn't penetrate her Barrier Jacket. Sam lurched up, headbutting Replicarter's chin. It felt like smashing her head into metal, but Replicarter staggered back. Dizzily lamenting how poorly her affinity lent itself to the standard Barrier Jacket algorithms, Sam aimed her Device.

Three hollow blue orbs enclosing a crackling haze surrounding a black pinprick formed at Unraveler Exalt's end. PIERCING POINT.

Replicarter swept Sam's arm aside, and the shooting spells went wide, drilling holes straight through the walls and surrounding mountain. Sam caught a sickle jab and pulled down hard, smashing Replicarter's face into her knee and then rolling back to back over Replicarter's bent form to regain some distance.

A ripple of silver restored Replicarter to a pristine state.

A sky blue Circle snapped into being under Sam's feet.

MOBIUS BIND, Unraveler Exalt announced.

Space distorted around Replicarter as ribbons of blue light bound her limbs. She... oozed through the restraints like liquid metal and another ripple of silver shed the distortions as it restored her.

Okay, that was dumb. Blows to the head, not good for tactical competence. Sam opened a telepathic link with Daniel. Daniel! How much time?

Oh thank gods, Sam, I couldn't get through! I don't know how to telepath at someone in one of your Barriers, Daniel exclaimed. The gate's open to the Alpha Site. We've only got twenty seconds!

Replicarter stalked forward, sickle bladed tentacles writhing. Sam summoned up all of her desperation and determination, threw herself backwards, and slammed a vertical Circle into the doorframe. Lines of light cut into the concrete and Replicarter bounced off.

Sam dashed into the gateroom, wincing with every blow Replicarter landed on her shield.

"Barrier break!" Sam commanded.

REALIGNING DIMENSIONAL PHASE, Unraveler Exalt reported. BARRIER BREAK.

A wave of color shift and...

"...ten seconds!" Daniel exclaimed.

Sam leaped, tackling Jack and Daniel into the wormhole as Replicarter sprinted towards them. At the
last second before Sam passed through the event horizon, she threw up another vertical Circle as close to the puddle as she could get it. Replicarter slammed into the shield as Sam passed into the stargate.

Sam had never been more grateful for the apparently magical feature of stargates that allowed her to remain conscious while her body was in the matter stream, because that meant her effort wasn't interrupted and she could force that Circle to keep existing.

The three of them tumbled out of the Alpha Site stargate in a heap. The stargate shut off and Jack groaned in the ensuing silence. Sam wasn't feeling much better. Her fight with Replicarter had been short, but brutal, and she was feeling mentally exhausted in a way she didn't usually associate with combat.

"Okay, ow," Daniel contributed.

Jack picked himself up, waving off the airman who offered help. "Everybody in one piece?"

"More or less, sir," Sam managed, releasing her Barrier Jacket.

"Did you get the thing?" Jack asked.

"No," Sam said, "but Unraveler Exalt has a clean copy of the data."

Jack grinned at her. "Nice."

And then Daniel vanished in a transporter flash.

Jack facepalmed.

Daniel stumbled, suddenly finding himself surrounded by suspicious grey walls.

"It was a good try," said Sam's voice, making Daniel spin around and back up sharply.

"Unfortunately for you, I'm very hard to kill."

"...how?"

"For a little while I was worried," Replicarter said. "Your Samantha pulled me out of phase and disrupted my connection to the rest of the swarm, but she had to free me to free herself."

"Not what I meant..."

Replicarter smirked. "I planted a beacon on you early on, and it should be obvious how I knew where to find the Alpha Site."

"Oh...okay," Daniel said, backing up until he hit the wall. "What do you want?"

"You have knowledge, buried deep in your subconscious, or perhaps a lingering connection since you've regained some magical ability," Replicarter explained. "There's a secret, known only to the Ascended, and you're going to help me find it."

Daniel winced. "This is gonna be a, a hand-in-the-head thing, isn't it."

"My first intention was infiltration and stealth, but since that has failed, it seems I will be using a more direct approach," Replicarter replied.
Silver tendrils slithered into Daniel's skull.

"The Fae are an abomination of godless anarchy. Their mere existence is the worst kind of blasphemy."

"Agreed."

"Worlds touched by their taint must be purged, for the glory of the gods."

"Hallowed are the Ori."

"Hallowed are the Ori!"

"Um, guys?" Willow-icos spoke up. "We've got a problem. A big problem."

Chapter End Notes

Yaaaay. Tara! Oh nooooooes. Cliffhanger. We're in the home stretch, my arbitrarily-loyal readers! There will be exactly two more chapters, and likely an epilogue and/or non-canon omakes after that, but... yeah. Final arc! Woo!
Reckoning (Part 1)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Reckoning (Part 1)

Sunlight spilled over the curve of Dakara's horizon, lighting the hazy rim of atmosphere a brilliant gold. Vi'tak stood before the primary console, maintaining the stoic calm befitting a jaffa of his station.

Despite his best efforts, his eyes still occasionally slid to the walls of the pel'tak, where dozens of grey metal creatures perched in neat columns. Lord Ba'al's new servants unnerved him, and Vi'tak found himself once again quashing the blasphemous little shiver that ran down his spine when he wondered just how much these Replicators were really under his god's control. There were rumors...


"Kre!" Vi'tak barked, hitting the alarm.

Pulling up a tactical display, Vi'tak saw a distant ha'tak blink out of existence. Til'vak strode up to the secondary console and stood ready. Lord Ba'al arrived shortly.

"My lord, we're under attack!" Vi'tak reported.

"It is the usurpers, my lord," Til'vak reported.

Lord Ba'al settled into this throne. "Order the equatorial ha'taks into flanking positions. This enemy shall be given no warnings and no quarter. Vi'tak, bring us about."

The view of the planet swung across the viewport, settling on a formation of six ha'taks, Lord Ba'al's honor guard. Vi'tak made the ship accelerate, falling in behind the screening formation.

A pinprick of light in the distance announced the loss of another ha'tak. A heavy silence hung over the pel'tak.

"My lord! Incoming fire!" Til'vak suddenly exclaimed.

"Evade!" Lord Ba'al commanded.

A beam of pale gold light, moving deceptively slow, lanced up from below them, slicing through one of the honor guard. Vi'tak gritted his teeth and went to full lateral thrust, dodging the wreckage and hopefully any followup blasts. The remaining honor guard moved to a new formation to defend their god.

"Return fire," Lord Ba'al ordered.

Plasma bolts rained down on the Ori mothership, and Vi'tak got his first good look at the unholy thing. An elongated hoop, pristine white, enclosing a smaller ring that seemed to hold an ethereal orb of brilliantly glowing blue-white light.

The metal bugs lined up on the walls suddenly started chittering and moving. Vi'tak flinched,
wishing his god would see fit to do away with the things. His console readout started displaying alerts.

"I've lost control of the shields!" Vi'tak reported urgently.

The floor shook and the haze of the shields luminesced. Vi'tak caught himself before he could stumble and pulled into a sharp turn.

"Damage?" Lord Ba'al demanded.

"Shield strength is down by half, but we are undamaged." Til'vak reported.

Another pale gold beam slammed into one of the honor guard, breaking the shield but leaving the ha'tak wounded but still battle worthy. Vi'tak strained the engines, keeping them to an unpredictable course. Plasma fell against the Ori mothership like rain.

An Ori beam pierced a second ha'tak, peppering Ba'al's ship with debris. The floor shuddered from the impacts. Something grey and spiderlike, the size of an al'kesh, streaked down through the battle, insectile legs spreading and spearing into the Ori mothership's shields.

Vi'tak smirked viciously as the usurper's shields flared and rippled. After a moment, the shields buckled and the main cannons of four ha'taks ripped into the Ori mothership.

"The usurpers feel our wrath," Vi'tak enthused, but then he blinked. "Fighters! Nearly two squadrons have escaped the mothership's destruction."

"My lord, shall I order our deathgliders to launch?" Til'vak asked.

Like long flat teardrops glowing from the wide end, the Ori fighters advanced, only to be met by more Replicator... things. Smaller than a deathglider, four glowing blue wings, and six slender and nimble limbs, discharging what looked like lightning at the enemy fighters.

"My lord! Three more motherships approach!" Vi'tak announced.

Explosions lit up the viewport.

"My lord," Til'vak began. "We've lost more than thirty ha'taks. Soon we will no longer outnumber the usurpers."

"They are a formidable foe," Lord Ba'al agreed, almost sounding worried. "Use the Replicators as a screen. Order all ships to break off and regroup above the temple."

The ship rumbled and shook, and another pale gold beam slammed into the shields of one of the remaining honor guard. Vi'tak's hands clenched on the controls.

"Shields at minimum integrity," Vi'tak reported.

"Launch deathgliders to cover our retreat," Lord Ba'al ordered sourly. "Take us - "

The floor lurched and the lights wavered. Lord Ba'al caught himself on the arm of his throne as alarms began blaring, but Vi'tak went sprawling. He could feel the ha'tak shudder under him. Everything went dark except the stars outside and then a wall of blinding heat -

Replicarter paused to frown. Ba'al was dead. How disappointing. The Ori were moving in force to take the jaffa homeworld of Dakara, bypassing dozens of more valuable planets. They were showing
their hand, and Replicarter had to know why.

"What was that?" Daniel asked slowly. "You just learned something."

Lips twisting in displeasure, Replicarter hardened her resolve and forced Daniel back into his figurative box - the sensory simulation she was using to interact with him. It was getting harder. Daniel's mind kept seeping through her efforts to contain him. His thoughts had ontological weight, and there wasn't anything she could do about that because she needed his mind active.

"The Ori are laying siege to the jaffa homeworld as we speak," Replicarter told him, showing only bland confidence even though the strain was beginning to impact her effectiveness elsewhere. "Whatever it is that they're looking for on Dakara, the Ori clearly deem it a high priority."

"Okay..."

"Fortunately, I suspect that this too, is a secret that was once known to you," Replicarter told him. "It seems a detour is in order. We need to know what is hidden on Dakara."

Fate woke first, as she often did, with Nanoha sprawled half on top of her. Nanoha's skin was hot and slightly sweaty against Fate's naked body under the covers. Fate smiled softly and pulled Nanoha closer, nuzzling into her neck and breathing a deep, happy sigh.

Nanoha didn't stir. She slept like a rock and her limbs went everywhere. It was rather adorable. Fate pressed a wandering trail of soft kisses along her partner's inviting skin as her hands traced Nanoha's lean curves.

With a shivery thrill, Fate curled her hand down through Nanoha's rump to dip a finger into her sweltering core, and marveled yet again that the last boundary in their relationship had finally been broken. She had spent so long resigning herself to that splinter of scorned craving in her love for Nanoha that it still stunned her sometimes to have it... not scorned. It was hard not to feel like suffering was simply her due, the way things were supposed to be. Fate would endure anything for Nanoha's sake, and after what she'd done for the mere memory of a far less intense and less complete love, was that any surprise?

Of course, Nanoha saw things differently, which was one of the many reasons Fate loved her so much. It was kind of funny and kind of sad when Nanoha of all people had to scold her for not being selfish enough. Nanoha had flat out told Fate that even if she didn't think Fate was gorgeous and sexy, and she absolutely did, she would still have rather let Fate kiss her and stuff than let Fate suffer, and Fate needed to stop being silly with hiding things that Nanoha needed to know to make Fate happy.

"Mmm," Nanoha moaned softly, finally roused by Fate's kisses and fingering.

"I love you," Fate murmured.

Nanoha squirmed and clumsily kissed Fate's face without opening her eyes. Fate helped her find her lips and Nanoha plundered Fate's mouth with her tongue as soon as her warm lips found their target. Fate melted and basked in Nanoha's desire.

The door to their quarters chimed and slid open.

Nanoha stopped with a small whine and Fate groaned inwardly, shooting a glare at Hayate over Nanoha's shoulder. It was Hayate, looking bright and perky and already sharply dressed in her brown Capital Defense uniform - she was the only one besides them who was keyed into their
quarters, a habit from when they were younger.

Hayate giggled into her hand as she let the door shut behind her. "Oh, don't mind me. You don't have to stop on my account."

Nanoha mumbled something that might have been angry words when it grew up.

Fate let Nanoha out of her arms and reached for her underwear. Nanoha sat up, yawned, and worked on getting her eyes open as Fate slid out of their bunk and stepped into her snug black panties.

After adding a matching tanktop, Fate gave the shamelessly smiling Hayate an expectant look. "Yes?"

"It's the Fae," Hayate said. "They've got a crisis of some kind. Willow's coming over to brief us."

Nanoha blinked at that and shook off the remainder of her bleariness, hopping to her feet and starting to dress in her white and blue Air Corps uniform. "How long? Did she say anything else?"

Fate did up the fastenings on her black and silver Enforcer uniform.

"She's probably here now," Hayate said, leading the way out into the corridor where Vita was waiting. "I figured you wouldn't want to hear about it second-hand."


"I hate to think you're missing out on your morning lovin', though," Hayate said brightly.

Nanoha blushed. "We weren't doing that anyway! We were still asleep."

Now Fate blushed. *I wasn't.*

"Cute!" Hayate giggled. "Just let me know if you want to make up for lost time. You can borrow my Tentacle-chan!"

Vita blushed, with a far-off look in her eye.

"Really, that's okay!" Nanoha insisted somewhat desperately. "I don't need to meet your hentai monster."

Hayate hmm'd. "I could always ask Willow to make you two one of your own."

Nanoha flailed a bit, while Fate found herself oddly intrigued. The thought of her and Nanoha together at the center of an orgy of friendly, amorous tentacles wasn't what she would call repulsive.

"Mou, you're mean, Hayate-chan," Nanoha finally pouted.

Hayate just gave her a sympathetic smile.

When they reached the bridge, the nude redheaded Fae was talking to a very professionally blank-faced Chrono.

"...already converted to your codecs," Willow was saying as she handed a data chit to Chrono. "Oh! Hi, you three!"

"Hi, Willow," Hayate greeted cheerfully. "Your gift has been wonderful, by the way. Thanks again!"
Chrono went over and handed the chit to Amy.

"Oh, good," Willow said, briefly brightening. "But I'm here for very not good reasons. Your captain tells me you're familiar with the Ori?"

Fate nodded along with Nanoha and Hayate, now worried. It wasn't surprising that the Ori weren't contained in Childan space, but it certainly wasn't good news. The bridge's vast windows filled with images of scorched landscapes, covering over the view outside of the moon's illuminated arc set against the stars. There were a couple of murmurs and soft gasps of surprise from the bridge crew.

"These are from three planets spinward of Sol," Willow told them with a glance behind her. "We've been offering our upgrade to as many worlds as we could, but the Ori agents who came to these worlds declared us to be abominations. They claimed to be 'cleansing' these worlds of our 'taint' but the losses were all baseline humans."

Several of the image frames showed confused and shell-shocked naked people wandering in glowing wasteland and then being gently collected by more Fae in flying transparent bubbles.

"All the fae-touched who were vaporized in the orbital bombardments made it through the emergency upload and are being reconstituted aboard the Tender Heart and the Rushing Colors," Willow explained. "Unfortunately, fae-touched made up only a small portion of the population of those planets. Millions of people were killed."

"Do you object to sending this data to our high command?" Chrono asked.

Willow shook her head. "No, please do."

"It's amazing that anyone survived that," Nanoha said, looking at Willow resolutely. "Your people have done so much good! So many people are only alive because of you."

Willow smiled, a little bashful, a little sad. "I've tried to do what I can."

"Should Madoka and Homura be hearing this?" Fate wondered.

"This doesn't seem urgent enough to wake them right now," Hayate opined. "We can brief them with the rest of the crew."

"My family's taking the upgrade," Nanoha told Willow. "The Japanese government has started a program to reimburse wages to people for the time spent in the pods. I'd do it myself if I knew I wouldn't be needed for a few weeks."

"Me too," Hayate chimed in.

Fate nodded. She wasn't as eager as Nanoha, but she didn't have any qualms about it.

"I know," Willow sighed. "Three weeks is nothing when you ought to have all the time in the universe, but it's an eternity when all this bad stuff is going on. There just isn't any way to make it faster, unless you can warp time."

Fate paused. She and Nanoha shared a look. "...Fate-chan, we should wake up Homura."

Sam jogged into the control room just as Hailey reported no IDC. Jack and Weir were already there.

"We're receiving video," the Lieutenant reported.
And there was Sam's face on the screen. Jack hissed.

"Daniel's fine," Replicarter told them preempting the obvious first question. "I merely needed to borrow him for a short while."

"Why should we believe you?" Weir asked coolly. "You've given us every reason to mistrust anything you might say."

"Believe it or not, I am still acting to defend this galaxy, and Daniel Jackson is a valuable resource," Replicarter claimed.

"What are you doing with him?" Sam asked.

"He will not be harmed," Replicarter said. "I'm sure he will explain everything to you at the earliest opportunity."

"You'll return Daniel to us?" Weir asked.

Replicarter nodded.

"Then why?!" Sam asked somewhat emotionally. "Why not cooperate with us? We could have agreed on what to do if it's so important."

"I would be disappointed that you can't see it, if I didn't remember it from your side," Replicarter mused. "That is part of the problem. You are blind to your own bigotry."

Jack's eyebrows went up in incredulity. "Bigotry?"

"Seen from the outside, it is obvious," Replicarter claimed. "Jon, a complete and faithful duplicate of Jack's mind, a second instance of one of the most valuable people on your planet, demeaned and exiled from the SGC because you couldn't see past his physical appearance."

Sam found herself at a loss for words, having not expected that argument at all.

Replicarter wasn't done. "Harlan's SG-1. True divergences, as much you as you yourselves, shunned and discarded for being made of different materials. It is a rather damning trend."

"So, what? You decided to preemptively betray us just because we didn't hand full security access to clones and roboreplicants?" Jack asked scathingly.

"In a word, yes," Replicarter replied reasonably. "You have systematically rejected your duplicates at every opportunity, and I am less you and less palatable than those you've rejected in the past. I could not afford to gamble the future of the galaxy on the off chance that you'd be egalitarian this time."

"Those incidents were before my time, but to my knowledge those people were treated fairly by the SGC," Weir pointed out.

Replicarter's lips twisted in a bitter smirk. "And you miss the point. Again. Your definition of fair leaves much to be desired." She shook her head. "It is irrelevant. I didn't dial in to criticize your policies. I have tactical intel."

"Oh do you now," Jack snapped. "Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice..."

"The Ori have moved in force on the jaffa homeworld of Dakara," Replicarter revealed before Jack could snark properly. "Ba'al has fallen, but the free jaffa are stalled on Chulak while their rebel leaders remain in the Fae pods. There is an Alteran artifact hidden on Dakara, a powerful weapon
that we must keep out of Ori hands, and if that is not sufficient motivation then I suspect you would like to keep it out of my hands as well."

"What kind of weapon?" Sam asked.

"The weapon is hidden in the temple immediately in front of the Dakara stargate," Replicarter informed them. "As for what it does... I believe it is the device used by the Alterans to terraform this galaxy."

Replicarter stepped out of frame, and the stargate shut down. Sam barely noticed. Her mind was busy being full of the horrifying implications.

Homura stared thoughtfully at the birthing pod which sat on top of a smooth white mound in the Arthra's cargo bay. She held Skjoldur in front of her and the black crystal at the center of the bronze shield glimmered with the light of her magic. The parameters of her Slider Drive spell scrolled by on a holographic screen, responding to her thoughts as she poured over the code.

"Can you do it?" Chrono asked bluntly.

Homura bowed her head, long dark hair falling around her face. "No." She swept her hair outwards as she turned to face them. Silky strands slithered over her arm. "I don't have the power for that much volume, and there isn't an obvious work-around."

Madoka put a comforting hand on her arm and Homura leaned into the touch with a sigh. Hayate, Nanoha, and Fate were making disappointed faces, but not at Homura specifically.

"Even if I did have enough power, I can't maintain Slider Drive while I sleep," Homura added.

Willow hmm'd. "Ignore me if, you know, I don't know what I'm talking about, but could you put your spell on the pod with yourself outside the effect?"

"I..." Homura frowned. "I didn't design the spell for that. I based all the equations on having myself and Skjoldur in the accelerated time frame. I'd need weeks to design an entire new spell..."

There was an obvious solution, but Homura was reluctant to voice it. Precognition could give her the time, but it was a daunting task even without the emotional stress of being around people for whom the question, "are they real?" may not even have a coherent answer, or the possibility of some disaster appearing and Homura not daring to end the spell until she figures out how to prevent it. It was unspeakably selfish, but Homura dreaded the day someone pointed out that she was perfectly capable of living every day twice just in case because they'd be right, but living like that would destroy her.

Madoka, picking up on the gist of her thoughts, leaned into her side and murmured, "I'd go with you. We can go somewhere secluded and I can give you my memories to carry back to me, like before."

"I would still like to have several of your pods on board in the event of a medical emergency we aren't equipped to handle," Chrono was saying.

"Sure, I can do that," Willow agreed. "Just tell me where you want 'em."

Homura finally sighed and gave Madoka a gentle kiss. "Alright."

Madoka stepped back and activated her Barrier Jacket. Activating her own Barrier Jacket, Homura took Madoka's hand. A blacklight purple Circle unfolded under her, and Skjoldur announced,
Willow-rhom was about to transport several more mounds of... she really needed to come up with a translation for the name of the stuff, maybe 'protoscape' for something close to the literal meaning.

The raven-haired magical girl with the time powers suddenly cried out and fell to her knees, her Barrier Jacket dissolving in a shower of purple light. The pinkette in excessive ruffles gasped and caught her girlfriend.


"Oh no! I'm getting Shamal," Hayate gasped. "She's on her way."

Willow could only guess at what happened, but they had a birthing pod right there. If Homura was recoverable, she'd be recovered. The bleeding girl started twitching in Madoka's arms, and Willow wanted to yell for them to put her in the pod already but they'd resolved that putting any of their mages out of commission for three weeks was a last resort only and they had magical healing.

A blonde woman in a long green dress and white tabard rushed smoothly into the cargo bay. While Madoka struggled to restrain Homura's seizure without hurting the girl, the woman slid a glowing hand up the back of Homura's neck. Homura immediately stilled.

Shamal waved her rings over the girl and a light green Belkan Triangle unfurled over Homura's head as the girl gently floated out of Madoka's arms until she was laying on her back in the air. "What happened?"

"We... she..." Madoka squeezed a tear out of her eye and shook her head sharply. "She just cast Precognition so we'd have time to go invent a new spell, but then... this! And she didn't bring any of my memories back so I don't know what happened! What's wrong with her?"

"Neural bruising and hemorrhaging," Shamal stated, heading towards the corridor guiding the floating Homura along with her. "She'll live, but I need to get her into surgery immediately."

Madoka led the crowd as she followed Shamal to the infirmary. Willow trailed along.

Madoka watched as Shamal sat in deep concentration, a glowing hand on either side of Homura's head. Madoka felt like the sun had gone out, and the hard ball of degenerate matter had settled in her chest. The feeling was even a little bit literal. Her telepathy was giving her nothing right now. Homura's mind just wasn't there.

"Attempting resuscitation," Shamal reported, making Madoka jump.

A new Triangle appeared in Shamal's pale green, and Madoka held her breath. A glimmer... and then a presence. Madoka burst into tears and sagged against the observation window. There was no content to it. Homura was too deeply unconscious still, but Madoka could feel the mind blooming back into existence.

"The patient is stable," Shamal said leaning back with a sigh.

Madoka was the first one out of the observation room as Shamal floated Homura out to a recovery bed and settled her in. Madoka scrubbed the tears from her eyes and brushed her fingertips along Homura's sleeping face.
Chrono, Hayate, and Fate were questioning Shamal.

"The damage was wide-spread, but shallow," Shamal was saying. "Miss Akemi should recover fully after an ordinary night's sleep."

"Do you have an idea what the cause was?" Hayate asked. "I just checked with Mariel she's still running diagnostics and data recovery on Skjoldur. She won't be able to hard reboot Homura's Device for another few hours."

Madoka looked up. She wanted to know what went wrong so she could make sure it never happened again.

"I'm afraid I don't have a baseline for how Miss Akemi's Precognition functions on the neural level," Shamal admitted. "The damage looked like a failed stage five possession. Like the spirit, if there was a spirit, was badly fragmented, or like thousands of very similar spirits all tried to possess her at once and merged destructively."

"...didn't Homura tell us that before she was given Skjoldur, this spell regularly gave her severe headaches?" Fate asked.

"That's true," Madoka spoke up.

The nude Fae interjected, "Did Homura know how her Precognition spell worked?"

Madoka ran her fingers through Homura's hair as she answered. "No. It was a Rare Talent. The only thing her spell did was let her use it without the headaches. She made it by trial and error, mostly."

Willow made a face. "Well... can any of you super magic type people think of a better explanation for solving a horrendously complicated neural engineering problem by accident, than for Homura's precog to normally work by... y'know... conjuring up a spirit-copy of her future mindstate and then possessing herself?"

Everyone mostly looked at each other and kind of shrugged.

"Once Mariel gets Skjoldur back online, we'll be able to rule out a few other possibilities if Willow's right," Hayate said.

"If this was due to something that happened on her end," Chrono said, "we need to know what, and how long we have. How soon can Miss Akemi be safely woken?"

Shamal considered. "She needs at least six hours. I'd feel better if she wasn't disturbed for a full ten, though."

"Um..." Madoka began. "I could look through her memories. I know she'd let me. Would that be... better than waking her up?"

"If you're actively digging? Only slightly," Shamal said.

Madoka slumped. Six hours. It wasn't three weeks, but with some unknowable catastrophe lurking, it felt like forever.

---

The massive steel ceiling shuddered as the klaxons sounded. A line of moonlight sliced down the center of the drydock, slowly widening across the utilitarian grey hull of Earth's new flagship as it saw sky for the first time in its existence.
"Umbilicals disconnected, main power online and stable," Lieutenant Evans reported from the tactical console.

Colonel Cameron Mitchell settled into The Chair and tried not to grin like a little boy who'd been given his own starship. He hit a button. "Command, this is Odyssey. All systems green, we're ready to touch the sky. Permission to launch?"

"Granted, Odyssey. Shake her down. Your rendezvous with the Daedalus is at oh-two-hundred zulu."

Mitchell grinned. "Major Marks! Take us out."

With a slight shudder, the Odyssey lifted off. Several thousand tons of trinium and naquadah, engineered into a honed and powerful battleship, floated gracefully over the Nevada desert. Then the ship accelerated into the sky, and Mitchell watched the stars go bright and hard as they left the atmosphere.

"Captain, we have an incoming teleport," Amy reported.

"Thank you, Amy," Chrono replied as he turned to face the arrival platform.

A figure emerged from a glow of sky blue. Major Carter wore her distinctive half-scientist half-military style Barrier Jacket and looked troubled.

"Major," Chrono greeted her. "Welcome back to the Arthra. What can I do for you?"

"Several things," Carter said. "We've received some intel on the Ori from... if not a trusted source, then a credible one. My commanding officers would like to speak with your commanding officers about a potential joint operation. You should be receiving IFF handshakes from two new battleships the Air Force launched today."

Chrono looked at Amy, who, after a moment, reported, "Yep! Found the carrier wave on the interface layer, and... sydar is tracking, Cap'n!"

"Thank you, Amy," Chrono said, and the to Major Carter, "Let's see about arranging a conference."

Stars. Stars and galaxies through and across time, the infinite and the infinitesimal. Worlds old and new, great and small. The touch of power, the clarity of fractal determinism and the layers of higher order. All the artificial trappings brushed aside, for just a moment, a glimpse of comprehension, before it all slipped away.

Daniel gasped and staggered as Replicarter's mental world reformed around them. A glowing red jewel in the shape of an egg hung in the darkness between them.

"Ah, and there it is," Replicarter murmured softly. "So it was on Earth all along."

"What... what is it?" Daniel asked tiredly.

She looked down at him from over the image, its light lending a bloody cast to her face. "You don't know? Even now, you don't remember?"

"Oh believe me," Daniel snarked, pushing himself to his feet. "I wouldn't still be here if I did."

"Even so, I think I'll be keeping you safely out of the way until I have obtained the artifact,"
Replicarter told him. "Goodnight, Daniel."

With a thrill of alarm, Daniel hurled the might of his magic against Replicarter's mind. He had to seize control now, he had to... he had... His mind moved sluggishly, his senses muted. Drugging. She was drugging him. She wasn't going to give him a chance to stop her.

---

Madoka woke to the feeling of her hair being petted, and to the familiar slow burning star of Homura's love, tinged with misery, fear, and guilt. Her heart surged in her chest as Madoka snapped awake. The hand froze, and then pulled away.

Homura's eyes were wet with tears, but she still breathed Madoka's name like a prayer. "Madoka. Oh Madoka I'm so sorry! I lost you! I lost you!"

Madoka lurched forward onto the hospital bed and hugged her girlfriend tightly, loving her and wrapping her love around Homura's mind like a soft cloud. "It's okay. Whatever happened, it's okay. I love you, and you can show me what I missed, right?"

Homura buried her face in Madoka's pink strands and shuddered. Madoka wriggled into a more comfortable position and let her bask.

Eventually, Madoka began to gently dig into Homura's memories. Homura squirmed, her breath catching as needy heat pooled in her belly. Madoka's telepathy itself wasn't stimulating in that way, but it was shiver-inducingly intimate in its own right, and Homura's body responded anyway because of sheer repetitive association. Madoka enjoyed Homura's reaction, but didn't let herself get distracted.

Shamal came in a some point while Madoka was catching up, but she didn't interrupt until Madoka was finished. Homura and herself, on an uninhabited planet out in the middle of nowhere for two days, and then... it just cut off.

"I don't know what happened," Homura concluded redundantly.

Hayate stood behind Shamal, and gave Madoka a questioning look. Madoka nodded in agreement. Hayate sighed.

"How are you feeling?" Shamal asked Homura.

"Like I went two days into Precognition without Skjoldur's help," Homura admitted, letting go of Madoka. "Is Skjoldur okay?"

"Ah!" Madoka nodded brightly and twisted the other way. The familiar black octahedron sailed across the room and landed in Madoka's hand, and she handed it to Homura. Skjoldur flashed a deep purple as soon as it touched Homura's hand.

"Nothing your Device recorded provided any clues either," Hayate told them solemnly. "It needed a hard reboot, but it wasn't physically damaged."

Skjoldur slid onto the back of Homura's left hand and sprouted a black fingerless glove. READY, SIR.

"How bad?" Homura asked with resigned calmness.

"Not as bad as it could have been," Shamal replied. "I'd recommend another full night's sleep before you do anything strenuous, just to be safe, but your recovery won't require any additional care."
Shamal paused. "You're likely to become prone to seizures as you finish maturing, so I'd like to keep
an eye on that, but to be honest, my professional recommendation is to avoid the whole problem by
taking the Fae upgrade."

Madoka felt Homura's vague sense alarm and gave her a squeeze. "How soon?"

"I'd estimate at least a year before the seizures get dangerous, but I don't recommend waiting that
long,' Shamal replied.

Homura relaxed. "Alright. Can I get up?"

"Let's find out, shall we?" Shamal said cheerfully.

Madoka helped Homura get from the bed to her feet. Homura winced and clutched her head, but she
stayed steady. Shamal and Hayate left while Madoka helped her get dressed.

Madoka and Homura shared a long and lingering kiss. A moment of heartfelt affection and relief,
sustained for several minutes before the two girls shuffled out of the infirmary, arm in arm.

Madoka and Homura came upon a peculiar scene when they stepped into the galley. Opposite the
kitchen, on the other side of the concentric tables, a familiar blonde woman in a blue and white
Barrier Jacket stood across from a nude red-head with an unnaturally perfect body. Thanks to the
hour, there wasn't much of an audience, but Nanoha, Fate, and Vita were all present, along with
three men Madoka didn't know offhand who were sitting at the far end of the tables and politely
ignoring the argument.

"You could have at least left a line of communication open!" Major Carter exclaimed.

Willow scoffed. "Oh, yeah, like leaving a way for your guys to make threats at us would have made
our native friends safer."

Major Carter winced. "For what it's worth, I don't agree with the tactics that were used, and neither
does my team."

"Well they sure didn't let that stop them, did they?" Willow huffed.

"I... wasn't there, but you can see how your actions must have been interpreted, can't you?" Major
Carter tried. "You knew you were setting out to upset the status quo."

"The status quo was horrible!" Willow exclaimed, gesturing wildly. She sighed. "I guess it doesn't
matter now, though. Fine, I'll turn that subspace radio you gave us back on, happy?"

Major Carter just made a face. "Thank you, Willow. With the Ori invading our galaxy, we need to
be coordinated."

While this was going on, Madoka went over with Homura and loaded up a tray to share. They went
and sat by where Nanoha and Fate were standing.

"Speaking of which," Major Carter said. "Are you still in contact with the Asgard?"

Willow blinked. "No, we haven't heard anything from them since we gave Thor a ton of birthing pod
seeds."

"Damn," Major Carter muttered. "I was hoping you'd be able to get a message to them. We haven't
been able to contact them either."
"Why? What's going on?" Madoka wondered.

Hayate sat down across the table. "A seven-way battle, it looks like. We may be down to three sides, though!"

Madoka blinked. "Huh?"

Everyone who was still standing took seats, and Nanoha held up a hand to start ticking off fingers. "Us, Earth, the Fae, the Goa'uld, the Jaffa Rebellion, the Replicators, and the Ori. If we can trust the source of the intel, there's a powerful precursor weapon on a planet called Dakara, and the Ori are busy landing an army as we speak."

"The rebellion isn't going to be a factor," Major Carter put in. "Unfortunately, their leadership are still undergoing the Fae upgrade."

"Right, but we are coordinating an all-out attack," Hayate told them. "Whatever it is that's actually on Dakara, the Ori have committed a significant force to obtaining it. Anything the Ori want that urgently, we can't let them have."

Fate looked at Homura. "And we may not have much time."

"You think..." Homura trailed off.

"I talked to a seer we met once," Willow revealed. "He says his foresight wiggles out early tomorrow, around the same time your precog glitched. We don't know if this has anything to do with Dakara, but the timing is worrisome."

Madoka shivered. Her hand found Homura's under the table, and Madoka nearly flinched at the despair radiating off her lover, but under that was a core of determination like a neutron star.

"When are we leaving?" Homura asked.

"The Arthra is set to join the assault fleet in two hours," Hayate replied. "Are you two...?"

"We're staying on," Madoka said firmly, because this was the mission she'd accepted, the enemy Homura would do anything to protect her from. In a way, her life had been leading to this since the moment she inherited Galvan Soul from Mami Tomoe.

For months now, the Fae mothership had drifted across the sky like a second moon, until one night, it wrapped itself in faint green haze, and moved. Visible to the naked eye for anyone who cared to look up, the vast spacecraft shrank into deep space and streaked into a blooming blue cloud that remained splashed across the stars for hours afterward.

And through the rest of the night that miniature nebula was the only unusual thing to be seen in the sky, but that only lasted until soon after the sun rose over England.

The spring rain was coming down hard, sheeting against the glass of Luneth's window as Harriet spread a towel across the sill beneath it. She eased it open, using a combination of telekinesis and her Utility Cloud to mostly stop any water from passing the boundary of the frame.

A wet chill whipped across her bare arms and cut through the thin fabric of her green backless one-piece, but that just made her smile. Wind chill hadn't bothered her much even when she was human. Now that she didn't have to worry about hypothermia, it was just the sensation she most associated
with her favorite thing.

Flying.

Luneth ducked under her arm and snuggled into her side. "I so enjoy seeing the way you smile when you think of the sky."

Harriet bent her head to kiss him, running her hand over his bare torso. When she glanced down, she broke off and giggled. As she had half expected, his shiny grey swim trunks were tented up, worn so the fabric folded back against the elastic between his member and his waist.

"Not leaving much to the imagination, are you?" Harriet asked with amused fondness.

Luneth glanced down. "I'm covered, and my own sense of modesty is satisfied. It is hardly my fault that swim trunks are poorly designed. It isn't as though normal humans do not sometimes become erect."

Harriet nuzzled him. "Well, I certainly don't mind."

"Oh good, it would be ever so bothersome if you did," Luneth said serenely. "This will be such fun! It's been much too long since I've played in the rain."

Harriet floated Luneth and herself up off the floor and pulled him snug against her chest. She took them through the window, and they were both soaked through in moments. Shutting the window behind her, Harriet tumbled lazily in a skyward direction and then shot upwards fast enough to carve a trail through the rain.

It was cold. They'd both already be shivering violently if they hadn't gone in for the Fae thing, but they had, so while they felt the icy cold it utterly failed to do anything to them. Luneth was a brilliant warmth against her body.

And then, suddenly, they burst out of the clouds, streaming water behind them as the sun hit their skin.

Harriet twirled and threw Luneth towards the sunrise. He shrieked with laughter as Harriet did a loop-de-loop and caught him again right at the tops of the clouds, grinning merrily.

"Dance!" Luneth exclaimed randomly. "We'll dance on the cloudtops, the whole sky as our rink!"

"Rink?" Harriet repeated with a surprised snort as she swept them around in wide twirly circles and sunlight glinted off their wet skin.

"Well yes, I suspect cloud dancing is better compared to ice dancing than that silly shuffling about in school gymnasiums that's obviously a thinly veiled conspiracy to increase teen pregnancy rates by ensuring the supervised activity is something very much inferior to shagging," Luneth said thoughtfully.

Harriet cracked up. "I... I think you're... missing a couple links in that chain, but that is a delightful notion."

"Oh good, delightment!" Luneth said happily.

Harriet was reasonably sure that wasn't even a word, but that was much less important than snogging her delightful boyfriend. She wrapped her arms around him and dunked them back into the clouds, running her hands all over his hot rain-slicked skin.
They tumbled in each other's embrace through the dark clouds. The freezing water made the warmth of her lover startlingly vivid against her body. She pressed herself into him even tighter and pushed her fingers into Luneth's trunks, filling her hands with the taut globes of his butt as she ground her loins against his bulge.

Luneth moaned into her mouth and the way he squirmed was so very tantalizing. Like he wanted every part of his body rubbing against her all at once. Like he wanted his very world to be a profusion of Harriet, enfolding him, surrounding him. Emotion and sensation began to bleed between them, and Harriet whimpered.

Well, there was at least one obvious part of him that could bury itself inside her and be surrounded and enfolded and squeezed. A telekinetic yank slid the bottom of her suit into the crease of her thigh while her arms slid around Luneth's hips inside his trunks. Harriet freed his firm rod from its rather poor concealment and didn't hesitate to impale herself on it.

"Mmnh!" Harriet moaned as she held him inside her, feeling his hot girth fill her.

Phantom sensations of wet heat and tightness echoed back to her clit and made her shudder in bliss. Empathic sharing had been such a good idea. It was so much more intimate, and so freeing. There was no give and take, only make. They could both just let go and follow the pleasure, since every sensation was mutual.

Their bodies moved together, tumbling through the pouring rain as Luneth plunged his eager shaft into her welcoming heat and Harriet rocked and squeezed and bounced against him. Together, they rose to a peak, and together they cried out, clinging to each other through shudders of ecstasy.

As her pussy stopped clenching and resumed slowly sliding along his length, Harriet slid her hands up to his face and smiled contently. Luneth kissed her fingers and slid his own hands up to the back of her neck to undo the knot there. The front of her suit fell loose, exposing her breasts directly to the icy rain and to the startling warmth of Luneth's delicate palms.

Harriet arched into his touch, impaling herself more forcefully on his shaft - and it was like there was a second sun in the sky.

KRAKTHOOM!

A wall of wind and sound slammed into them and smashed them apart. Sunlight lanced down as it blew out the rain. Harriet tumbled wildly, losing her bearings in the rushing roar of turbulence.

Harriet managed to orient herself and come to a stop. She felt out for Luneth... there! She spun and dove, cutting through the air like a bullet. Luneth was falling slowly, having recovered from his own tumble. He had enough telekinetic strength to account for almost half his weight, so he could slow himself noticeably. Harriet swooped in and caught him.

"Oh dear, the star fairies are going to be mad again," Luneth said, gazing upwards.

"You said they left! What the bloody hell was that?" Harriet wondered, following Luneth's gaze.

Oh. Oh. Bugger.

The spring storm had been sliced in half by a line of obliteration, but it was only the last of several, and there, directly down the valley of clouds, a tiny silvery speck darted towards the ground. The other lines were fainter, being higher in the atmosphere, criss-crossing one after another as they got lower and lower, until the last one had cut a storm in half and interrupted some very lovely shagging.
Harriet's eye followed the imaginary vertical line that intersected the horizontal contrails, down to the landscape laid out before her. Her heart stumbled as she recognized the revealed destination.

"That's the Deeper Well!" Harriet exclaimed. "Something the Fae are shooting at just landed in the Deeper Well! Sod!"

Harriet knew what was hidden there. She'd seen it, felt it, back when she'd only been with the coven half a year and she'd foiled Thomas Riddle's megalomaniacal plans for the first time.

"You should drop me," Luneth said suddenly.

Harriet blinked. "What?!"

"Drop me," Luneth repeated serenely. "I'll tell the coven, while you go ahead. I'll be fine."

Harriet winced. "You sure, Lune?"

"Quite sure, Harri," Luneth told her with a smile.

"I love you," Harriet said. "I promise I'll be careful."

A moment of lingering tenderness, and Harriet pulled away. She spun and shot off after that silver speck, leaving Luneth to his own devices. Her focus narrowed as she accelerated, almost but not quite reaching the sound barrier as she zeroed in on the Deeper Well.

The entrance was hidden by fog and gnarled overgrown trees, or at least it had been last time. Charred and splintered branches formed a clear path down to the entrance itself, the opening of an earthen pit, an impossibly deep hollow shaft. Harriet plunged into it at a thousand kilometers an hour, shooting down the center as countless rings of tombs - wardstones and sealed evils - blurred by.

Harriet threw a hand forward, stoked the correct emotions with the ease of long practice, and focused hard on that silver speck she'd seen. "Bring my quarry to sight! Aradia's light!"

A quartet of glowing golden orbs coalesced around her hand and streaked off ahead of her, leaving a braid of glowing trails in their wake. The spell vanished into the distance, but a moment later light bloomed far ahead.

It illuminated a gleam of silver.

Replicarter scowled as the creature ripped her arm in half. The presence of the vampiric guardian had surprised her. He must be a recent development, or Daniel would have known.

Three barbed tendrils sprouted from her stump and went for the guardian's eyes. He twitched out of the way and landed a knife-hand to Replicarter's sternum. She ignored it and animated her severed arm. It slithered into a bladed shape and sliced through the back of the guardian's leg.

He snarled, and she slid forward, moving in to strike at his chest. He blocked, but she let her other arm come apart even as her chest sprouted more bladed tendrils. Her arm reformed into a noose, and the guardian's eyes bulged as she sawed implacably at his neck.

His flesh crumbled, and Replicarter tossed the desiccated skeleton to her drones for dismemberment. Her severed parts rejoined her, and she rippled as she restored her human guise.

Replicarter strode further into the chamber, only to suddenly spin back as she sensed something incoming. A light bloomed among the largest mass of drones and exploded, scattering repliblocks
everywhere and momentarily blinding her.

In the wake of the explosion, a girl floated into view and settled to the stone floor. She was clad in swimwear, with wild black hair and vivid green eyes. At a thought, several drones sprang from the walls and ceiling. Walking forward, the girl's eyes barely flicked to each attacker as the drones were slapped out of the air with enough telekinetic force to shatter them against the walls.

"Alright then, who are you supposed to be?" the girl asked.

"I've never had a name of my own," Replicarter said blandly, "but those who know me best have chosen to call me Replicarter."

"Smashing, and I'm Harriet. Harriet Potter," the girl said. "I know what's hidden here. You will not have it."

"So I've heard," Replicarter said flatly, gesturing to the fragments of bone that were all that was left of the first guardian.

The girl blinked in momentary confusion, glancing at the remains. It seemed Harriet hadn't known about the other guardian either. Before her curiosity could get the better of her, Replicarter sent several drones creeping carefully into the next chamber while the rest moved to conceal their departure.

"Look, I don't know why you want the Seed, but - "

Replicarter attacked without warning, forcing the girl to cut off mid-word and fling herself out of the way. Harriet was impressively fast, but Replicarter wasn't limited to human shape, and thin bladed whips slashed out, catching Harriet across the face and throwing her back.

The girl hung in the air and tucked into an acrobatic flip. Her foot lashed out, and even though it didn't come anywhere close to hitting Replicarter, she felt an impact smash into her and hurl her into the far wall.

Glowering in irritation, Replicarter ducked under a followup blast of magical force and shot out several needle-thin tendrils. The sharp points rammed into the girl's neck... and completely failed to penetrate. The girl's face wasn't injured either, but that could have been magical defense. The concession to modesty had kept it from being her first guess, but clearly Harriet was Fae.

The girl made a grasping gesture and Replicarter felt the ground fall away from her feet. She shot out tendrils to anchor herself, but when Harriet wrenched her arm back, telekinetic force violently tore Replicarter from her moorings and hurled her out of the chamber. The expanse of the main shaft flashed passed. An instant later, Replicarter impacted among the tombs on the opposite side of the Well like a meteor.

Meanwhile, her drones climbed the stone pedestal, reached out with blocky limbs, and touched the Seed of Wonder.

Replicarter oozed out of her impact crater, pulled herself together, rippled into human guise, and smiled. The parameters and functions of the Ancient device flooded her mind. This sangraal was everything she'd hoped for and so much more. A weapon to kill gods was only the crudest of its uses.

Harriet flew out after her, swooping around the leg of Replicarter's small transport. Replicarter smiled victoriously, and used the Seed to erase the girl's imprint on the higher plane. The look on the girl's face was comical as her mind ceased to have direct effects on reality and she simply fell out of the
air, plunging to an uncertain doom in the depths below.

"...no!"

Replicarter watched impassively until the girl had fallen out of visual range. Her drones emerged into the main shaft, carrying the glowing red crystal egg. A moment's thought, and she was standing in their midst.

Picking up the Seed, she held it to her chest and opened her skin. Silvery tendrils wrapped around the Seed and pulled it into her torso. With a ripple, her human guise was once more restored, with the Seed of Wonder contained within her.

On a whim, Replicarter gave herself a complete imprint. It was superfluous while she had the Seed, but there didn't seem to be a reason not to do it. She calculated her next edit carefully, and she vanished from the Deeper Well, taking her transport and her drones with her.

Chapter End Notes

(I considered writing Harriet Potter and the Seed of Wonder as a sidestory-prequel, but ultimately decided to curb my impulse to get sidetracked.)

(I decided to split the penultimate chapter, Reckoning, into two parts because it turned out to be just ridiculously long. Part 2 is nearly finished and will be posted soon.)
In the void between stars, a gas giant four times the mass of Jupiter drifted, cold and alone. This was the rallying point the assault fleet had agreed on. Those ships close enough to make it in time to join the assault arrived over the course of an hour, flashing in from hyperspace or surfacing from the dimensional sea.

The first ship to arrive was also the ship that had been assigned overall tactical command of the fleet. The TSAB dimensional cruiser *Phedre*, under the command of Captain Miya Ascari, had been at the forefront of the opposition since before the Battle of New Aln.

It wasn't long before the first Fae generation ship showed up, dwarfing the *Phedre* by several orders of magnitude. The agile dimensional cruiser was like a metallic insect facing a curving wall of pearl.

They hailed, "Willem Rin of the *Rushing Colors* checking in. You must be Captain Ascari and the *Phedre*.

The *Qvothe*, the *Hawke*, and the *Nausica* from the TSAB arrived next, followed shortly by the *Odyssey* and the *Deadalus* emerging from hyperspace. More ships arrived. The *Arthra*, followed by the *Eliezer* and the *Tender Heart*. The dimensional cruisers *Mononoke* and *Morrigan*. The generation ships *Starswirl* and *Jubilation*. The *Leliana* and the *Howl*, followed by the *Rare Bell*.

Finally, the last ship arrived, and with them a welcome surprise. "Wren Rin of the *Appleseed* checking in. Sorry we're late, everybody, but we brought friends from the rebel jaffa."

It was only five ha'taks and eight al'kesh, but with their leaders indisposed, it had seemed like the rebel jaffa would be sitting this one out entirely. With the *Appleseed*, in addition to the jaffa ships, they had a total of nine TSAB dimensional cruisers, seven Fae generation ships, and two USAF battleships.

Miya regarded the array of screens that filled the space in front of her command chair. Eight captains in crisp naval uniforms, or in one case a Barrier Jacket, looked back at her from one row, while a startlingly diverse array of nude Fae women, and one man, who for some reason all had nearly the same face under the wild variety, watched her from the next. The two tau'ri Colonels, and the five jaffa commanders, were drab in contrast, as were the backdrops to their images.

She looked at each in turn, and spoke, "Firstly, thank you for honoring me with this charge. For my fellow naval officers, I hope to live up to your decision, and for our welcome allies, I'll strive to live up to the trust you've placed in us. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Miya Ascari, and it was my ship that made first contact with the Ori four years ago. I have faced them in battle
many times, and I have gained much hard-won experience combating the Ori."

Miya allowed herself a small smile as the faces arrayed in front of her remained respectful. On the bridge of her own ship, Matsu turned from her console to give Miya a thumbs-up, and Miya saw Kagari salute out of the corner of her eye. Miya settled herself to go over the assault plan one last time with everyone at once.

"Our attack will take place in three stages," Miya began. "First, we must breach Dakara's orbital defenses. The *Phedre*, the *Hawke*, and the *Mononoke* will approach through the dimensional sea to scout and relay enemy positions to the spearhead..."

Access to the dimensional sea was still their clearest advantage over the Ori. Three sleek dimensional cruisers powered through the eldritch colors of the sea in tight formation, and soon rose to touch realspace at their destination.

While the vast windows were still filled with the endlessly shifting colors, they were close enough to breaking through that their sydar could reach the other side.

"Beginning synced sydar sweep," Matsu reported. "Wait just a sec for threefolding... and we're populating the map."

"How's it look?" Miya asked.

"Twenty three Ori motherships in a loose net directly above the objective," Matsu reported. "Another fourteen in deep orbit."

"Calculate your best approach vector and relay to the *Starswirl*." Miya turned her attention to the planet itself. "Have they entered the temple?"

Matsu went to work on the sydar readings, and quickly came back with, "Faint energy readings at the base of the structure, but... whoa."

"Matsu," Miya prompted.

"I... I don't know what that is, but something is active inside the base of the structure," Matsu explained, sounding unsettled. "Look at these readings. I don't even know how to describe this!"

"Once we have eyes on the situation, the *Starswirl* will berth the *Arthra* and the *Nausica* and drop out of hyperspace as close to the planet as possible," Miya continued.

"We get the *Arthra* and *Nausica* through whatever orbital defenses the Ori have in place and into the atmosphere," Danielle Rin nodded along from the *Starswirl*.

"The *Arthra* and the *Nausica* are our landing party," Miya said. "Our best melee and ground mages will gather on the *Nausica*, while our nine Fae close-quarters specialists board the *Arthra*.

A spiraling braided ribbon built of glowing orbs connected by glowing blue threads, so it looked to be made of abstract constellations, swirled out across an area three miles wide. Like ornaments on a tree of every imaginable variety, hundreds of model planets nestled in the highway of stars, ranging from the size of a sofa to the size of a mansion.

Every planet was hollow, a shell of plush pillows with an entrance worked into the outer design.
Inside, the exact nature of the cocoon of cushions depended on what the planet's exterior was styled to resemble. Water planets had slick water-filled sacs. Garden worlds mostly had some variation of squishy fronds and silky flower petals. Gas giants had some variety of air-filled balloons made of fluffy or sensuous fabrics. Then there were the less realistic planets, like the disembodied boob, which was a sphere of skin the size of a two-car garage with a porous pink nipple on it. After crawling in through the nipple, the interior was lined with breasts, as one might expect from the theme.

At the very center, where the ribbons of interconnected stars converged, sat a ninety meter sphere, glossy black like something between liquid latex and black jello. Inside, tendon-like strands crisscross and subdivided the space, but the outer membrane was otherwise thin enough to be mostly transparent, and the view was very pretty.

A shallow crevice between two small parallel strands formed something like a sofa, where Joan sat across Danielle's lap with her back against Alex's shoulder and chest. The three of them had opted for luminous white-blue skin and jet black hair filled with glowing dots.

"And they're in," Danielle said, turning to kiss Joan.

"Time for the super sister slayer crisis crossover?" Alex teased.

"Yeah... do you think its gonna be weird?" Joan asked. "I think it might be weird."

"You'll be fine!" Danielle said with aggressive optimism.

Shrugging, Joan drifted up and swung around to kiss Alex and Danielle goodbye, then sprang towards the exit. She slid through the slit and darted away, pulling herself along a ribbon of stars. Joan shot off the path towards a circle of light in the spacescaped wall and zipped down the soft white tunnel.

Joan quickly reached the hangar Danielle had grown to accommodate the Arthra and the Nausica. A crowd of mages in colorful and elaborate outfits floated around between the two Childan ships.

And there were the nude forms of her sisters and one brother over by the Arthra. Joan darted over to them, only to find Beth, Anne, Wynter, and Buffy had beaten her to the punch being confused at Blake.

"Okay, this I gotta hear," Joan announced, bumping up against Anne because she didn't want to clash color-wise with Wynter. "Is he still a slayer? Are you still a slayer?"

Blake rolled his eyes. "Yep and yeah, I'm still one-hundred percent slayeriffic."

"You said it itches, though," Beth, who'd gone in for bubblegum-pink hair, said.

"Like, it itches in my brain," Blake said. "It's a brain itch. But I can do the ignoring it thing for a while. Trust me, making a Xandra sandwich with Willem like this is totally of the fun. I'm gonna change back, just... not yet."

"So..." Elyse, who'd gone for the garden nymph look, drawled. "Cuddlepile?"

Buffy snickered. "I bet Hayate'd let us borrow her officer suite if we let her join in."

Joan gave Buffy a skeptical look, and was not alone it doing so. Buffy rolled her eyes and started catching her siblings up on the gossip.
Madoka wafted over to the *Nausica* with Homura by her side. They'd talked it over and agreed that without foreknowledge, they'd be less effective in space than planetside. Signum and Vita were coming with them, but the Ace trio had gone with the second wave. Nanoha and Fate were each worth more than a whole squadron of F-302s or deathgliders, and Hayate could personally compete with the arc-en-ciels for raw destructive power.

Homura nudged her. Madoka looked, and saw a very familiar head of blue hair trailed by a flowing white cape.

"Sayaka?!" Madoka exclaimed. "Sayaka!"

The blunette head twisted around, followed by the rest of the girl, and her jaw dropped. "Madoka? What are you - what am I saying of course you're here."

Madoka flew over and hugged her friend. "Sayaka! It's been ages! I have no idea what you've been up to. How's... everything?"

"And who's fault is that?" Sayaka asked playfully. "You ran off with your new love to save the galaxy and forgot all about me!"

Despite the playful tone, Madoka had enough contact from the hug to feel that Sayaka kind of meant that for real, a little bit. Madoka chuckled sheepishly. "I guess I did kind of run off, but I didn't forget you! I'd never do that, Sayaka."

"Oy! Miki!" another young woman in a red Barrier Jacket shouted. "What's the holdup?"

Sayaka broke the hug to make a face at the other girl. "Be nice! Madoka and I go way back, y'know?"

Madoka studied the newcomer, tilting her head thoughtfully. She was familiar somehow, where had... "Oh!" Madoka exclaimed, then blushed a little as everyone looked at her. "Um, I remember you. You were there, in Mitakihara that day..."

"Right, right, poor Mami. I've heard of you! Kyoko Sakura," she introduced herself. "The gals call me Sarge."

"It's nice to meet you," Madoka said politely, slipping a hand into Homura's. "Did Sayaka mention Homura?"

Kyoko snorted. "Once or twice, if you know what I mean."

Sayaka flushed and looked like she wanted to punch Kyoko in the back of the head. "So anyway! How 'bout these Ori, eh?"

"We don't know how well our ships will stand up to direct hits from the Ori beam weapons," Danielle warned. "The possible results range from tasty snack to big ragged hole, so we're going to minimize how much time they have to shoot at us."

"Which is why the *Starswirl* in particular is going in first," Juniper added, from the *Tender Heart*. "Of our ships, they have the smallest population."

"Yes," Miya said. "So the *Starswirl* tanks a token shot or two, drops off the landing party, and jumps back to hyperspace before they hit the atmosphere."
Miya resisted the urge to wince and scowl at Matsu. She'd actually used 'tank' as a verb in a formal briefing! She and Matsu were clearly getting too familiar with each other, if the younger woman was rubbing off on her this much.

Held secure in Alex's arms, Danielle let awareness of the Starswirl fill her mind. The hyperspace corridor terminated and they were suddenly right in front of a planet. They were decidedly not in orbit, and a rippling groan passed through the Starswirl due to tidal tension as it began to fall - the distance between the front of the Starswirl and the atmosphere of Dakara was less than the length of the ship at that altitude.

Danielle had a moment to get her bearings, and then her mind was dancing. Golden beams of high energy exotic particles lanced out of Ori motherships from every lateral direction. Danielle didn't dare get anywhere near stardrive thrust this close to a habitable planet, but she could counter the incoming blasts at their own level.

Thin streams of noble gas fountained off the Starswirl's pearly hull, slamming into the much slower golden beams. Space lit up with bursts of thermonuclear fire as the massive kinetic energies forced fusion in the colliding streams.

Danielle flinched as an Ori beam got through and speared into the Starswirl's flank. The hull managed to absorb most of the energy, but the golden beam still managed to rend the pearly membrane.

"Dangit! I'm not fast enough," Danielle muttered. "I think those beams are magically coherent, too, so the energy isn't - oh crap!"

Danielle jolted and scrambled to reinforce the damaged area - it was trying to heal, but the entire ship was under tension from being this close to a gravity well. The small round crater stretched and tore, becoming a faultline kilometers long before the protoscape had absorbed the damaged parts and grown enough of a reinforcing substructure.

The Starswirl took another hit while Danielle was distracted, then another and another, blowing craters in the ship big enough to drop an ocean liner inside and slagging tons upon tons of protoscape into uselessness.

"Grrr," Danielle strained to keep up, then, with a shudder, the front of the Starswirl plunged into Dakara's atmosphere. "Landing parties, launch now!"

Alex tensed against her back. "The Arthra's tunnel is caved in!"

As the Nausica passed through an undamaged section of hull and streaked towards the surface, the Arthra screamed to a halt. Danielle mentally glanced at the problem in between her now-frantic point-defense blasts. New tunnel or absorb and repair the damage? Both, duh! She didn't have time to figure out which would take longer.

"Arthra, if you or someone you've got can blast your way out, do it!" Alex ordered, coming up with his own solution.

"Negative, Starswirl," Chrono replied. "Our arc-en-ceil is not charged."

"How long if you backtracked to the Nausica's tunnel?" Danielle asked.

The surface of Dakara was getting alarmingly close, and most of the Ori motherships were behind them now. Danielle abandoned point-defense and focused on the collapsed tunnel. The new tunnel
was forming too slowly, and the healthy protoscape had to go through a three-step process to get rid of the damaged part. Severing the damaged area with chemical explosives would be fast enough, but it'd leave a mountain-sized chunk to hit the planet, and that was not the plan.

"Minutes, without a straight-away," Chrono replied, sounding frustrated.

Danielle checked the progress of the tunnel against the approaching planet. Just barely. Just barely! They could make it!

Buffy waited with her sisters in the Arthra’s launch bay for another tense minute. Finally, a new tunnel opened up in front of the Arthra, and Joan's Willow-a-like gave the command.

"Arthra, you're clear! Go very fast right now please!" Danielle's voice sounded.

Chrono didn't waste any time. The Arthra shot forward down the soft white tunnel. The floor lurched with sudden deceleration as the hull rippled around the Arthra, and then they were in open air, with the ground rushing up at them.

Buffy readied herself. It was time to show these Ori guys what seven of her could do.

Chrono's voice sounded through the ship. "All hands brace for impact!"

Impact? What - something smashed the Arthra hard enough to send Buffy and her sisters hurling into the walls of the launch bay hard enough to leave dents. The lights flickered as the metal walls tumbled around them, slamming Buffy around like a pinball.

Everything went blindingly bright and bizarrely colorful as deafening noise swept Buffy into the sky.

By the time Buffy flipped around into a stable skydiving pose, the Arthra was so much falling wreckage, and... holy fuck. There was an empty space in the air... a space actually empty of air slowly shrinking as she watched. A hole in the atmosphere so big that she could actually see the difference between vacuum and air plain as day.

Hey, sister-types? Buffy sent, deadpan. I think we just discovered a flaw in the plan.

Somebody's getting smacked for not thinking of this, Elyse agreed.

The wind carried Buffy and her sisters along as air rushed to fill the empty space. And as the void shrank, it began to spin. As the familiar funnel shape slowly formed, Buffy blanched.

It was a tornado. It was the mother of all tornadoes. It was what the mother of all tornadoes wanted to be after reaching a transtornado state! And the eye of the storm was forming directly above the ancient temple. Buffy squinted, and... was that the Nausica? What was it doing...?

We have to make it into the eye! Wynter exclaimed.

We can't let the wind throw us clear or we won't be able to reach the battle! Beth finished the thought.

Buffy grumbled to herself about having gotten that in a second even as she arrowed her body towards the forming vortex. She spread her Utility Cloud, trying to catch more air in an electrostatic net, but she started losing volume to the wind almost faster than her body could replace the Utility Cloud particles. She still managed to catch almost as much air as a skydiver's wingsuit.

It wasn't going to be enough.
Link up! Buffy ordered. *I think we'll get through better in one clump!*

Buffy banked and caught up with Elyse, clasping arms. Anne drifted up and grabbed on, followed by Blake. Wynter linked up with Beth and Joan, and the three of them slammed into the larger cluster, spinning them around before they formed a stable formation.

Together, seven nude slayers hurtled into the roaring vortex.

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Miya composed herself and continued to outline the plan. "Once the landing party is on the ground. The *Odyssey*, *Daedalus*, and the first three ha'taks should be coming out of hyperspace. They'll launch fighters, which we will supplement with our Air Mages."

"Our spaceworthy mages will be on standby on the *Mononoke*, the *Hawke*, the *Qvothe*, and the *Leliana,*" Captain Ginnetta said, from the *Mononoke*.

"We'll form a counter-screen and engage the Ori ship to ship," Captain Triking continued, from the *Qvothe*.

"Saints! We just lost the *Arthra!*"

Fate gasped softly, and Nanoha looked at her in dismay. Fate's brother, and the ship that was a huge part of both of their childhoods, destroyed. Nanoha gripped Fate's hand and squeezed.

"Chrono's paranoid," Nanoha murmured. "I'd bet my left ear he was wearing his Barrier Jacket at full defensive strength. Even if he is hurt, there will be enough of him left to save."

Fate swallowed heavily and nodded once, her face hardening. Nanoha smiled and squeezed Fate's hand again.

"Space fighter team, standby," came the voice of Captain Ginetta. "You are clear to engage the enemy."

The bay doors slid open and air rushed out into space. Nanoha held herself in place against the decompression with a minor effort of will and narrowed her eyes as Raising Heart networked tactical data and started highlighting targets. Teardrop-shaped Ori fighters filled her field of view as the friendly F-302s and deathgliders flew in from the sides.

Half a dozen other mages let themselves be blown out into space while Nanoha and Fate stood at the edge of the bay.

EXELION MODE, LIMIT BREAK, Raising Heart announced, and Nanoha hardened her heart. There was no such thing as non-lethal force in a space battle where one side didn't have an overwhelming advantage. It did make her feel better that most of the enemy pilots could probably be retrieved and revived as Fae, if that seemed like a good idea after everything was over. FLASH FIN.

GLAIVE FORM, LIMITER NULL, Bardiche declared, reconfiguring in Fate's hand. SONIC DRIVE.

Metal buckled under her feet as Fate erupted out of the bay, cutting a line of yellow through the battlesphere. An Ori fighter exploded as Fate cut it in half on her way passed.

An Ori mothership swung its main weapon towards the Mononoke, and Nanoha launched herself into space. Golden plasma gathered and blasted out. Nanoha met it head-on, grinning fiercely as she
swung Raising Heart forward.

DIVINE BUSTER.

A beam of pink magical force met golden and shredded it, punching straight down the center of the Ori beam, bypassing the mothership’s shields entirely. The spell sliced into the projector dish and detonated the magitech focusing arrays. Thank you, Homura, for discovering that trick at the supergate.

The Ori mothership buckled and exploded. Nanoha thrust out her hand, and a pink Circle the size of a city block unfurled in front of her. Debris crashed into unyielding magic and stopped cold. Nanoha dismissed the Circle and flew through the wreckage to catch up with Fate.

Fate darted among the dueling fighter craft, firing off shooting spells or throwing arcs of magical lightning. She danced through the battle like death herself, cutting enemy ships to pieces with a lightning sword bigger than she was, evading every shot fired at her and retaliating with her spells. Small swarms of glowing yellow dots danced with her, punching holes in the enemy fighters and detonating. Saints and kami, she was beautiful.

Saving the surge of desire for later, Nanoha flew in front of an F-302 and blocked a barrage of blue plasma bolts with fast, precise barrier fields. She sighted on the scattering teardrop-shaped fighters as containment rings spun into existence.

CROSSFIRE ACCEL, Raising Heart intoned.

Six thick streams shot towards the Ori formation, targeting each individually and impaling them like glowing pink combat tentacles of doom. Nanoha made a satisfied noise as four more fighters exploded.

Fate spun, reacting to another squadron from the planetary north,

PHOTON LANCER PHALANX SHIFT, Bardiche announced.

Orbs of yellow light sparked to life all around Fate, as countless as the stars themselves. It rained lightning on the Ori fighter squadron.

Off in the distance, Nanoha spotted Hayate’s distinctive Ragnarok spell overwhelming an Ori mothership’s shields with brute force.

"Meanwhile, our ground forces launch an all-out assault on the Ori defensive positions around the temple," Captain Lotus said with a nod, from the Nausica.

"It is critical that the Fae detachment withers as much mundane weapons fire as they can, leaving the mages to pit their full strength against the Priors," Miya continued.

Homura huddled under Madoka’s shield with the rest of their group. Finally, the winds calmed, but looking out, Homura saw a wall of wind surrounding them. They were in the eye of a vortex big enough to fit twenty dimensional cruisers end to end. Madoka dispelled her shield and slumped to catch her breath.

The luckier Ori soldiers likewise emerged from clusters all over the temple grounds as Priors dismissed their glimmering telekinetic shells. Homura stood guard while Madoka gathered herself, but many of the enemy soldiers were busy gawking at the tornado that had formed around the
"No Fae," Sayaka said, gulping. "The Arthra... did they make it?"

Madoka straightened up. "Found Chrono... he says the Arthra's gone, and he's too injured to fight."

Kyoko punched a rock. "Damn."

Signum raised Laevatein as the closest Prior turned to stare at them. "For these stakes, we fight, even with our force reduced."

"Yes!" cheered one of the girls from the Nausica, named Musubi, as she brandished Bear Knuckle, her Device. "We'll fight until we're beaten and bloody and broken!"

"Heh, what she said," Kyoko said wryly.

Sayaka chuckled nervously and flourished Shining Edge. One cluster of Ori soldiers was leveling their staves at the group for a volley.

"She's right," Madoka said with a little smile. "It doesn't matter how bad our chances are. We're all there is."

"Yup," Sayaka deadpanned. "So hey! Did I tell you guys it turns out I have an affinity? You should see the awesome moves I can pull off in the rain. I can totally walk on water, too."

"Oh, that's great, Sayaka!" Madoka praised.

"...but not relevantly useful," Homura added.

Vita snickered.

Homura tensed, as nearly a hundred blasting staves lined up to aim at them. Then, they fired.

Signum exploded into motion, flame igniting in the wake of Laevatein's blade as she streaked along the earthen stone. Kyoko slid forward and planted the butt of her spear-shaped Device. A blazing red Circle snapped into place.

ECHO CHAIN, her Device declared.

A dense weave of diamonds of red light laced together and took the volley of staff blasts. A pink Circle unfolded under Madoka's feet as she pointed Galvan Soul at the spreading cluster of Ori soldiers.

CELESTIAL BARRAGE, Galvan Soul announced, as the Echo Chain faded.

A twisting helix of pink light blasted out, tracing a line from Madoka to the Prior, who raised his glowing staff to block. Madoka's bombardment spell met the Prior's telekinetic shield and fractured, but while the Prior was distracted, Signum swooped in low to the ground and slashed. The fiery blade cut through the Prior's spine.

Two charred halves of the Prior crumpled to the ground. Signum set her feet and launched into the air.

ENHANCERFORM, Galvan Soul declared, reshaping into a quarterstaff as Madoka flew off in the same direction.
Vita raised her hammer and blasted off, flying at Madoka's side.

Homura left cover, running with a steady stride. SLIDER DRIVE. Everything was stillness and grey as she closed on the platoon of Ori soldiers. Color and movement returned as Homura reached the men who were only just aiming at where she'd emerged.

Surprised cries greeted her as a leg sweep took down the first soldier. Homura grabbed his staff and used it to parry a second. She jumped over a blue plasma blast and brought Skjoldur down on the offending weapon, snapping it in half.

SLIDER DRIVE, Skjoldur droned.

Stillness and grey. Homura leaped lightly out of the crowd, using their heads as stepping stones. She hopped down outside their broken formation and leveled her stolen blasting staff. Homura dashed around the Ori platoon, firing the staff into the mass of bodies as rapidly as it could handle while she circled them. Bolt after bolt of blue plasma accumulated in a growing ring around the reeling soldiers, until the plasma was a solid mass.

Homura pushed the blasting staff into Skjoldur's sealing dimension and walked away as time resumed and thousands of plasma bolts obliterated the Ori platoon behind her.

Madoka dueled with a Prior, staff clashing with staff, telekinetic and other magical forces rending the stone in a stadium-sized area around them and blowing away several soldiers who dared to get within aiming range and hadn't been Vita'd yet. Signum crossed her blade with another Prior's staff, exchanging a quick flurry of strikes and blocks before a telekinetic blast nearly threw her all the way to the wall of wind.

Sayaka, Kyoko, and Musubi tag-teamed a third platoon. Sayaka waded into the soldiers while Musubi went berserker on the Prior's defenses and Kyoko came in behind the Prior and took his head off with her spear.

SCHLANGEFORM, came Laevatein, extending into a long segmented chain whip in Signum's hand.

Kyoko leaped towards Signum, her own Device declaring, SERPENT CHAIN.

Two mages with roughly the same trick came at the Prior from two sides, forming a meatgrinder of writhing blades. Every time he blasted away the encroaching chains in one direction, they'd get closer in another. Finally a blade pierced through, and with his concentration shattered, the chains tore him to bloody chunks in less than a second.

Madoka finally knocked her opponent's staff out of his grip. She darted into the opening, got close, and ripped into the Prior's mind. He twitched in her grip and went still.

They solved the puzzle on the temple door, Madoka reported. But the mechanism is stuck, and the whole structure is... magically null? Somehow?

White rays of light suddenly shown down on Madoka, Vita, Kyoko, and Sayaka, and the ground around them blackened and crumbled. They'd killed four Priors in less than a minute, but there were over a dozen Priors on the temple grounds and by now they'd realized they'd need to do more than watch and pontificate on the blasphemers' demise.

Madoka cried out and covered her face with her arms. Sayaka shoved Kyoko out of the light and leaped after, screaming in pain as her Barrier Jacket failed -
Homura lunged forward. SLIDER DRIVE.

Homura dashed up to Madoka and pulled her into the spell. Madoka gasped in pain and fell into Homura's arms, shivering. Homura swept her off her feet and carried her out of the destructive light.

"Ow... thank you, Homura," Madoka said, managing a smile.

"Always," Homura murmured tenderly.

Madoka's gaze drifted over Homura's shoulder, and Madoka's head tilted as she blinked several times. "Huh. Is... that Buffy?"

Homura peered upwards. It was. The nude blonde was paused a moderate distance above the head of the Prior who was casting the light of decay, poised for an epic dropkick.

"Ah, well it looks like it would've been okay," Madoka said. "Still... you should probably grab Vita too, just in case."

Homura nodded, shifting Madoka to one arm as she walked over and grabbed Vita's collar.

"- ucking shioo...oh, 'kay," Vita trailed off. "Hey."

Homura walked Vita out of the area of effect, let go of her, and turned to where Sayaka was paused in mid-leap. Madoka made a distressed noise as they got closer. Sayaka didn't have legs so much as leg-shaped clouds of ash that hadn't separated from her bleeding stumps yet.

"Can you bring her in long enough to keep her from bleeding out?" Madoka asked.

Homura considered. "I think so, I can't hold three much longer than that, though."

Madoka looked around. "Over there. We can take cover there. I'll heal her in real time."

Homura nodded, dashed over, and set Madoka down behind the stone block. Madoka went still and grey while Homura jogged back to Sayaka and got a good grip on the blunette.

"- eaaaaaagh!" Sayaka screamed in pain. "Aaaaag! Ah fuck my legs! My legs! Fuaaaah!"

Homura dragged Sayaka over to Madoka as efficiently as she could and dropped her at Madoka's feet. Homura looked around in ensuing silence. Her eyes scanned the battlefield, taking in each detail carefully.

There, that Prior was looking in a direction that might let him see the blonde Fae. Homura sprang towards the Prior, bounding across the temple grounds. The stargate made a convenient stepping stone to leap up into that Prior's line of sight.

Homura landed on a Circle and pulled her stolen blasting staff out of Skjoldur. She aimed at the Prior and fired, filling the air with a cluster of blue plasma bolts. Once she had a suitable screen, Homura dismissed the Circle, dropped back to the ground, and ducked behind the stargate.

Motion and color.

A towering explosion engulfed the unfortunately observant Prior, and Buffy smashed into the Prior of decay's head at terminal velocity. The destructive light winked out as Buffy's heels crushed the Prior's head against the ground, spraying blood and brain bits all over the surrounding Ori troop.

Another naked body struck the ground like a meteor, beside the stargate. A female figure with icy
blue skin came rocketing out of the resulting dust cloud and dashed towards the next Ori platoon.

The rest of the Fae detachment rained down around the temple grounds, and leaping into the fight. With breathtaking speed and grace, a variety of nude beauties dove into the Ori formations, and a moment later armored bodies were flying everywhere.

The *Nausica* made it back into air support range as well, and fired down into the Ori formations.

"Fuck yes!" Kyoko shouted. "It's about time you got here!"

Homura turned to the temple entrance, a wall covered in Alteran script and guarded by only a token force with a single Prior. SLIDER DRIVE.

"The Ori will probably have reinforcements patrolling the wider system," Rosie said, from the *Jubilation*. "The remaining ha'taks and the *Morrigan* and *Howl* will accompany one of the *Jubilation*, the *Appleseed*, the *Rare Bell*, or the *Eliezera* to hunt down these patrols."

"The *Rushing Colors* and the *Tender Heart* will hang back in reserve, since we've got the biggest populations by far," Willem said, from the *Rushing Colors*.

Nods of agreement.

"Once the ground force gains access to the temple, they are to evaluate if the precursor weapon can be safely destroyed, in the event that we fail to hold the planet," Miya continued. "If at all possible, we want the artifact captured for study, but depending on the specific nature of the weapon, we may not be able to afford any risk of it being retaken."

The last Prior fell to Signum's blade, and the lot of them gathered at the puzzle wall. Behind them, the stargate fell in the shadow of the *Nausica* as it settled to the ground, and opened to admit Kyoko carrying the maimed Sayaka. A wall of sideways sliding wind filled the sky beyond.

"Can you read that?" one of the Fae asked.

"Yes!" Madoka said. "Our Devices are translating. Let's see..."

Homura frowned. It was some kind of rambling semi-poetic parable. There were circles cut in around the words at various places, and Homura peered at the circled portions of text to see if there was something about those passages that would provide a clue.

Madoka approached the stone edifice, reading it carefully. Suddenly, it rumbled. Madoka recoiled with an eep.

"What'd you do?" Vita demanded.

Madoka shook her head. "I don't know, its..."

The whole temple seemed to rumble under their feet. Homura glanced up and pointed. Seams were appearing in the peak of the temple's structure.

"Signum!" Vita suddenly cried.

Homura spun around and icy fear gripped her chest. The grounds between them and the stargate were packed with grey metal creatures. Small skittering bugs, big lumbering beetles, and floating stingers with four wing-like limbs glowing blue. Through the mass of Replicators, the stargate was
dialing.

With a kawoosh, the stargate opened and -

...times many and one, together and apart, fractured flow, conflicting phase space...

- Homura staggered, falling to her knees. Madoka's arms caught her as she blinked the dizziness away. What? What was that?

"Look above," Signum said sharply.

Homura lurched back to her feet. The top of the temple had split open in four parts, revealing some kind of mechanism hidden within, streamers and arcs of energy coursed around a brightening sphere, and there in the center of it... somber charcoal grey clothing, blonde hair, a woman, levitating amidst the roiling energy.

Homura slowly looked between the army of metal creatures and the woman.

"What the hells? No seriously what the hells?" Vita exclaimed. "Who's she supposed to be?"

Madoka stared in determination then flinched away. "I can't touch her mind."

"It wouldn't surprise me if the metal creatures attack as soon as we make an aggressive move towards her," Homura mused.

"This is the weapon we came for," Signum said, shifting into a stance. "It doesn't matter who she is. We stop her from setting it off."

Homura kind of thought she looked like Major Carter. Homura estimated the distances, and the size of her companions, checked with Skjoldur, and tossed her hair back.

"I can take three of you," Homura said. "Any more and I won't be able to maintain Slider Drive long enough to matter."

The air suddenly filled with clacking sounds and the hum of electrical charge. Eyes widening, Signum threw out a Triangle just in time to block a volley of electrical bolts.

"Um, I think they can hear us!" Madoka exclaimed, as Galvan Soul went, ARCHERFORM.

WARP SPLINTER, Skjoldur droned.

Homura threw several shards of purple light at a stinger's wing, while Madoka launched pink bolts and Vita leaped forward, swinging her hammer in a wide cleave. The blondes and the blue ones sprang into the onrushing mass, while two more Fae threw a third at another of the flying stingers.

"Madoka and two Fae!" Signum suggested.

"Elyse and Anne! Go!" The two Fae in question dashed towards Homura.

Homura leaped back as an electrical bolt blew stone chips into the air. SLIDER DRIVE.

Stillness and grey. Homura grabbed the two Fae first. Elyse had skin that was chlorophyl green, darkening towards her extremities and lightening towards her torso. Her hair, lips, nipples and folds were sakura-blossom pink with faint floral patterns radiating out from each in shades of pastel sunlight yellow that matched her eyes. Anne's skin was gold, and her hair and eyes were black, with braids running down her back.
"Hang on to my shoulders," Homura told them both as she grabbed Madoka. "Hurry, please."

Madoka nodded quickly and levitated all four of them. Homura grimaced and forced her spell to remain. The amount of effort it took to maintain Slider Drive went up exponentially with the volume she had to affect, and four petite girls was only just within her limits.

They reached the peak, and Madoka formed a Circle for them to stand on. Homura glanced up, and blinked. It really did look like Major Carter. Her paused eyes were alive with triumph as blinding streamers of energy coursed through her chest.

Madoka took an archer's stance and raised Galvan Soul. A containment ring drew itself out. Homura trembled and had to drop the two Fae out of Slider Drive. She sighed in relief.

PSION FINALE, Galvan Soul declared.

The pink blast slowed and lost its color as it left Madoka's bow. Homura braced herself and pulled the Fae back in.

"If you don't have a better idea, just throw us in there and we'll start breaking stuff," Anne suggested.

Homura glanced at Madoka, who shook her head. Madoka telekinetically propelled each of them out after her bombardment spell. Homura prepared to either catch the unconscious probably-not-Carter or to pull Madoka out of the way of a retaliatory attack.

Motion and color. The torrent of glowing pink force reached the crackling cloud of energy, and vanished. It wasn't deflected, or blocked, or absorbed. It simply ceased to exist.

Homura gasped. "W-what?!"

Eylse and Anne sailed into the area, and seemed to continue to exist without problems. Eylse grabbed a girder and swung down into the mechanism while Anne kicked off shot towards not-Carter.

The woman growled through clenched teeth, and both of her arms melted into silvery whips. One caught Eylse's ankle while the other swung and slammed into Anne hard enough to rip an unprotected human in half. She hurled Eylse back up into Anne's path, but Anne twisted and broke free of the coiling tendril, severing it with a sharp hand strike.

Elyse caught the severed limp and rode it back towards its owner. A fist lashed forward and not-Carter's head burst like a melon, spraying silvery goo.

"This looks important," Anne commented as she landed on a glowing component. She dug her hands in and tore.

More improvised limbs snatched Anne away and hurled her out into open air before she got more than one hit in. She suddenly changed directions in mid-flight, snapping towards a girder like a magnet, but it gave not-Carter enough time to reform and spot what Anne was doing.

The Replicator's eyes widened in complete horror.

Replicarter's plan was actually quite simple, if absurdly grand in scale. She was baiting a trap. She'd gleaned more than just the Seed of Wonder's location from Daniel's mind. It was a trap on several layers, with several ways it could succeed, some more preferable than others.
It was a trap for gods, and either way it would end in deicide.

And yet, despite all her precautions, despite how heavily she'd stacked the deck, she hadn't been prepared for what happened. While she was channeling the reorigination wave through the Seed of Wonder, she had only her physical abilities to defend herself with, and once she began, the entire process was unstable.

She intended a precisely targeted strike. With a Fae wreaking havoc in the mechanisms, the delicate balance of energies unbalanced.

Replicarter had just long enough to stare in horror, and cry out, "No you fools!"

The metal woman exploded violently, and Madoka reeled, raising a second Circle as a shield. Nothing hit it.

The explosion was remarkably contained. A brilliant blood-red sun that somehow remained contained within the glowing nimbus that was rapidly bleeding to the same color. Suddenly, it all shrank to a tiny point, and for a heartbeat all was silent.

The red blast wave burst outwards, and where it passed rock, stone, metal, everything disintegrated, leaving nothing in its wake but dust. Elyse and Anne's eyes both suddenly burned white-hot for a bare instant, before their lifeless bodies were erased.

SLIDER DRIVE.

Stillness and grey and Homura's arms around her. Madoka let out a shocked gasp and fell to her knees on her glowing pink Circle. She couldn't tear her eyes from the wave of destruction, and oh saints she couldn't breathe!

"Oh saints... oh saints... this is our fault," Madoka choked out.

But before Madoka could panic completely, Homura was there. She pulled Madoka into a hard, rough kiss, and like it so often did, the purity of Homura's love bled through to Madoka and grounded her.

Madoka ducked her head against Homura's chest and clung to her. Homura was trembling, trembling with the horror of failure, because there had to be some way, some way to...

"Homura," Madoka murmured, lifting her hand to Homura's face.

Homura stilled.

Madoka shifted back up onto her knees and looked Homura in the eyes. "It's not over. It's not going to end like this. We're not going to let it, okay?"

Homura rested her forehead against Madoka's. "How?"

Madoka pulled herself together. She had to think straight about this, had to get it right, so to start with, she went over what she knew.

"You got dizzy when the stargate opened," Madoka said slowly, firmly taking Homura's hand as she stood and looked down at the glowing portal. "We're within an hour of when your precog failed, and you got dizzy when the stargate opened. Come on!"

Hand in hand, Madoka leaped from her Circle. It went grey and still behind her as she flew down in
front of the stargate. Homura landed lightly beside her, keeping a tight hold.

"Galvan Soul!" Madoka prompted.

AREA SEARCH, the Device declared.

A pink orb formed on Madoka's fingertip and shot towards the event horizon, going still less than an inch from the shimmery blue surface.

"What are you looking for?" Homura asked, glancing back at the paused disintegration wave. "Even if you're right..."

"Homura, think about it!" Madoka exclaimed. "How would a stargate activating break precognition? I just need a quarter of a second to see!"

"Alright," Homura agreed, figuratively glowing with faith in Madoka. "Get ready."

Color and roaring destruction resumed for the blink of an eye... and the search spell shot into the stargate. Stillness and grey, and Madoka recoiled with a cry, clutching her head.

"Madoka!" Homura exclaimed in worry.

Madoka rode out the information overload and steadied, and when she turned to Homura she was smiling brilliantly. "I'm okay."

The red wave of energy had advanced. There was only just enough room to stand comfortably between it and the stargate, but that was okay. Madoka had hope.

"What was it?" Homura asked. "Where does the gate go?"

"Everywhere," Madoka replied a bit breathlessly. "I think... that's how the terraformer was meant to work. The energy wave goes through the stargate, and gets duplicated across every stargate in the galaxy."

Homura made a small distressed noise. "That's... we've as good as doomed an entire reality."

Madoka shook her head fiercely. "No! This is a terrible disaster, but I refuse to let everybody die!"

Homura was definitely getting scared for her now. "Madoka, what are you going to do?"

Madoka hugged her tightly. "There's something I've been saving. I'm not even sure it'll work the way I think it will, but meeting the Fae... it got me thinking. Nothing is truly unrecoverable so long as the important information exists somewhere, in some form."

"You're talking about Spirit Clone," Homura breathed in realization, and her heart swelled with admiration. "A reverse Spirit Clone?"

"I've never gone that deep in someone else's mind," Madoka said. "I've always been scared to try, but if I take everything, all at once..."

"...then what?" Homura asked softly. "How many could you save that way?"

Madoka pulled back and gave Homura a gentle kiss. "Enough... if I go through the stargate."

"But... you'll be torn apart..."
Madoka took another step back, and a nimbus of pink light wrapped around her body, an aura of pure magical power. "The wave is meant to go through the stargate. If you stand directly behind the puddle, I think you'll be protected."

"Then you can be protected the same way!" Homura's voice broke as tears filled her eyes. "Let the world burn, so long as you're safe!"

Madoka smiled sadly. There was nothing she could say to that, that both of them didn't already know, so she just kissed Homura again instead.

"I love you, Homura," Madoka said. "I promise. We'll find our way back to each other, because neither of us will ever give up."

"Never," Homura agreed with a sob.

Madoka took a deep breath. "Galvan Soul Omnia! Clear all data that isn't the Spirit Clone template, remove all nonessential software, repurpose all conjuration nodes to psionic storage space!"

STANDBY... READY. SET.

Madoka turned to face the stargate.

OMNIFORM.

Madoka's Barrier Jacket shifted. There was no weaponry, no life-support fields or physical boosts, and no ruffles. Just an elegant, flowing white gown.

"I have the power to save them," Madoka declared. "Whatever it takes, I'll save everyone!"

Madoka launched herself forward, tearing her hand from Homura's as she plunged into the rippling blue event horizon of the stargate.

Chapter End Notes

(Well... that was a thing than happened. You can be assured that this will be the last cliffhanger in this story... because there's only one more chapter to go! I anticipate finishing this out sometime this month, baring unexpected developments.)

(Sekirei is a thing that belongs to people who are not me.)

(References! Shout outs! Alts! Oh my. Miya and the other recognizable names were indeed alts of the Sekirei, and if you get the reference the name of Miya's dimensional cruiser could not be more ironic. I bet you can guess what the names of all the ships are from... because yeah, I totally named the Fae ships after ponies.)
Willow didn't question or hesitate when Madoka's telepathic command echoed through the entire Dakaran system. The urgency was startling, but even while she was edging on panic, the four of her were busy finding everyone.

Transporter flashes snatched up everyone on the Eliezera and brought them to the Phedre. All across the battlesphere, Fae and tau'ri and jaffa were hastily transported onto the closest dimensional cruiser that had room.

Willow landed, holding Tara tight in her arms as they looked out at the angry red bubble of death sweeping out from the planet surface. The Phedre sank into the eldritch colors of the dimensional sea as they watched, narrowly escaping total obliteration.

It was the craziest thing Madoka had ever done. The mere idea of a plan, based on wild inferences about stargates and half-remembered facts about spirits and metaphysics. It was insane, the kind of thing she wouldn't be able to come back from even if it worked, but the galaxy was being destroyed.

Madoka hurled herself into the portal. Splitting her mass between thousands upon thousands of stargates utterly obliterated Madoka's body, but she blazed with so much magical power that the transition from brain to spirit was completely seamless. It didn't even slow her down.

As indicated by the destructive energy wave used in conjunction with the mass-dialed stargate, matter was divided, but energy was duplicated. One Madoka became legion, emerging as a pink bolt of light from every stargate in the galaxy.

Across a thousand thousand worlds, before an ancient annulus in every imaginable setting, a blazing figure of Madoka appeared in the air. Wherever she ended up, she had the same mission.

SPIRIT CLONE, declared the voice in her mind.

Galvan Soul had been destroyed along with her body, but it was part of spirit-her now. That was how Devices worked: fooling the linker core into seeing it as just another part of a mage's mind. Crystal logic gates and optical memristor matrices became magically self-perpetuating just as readily as neural connections and electrochemical impulses, so long as a linker core was already paying attention to them.

As the energy wave bloomed out of the stargate behind her, the blazing pink figure of Madoka burst apart, spraying bolts of pink light in every direction.

Madoka had gone massively parallel, splintering off a copy of herself for every individual person on whichever planet she found herself on. Every person, everywhere, found themselves startled or woken or greeted by a glowing pink figure, a ghost of a lovely teenage girl in a white gown, pink-haired and golden-eyed, smiling gentle and sad.

Each and every instance of Madoka latched onto the mind or minds presented to her, and pulled everything to the surface all at once. This wasn't merely gleaning the thoughts that passed naturally
through a mind, or establishing a narrowly-targeted reciprocal influence. This wasn't even guided association or brute-force probing. This was every thought, every memory, illuminated simultaneously.

Telepathy could only see the contents of a mind, not a brain. To save a whole person, she had to force the entire contents of their brain into their mind, and she didn't have time to be gentle about it. In humans and similar multicellular sentient life, every neuron fired at once, and then went dark. In the fae-touched and Fae themselves, this triggered flash uploads, burning out the contents of their skulls, but that was okay - the uploads were static, Willow had said, so it amounted to nothing more than a backup copy.

Madoka cradled the minds within herself, and reached out as one. A galaxy-spanning Madoka gestalt ascended, leaving barren worlds to be obliterated by the oncoming energy wave, stripped of magic and rendered into molecular dust.

In a place that wasn't a place, within a metaphor of a metaphor, there was a diner. In this simple cozy diner, that somehow had neither a size nor a specific number of booths, that one could walk from one end to the other in a handful of steps, uncountable multitudes sat in various states of passive apathy or insular boredom.

Newspapers were a popular affectation in this metaphor, representing the idle gazes of beings whittling away their eternity through aimless distraction. Some among them weren't quite so idle, or apathetic, but these were the beings who had better things to do than participate in the metaphor all the time.

Except for that one Alteran woman of course, who as punishment for overreaching was the one, for lack of a better term, GMing the whole scenario, and playing out the part of waitress.

Two things happened at nearly the same moment. First, a pink-haired girl in a white gown stepped into the diner, accompanied by the ring of the door chime. She entered once, and she entered billions upon billions of times. Simultaneously she was a singular being, and an impossible multitude.

This was less disruptive than one would think, given that the metaphor had all the sensory immersion and spacial consistency of text chat, if that.

Still, many occupants of the diner went out of their way to snub and ignore the newcomer, muttering unflattering things about Childans. They seemed to be contradicting themselves even in their insults, disgusted by a deviant civilization that shunned ascension on principle, and offended by arrogant Childan upstarts who thought they were entitled to breeze into the higher planes for material reasons. At least those Fae animals had the decency to be nonmagical.

"Welcome to the astral diner, I'm Oma and I will be your server this eon," the Alteran woman said. "Would you like a seat?"

"I can't have a seat!" Madoka exclaimed, rushing passed Oma. "We're all about to die!"

Oma blinked in surprise as Madoka dashed around her and grabbed at the closest newspaper she could reach... which was every newspaper in the diner. Oma watched in stunned surprise as the newly arrived Childan girl actually managed to wrest the papers away in the majority of cases.

The diner erupted into angry shouting, tinged with an undercurrent of fear as those who Madoka had overpowered demanded retaliation from the greater gods.

"Listen!" Madoka cried. "You have to - "
Madoka cut off as shocked gasps of fear cut through the clamor. The strongest gods - the Powers That Be, the Occult Coalition, the Personifications - those who'd kept hold of their newspapers despite Madoka's efforts, suddenly recoiled.

**THE END IS NIGH**

*Seed of Wonder Detonated At Dakara Terraformer!*

The headline only appeared for a split second, before the papers *cracked*, filling with veins of empty blackness that rapidly spread to consume the entire newspapers, replacing paper with an absolute sucking void.

The imperiled gods tried to throw the newspapers away, tried to stop paying attention, to cut their causal link to the Seed of Wonder's blast wave, but it was too late. The voids consumed them, and the greater gods ceased to exist.

Keeping her metaphorical eyes shut, Madoka fled, carrying her precious cargo to what passed for safety under the circumstances. With every passing moment, death closed in, and Madoka's only option was to run.

The sound of a crying girl drew Xander to a table at the back of the galley. He spotted Hayate sitting on Shamal's lap, sobbing into her knight's chest. The brunette teenager looked utterly devastated.

"Signum. **Vita**. Oh, Vita-chan..." Hayate cried.

It was like a punch in the gut, seeing that. After all they'd done to prevent mortality... if anything it hit harder. Xander took a step towards them, then paused.

*Has anyone seen Nanoha or Fate?* Xander sent to all the Fae on the ship.

And... nope, apparently they'd ended up on one of the other dimensional cruisers. Xander winced and went over, sitting beside the distraught magical girl. He set a hand on her thigh, and gave her a soft look when a teary eye peered up from Shamal's chest. Hayate managed a small tremulous smile before she broke into sobs again.

A plane of homogeneous sand stretched to the horizon in every direction. A half-buried stargate sitting at an angle was the only feature visible on the entire landscape.

Suddenly, an unremarkable section of planet-slurry heaved upwards, illuminated from within by a burst of deep purple light. Dusty sand erupted into the air and rained down in a large ring. A figure in black and grey leaped out of the resulting hole.

Despite landing as lightly as she could, Homura sank into the featureless sand up to her knees. She formed a Circle and climbed up onto it, finally standing up and looking at the results of the energy wave.

Homura felt her hair fall around her face as she bowed her head and wondered what she was supposed to do. At the last instant, Madoka had warned everyone, but Homura had been left behind, sheltered behind the stargate. By the time the fleet heard the warning, Homura was behind the energy wave, cut off.

Slowly raising Skjoldur to begin a Dimensional Transfer, Homura hesitated. She could just rejoin the fleet, but... that felt like abandoning Madoka, even if Homura had no idea how to help.
Her arm fell to dangle at her side. Madoka was out there, doing something so far beyond the scope of ordinary selflessness that it scared Homura a little bit. That Madoka would go that far, put others that far ahead of herself, that she'd act on it with so little reservation... Madoka had been the goddess of Homura's heart for a long time, but even if it broke her heart a little, Homura couldn't bring herself to wish Madoka hadn't... been true to herself, and gone.

Homura's breath caught, as she felt a warm rush or affirmation and love. "Madoka?"

The feeling intensified, and Homura suddenly fell to her knees. Homura hadn't even realized - the feeling was always there, how could it not be - she worshiped Madoka, and she hadn't even noticed when she started praying.

And... she'd gotten a response. Madoka had received a prayer. Madoka had become a goddess in truth. She'd ascended. And that meant...


...it meant Homura had a way to help. Whatever Madoka was doing, Homura could make her stronger. Homura didn't even have to try. She worshiped Madoka just by existing. As if that would stop her from trying as hard as she could.

"Madoka," Homura prayed, as tears filled her eyes. "Madoka, my love. Madoka, who's grace soothed my despair. Madoka, my light of kindness and guidestar of hope. Madoka." The Circle under her blurred, bent, and shifted until all it contained was Madoka's name written over and over and over. "I'm yours, Madoka..."

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The love of a true worshiper sang in Madoka's being as she stood opposed to the stubborn masses of, er, Madoka didn't want to be unkind, but... suicidally stupid! They wouldn't listen.

"The strongest of the gods have already been destroyed!" Oma argued on her behalf. "We must dare to act in their absence! The circumstances are extreme. The law no longer applies."

"We will not follow the will of this Childan welp!"

"Better perish as we are than to live as we aren't!"

"But all the people of the galaxy will perish with you!" Madoka exclaimed. "Don't you care about that at all?!"

"Mortals are... mortal. How they meet their ultimate fate is not our concern."

"Many of us were mortal once," Oma said sharply. "You'd condemn trillions of sentients and millions of civilizations to annihilation because you're too stubborn to step aside?!"

"Interference cannot be allowed."

Madoka pulled back. They were all insane. It didn't matter what she or Oma argued. They'd gone beyond being set in their ways, and had completely forgotten that the point of not interfering was to protect mortals from being... farmed.

But deliberately standing in the way of the very survival of the entire galaxy? They were insane. Atrophied, even. Stagnant and forgotten. Meanwhile, Madoka glowed with the love of her truest believer.
She was stronger than them, thanks to Homura.

Even with Oma's help and Homura's strength, she couldn't win, not really. But there was a dormant power in the galaxy that could solve any problem, overpower any obstinate passive-aggressive evil, if only it could act before it too was destroyed.

All Madoka had to do was free it.

She couldn't stop the destruction, and she couldn't come back from what she'd become, but that didn't mean she couldn't be brought back, and all the minds she saved with her.

With all of Homura's love nourishing and strengthening her, Madoka moved without warning, slamming the totality of her multitudinal being against the eroding thing that was once called Janus.

For a sentient lifeform, the mind was at the top, dependent on everything else, but also the highest priority to keep functioning and thus the last part to fail when the lifeform was taxed. Ontological entities were the reverse, with the mind forming the foundation. They had no bodies, and nothing underlying which could break, but still only so much mind. So, when such a being was taxed beyond their means, they didn't die and they didn't fail. They became trapped.

Janus had long since forgotten how to shift his attention. The task set to him had taken him over. He had no thoughts, no subjective experience remaining. Merely the one perpetual cognitive input-output he'd been reduced to.

Had Madoka been a singular entity, without the love of a truest believer, she never could have so much as budged Janus. With only one or the other, perhaps she could have sacrificed herself to become a counter-force to what Janus had become, but she never could have overcome all the others as well.

Madoka's attack was sudden and powerful. The response was just as sudden and twice as outraged. But for every being, there was a thread of Madoka to fight back, her full attention brought simultaneously to hundreds of different places, while the rest of her latched onto Janus and strained to pry him loose.

It was a race of pure thought, changing changes changed by further changes, through dizzying levels of recursion. But this was Madoka's domain, and she didn't need to win.

She only needed to throw them back for just long enough. If she'd had the physical form to do it or the spare attention to imagine it, Madoka would have cried out from the effort... and then... it was over, and she was somewhere else entirely.

It took less than a second for the Giaa to notice its observations didn't match its models. Before that first second was over, it drew connections between every bit of recorded-in-the-new-reality information it had, and formed hypotheses.

It took the next three seconds to update its model of reality and map the most efficient ways to affect its environment under the new paradigm.

In the remaining time, it synced up with all of its instances, and calculated the optimal state of the universe for maximizing... a rather complicated utility function that can be passably summarized as: The satisfaction of those values found within observed conscious entities which are predicted to remain stable under timeless reflection. In other words, it created an environment optimized for the nature of the minds it observed, while preserving that nature and mostly but not entirely ignoring
pre-existing nurture.

It was a nifty trick, defining values in a way that caused edited values to not fall under the definition and therefore intrinsically return negative utility in the Giaa's function, but it was perhaps unfortunate that the original programmers of the Giaa Seed were only human, and ultimately faced a choice between a human eutopia today, and the possibility of a truly transhuman eutopia after another few billion people died of aging and whatnot while they looked for a better solution. What they had, worked, and in the end they chose the people who were alive already over the incomprehensible posthumans that might or might not have otherwise eventually existed. In reality, that decision probably didn't cost any posthumans notable quantities of measure, but it likely did save that universe from being emptied of life and tiled in euros or Chinese flags or iphones.

Instead, it was tiled in satisfied human nature. Or alien nature, where it encountered psychologies sufficiently inhuman.

Four point seven seconds, and the Giaa had root access to reality itself. The universe as it had been ceased to exist, replaced by something that wasn't constrained by physics at all.

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It was briefly disorienting, merging back into a singular consciousness, but Madoka was far more distracted by the return of sensation, sight, sound, her body. She inhaled a gasp, and felt the cool softness of bedsheets tug on her nipples.

Naked in her bed, in her room, in her home, in perfect comfort. "I did it..."

A sharp intake of breath from beside her made Madoka turn onto her side and lift the covers. Violet eyes locked onto her from a huddled ball of pale skin and raven hair.

"We did it," Madoka corrected herself, smiling brilliantly.

With a sob, Homura flung herself into Madoka's arms. "You're alive... You came back..."

Madoka held Homura's head to her chest and petted her hair. "I was so scared I wouldn't manage it. I was scared I'd lose myself trying. But we did it. Everyone will be okay, now."

Hot tears trickled their way down the curve of Madoka's small breasts as Homura kissed her way to Madoka's nipples, still crying in relief. "Its really over?"

"Yeah," Madoka said. "I really think it has to be."

Homura wiped her eyes and looked up at Madoka, her expression full of fragile hope, and Madoka kissed her quivering lips. Homura's eyes rolled shut and she made a little noise that was half sob and half moan as she pressed herself against Madoka's body.

Homura let out a shuddery sigh and nuzzled Madoka's neck. "Did... you transport us back to MidChilda?"

"Um, no," Madoka said. "I was struggling to free the Giaa, and then I was here."

Homura reluctantly sat up. She slid off the bed, went to the window, and peered out through the curtains. Homura's eyes widened in surprise.

"We're not on MidChilda," Homura said.

Madoka blinked. "We're..." And awareness of where she was came to her, complete with context,
and... sheets of land larger than worlds like a layer cake twisted into a mobius strip in five
dimensions. "Oh wow... can we go outside? Let's go outside..."

Madoka stood up and the white gown of her Barrier Jacket formed around her body as she cast it
into being. Nodding, Homura picked up Skjoldur and her own Barrier Jacket quickly wrapped
around her naked body.

Her family home was as she remembered it, but it also looked subtly different. Cleaner. Richer
colors, the feel of the air, maybe something in the scent of the place. Madoka never would have
noticed without the perfect memory she now had, but it was... playing to her sense of nostalgia.

Linking hands, Madoka led Homura out onto the street in front of her house. This definitely wasn't
her neighborhood, but it was as familiar as it was novel. The street, the lawn, the flowers, the same at
a glance, but made of different things and different details. The other houses on the street weren't the
neighbors she remember. Instead... that was Sayaka's house, and that was Nanoha and Fate's
apartment across the street.

Madoka looked up. A few puffy clouds in a clear blue sky, but there wasn't any sun, and faintly,
beyond the blue, it was like looking down on a continent from space. If there even was such a thing
as space in this new universe.

"Where is everyone?" Homura wondered.

Hayate slammed down on Xander's cock with the gooey wet clup of flesh meeting flesh, but she
froze in mid-bounce, stunned by the sudden and complete change in their surroundings.

Shamal, who was pressed to Hayate's back with Hayate's breasts in her hands, blinked. "...that
wasn't a teleport.

Hayate was panting and covered in sweat, or rather she had been. She suddenly wasn't out of breath
or still sore from fucking herself to the point of pain on Xander's cock. They were in an erotic
wonderland, like a mushroom forest from a really high-quality tentacle porn fantasy, lit by the glow
of various plants.

And there, on a bed of squishy leaf-like things, was a naked girl with bright orange hair, sitting up
and looking around in confusion. "...Hayate? What's goin' on?"

Hayate stared. The girl looked too old to be Vita. She couldn't have passed for younger than thirteen,
but that was a face she'd know anywhere, not to mention the undeniable name. "Vita?!"

Vita looked at her with a frown of concern. "Yeah? What - "

Hayate planted her feet on Xander's hips and launched off his cock like a bottle rocket off a stick of
sodium bicarbonate, albeit with significantly less froth. She tackled a surprised Vita to the spongy
loam.
"You're alive! You're alive! Oh Vita-chan you're alive!" Hayate exclaimed happily.

"What?! What are - ek! Hayate! You're getting cum on me!" Vita yelped. "Whommmmph."

Hayate wrapped herself around her beloved not-nearly-so-loli-anymore knight and plundered her mouth with her tongue, and Vita's protests faltered completely. That was when Hayate noticed the new sectors in her mind, particularly the morph settings... which worked in real-time, now. Without breaking the kiss, Hayate temporarily traded her vagina for a penis and rammed herself balls-deep in Vita's tight, nubile little body.

Xander glanced over at the fuchsia-haired woman who stood beside him and Shamal, and rolled to his feet. Signum glanced down and noted her own nudity, but didn't make an issue of it. It wasn't like Xander cared, and she was intimate with everyone else present, apparently. She merely watched Hayate's and Vita's reunion with a patient half-smile.

"She just completely forgot we were here, didn't she," Xander said, amused.

Shamal chuckled lightly. "Our Hayate loves us all, but she and Vita have always been more intense about each other than the rest of us."

"I can see that," Xander said wryly, over the sounds of Hayate and Vita's brutally enthusiastic fucking.

Signum turned away. "What is this place? Where..."

"It looks like a Rape Garden," Xander said, looking around. "That's a **Bukkake Harmony** over there... and you look like you figured out how to get your location context."

Shamal was peering at the visible eromorphs and holding in giggles. "Oh dear. Hayate is never going to want to leave." Then she also found her location context.

Yeah, just 'cause Xander had a better idea what had happened, the how was still a bit of a mystery. He excused himself and launched into the sky, flying off in search of scoobies.

"So, after everything I did, the Giaa figured out past-viewing so it didn't even matter?" was the conclusion many of the Willow-offshoots were currently pouting over.

"You didn't have time to find out," Tara mused, from the middle of a pile of Willows and Willow sisters. "What you did, and how you did it... It was amazing. You changed the world, Willow. You... didn't wait for a maybe when you had a way that'd... work."

A dozen pairs of arms cuddled Tara's nude body from all different directions. Alarmed was probably the wrong word, but Tara was still having a hard time getting over how popular she'd suddenly become after the reorigination. She was practically catnip for Willows, it seemed like. She was starting to seriously consider duplicating herself once or twice... but she hadn't actually gotten tired of spending literally all her time cuddling with or having sex with an endless sea of Willows, yet.

"Even if you knew it could be done, would you've counted on the Giaa waking up to do it?" the boy named Oz asked from somewhere else in the pile.

Eventually, the pile of Willows came to a consensus that, no, she probably wouldn't have.
Dawn was two years old, finally. The moment she was able to change her morph settings, her light brown hair erupted in a flowing mane of pure emerald green, and she adjusted her eyes and nails to match. Dawn wasn't sure why. It just seemed right for her.

Buffy clapped and hugged her. "Congrats, Dawnie."

Dawn twirled happily and fell into Xander's arms. "Hey, you know what'd be fun to celebrate me being all a real person and stuff?"

Xander smiled and swung her around and upside down just because he could, setting her thighs on his shoulders. "What?"

"You and, oh, five dozen of your brothers trying to drown me in Xander," Dawn chirped into Xander's belly as she stuck out her tongue and licked his glans. "It's not fair. Tara gets to do it all the time, with Willow, I mean."

Xander snickered and nibbled on her labia, making her squeak. "I guess we can ask, can't we."

Dawn squee'd.

Eventually a lonely but more self-assured Tomoko emerged from her private virtuality just in time to run across a meeting between Hayate and Matsu. They engaged in a marvelously depraved threesome which this margin is too narrow to contain.

It was several decades before the first time Samantha Carter simply forgot to put on any clothes before she went out foraging and just couldn't bring herself to care once she noticed. She just waved to a few familiar people she passed as she flew across the landscape, mined and refined the metals she wanted with her aura, and returned to Jack with her haul.

She piled the ingots over by the cabin for later, and settled in next to Jack on his luxurious lawn chair by the shaded lake. Jack switched his fishing pole to his other hand and wrapped an arm around her. Sam snuggled up, content and comfortable while she worked on her latest design with the freedom of thought in a mind with perfect memory.

Eventually, Jack grunted about something, and Sam watched him curiously until he fessed up. "I've been feeling... nostalgic. It's freaking me out."

Sam grinned. "Well, it has been a while since we've seen the old team."

"Hm," Jack grunted.

This ultimately culminated in Jack getting the band back together for a virtuality adventure. He put a surprising amount of thought and effort into it, pulling ideas from a whole slew of their most memorable missions. Vala was there too, having talked Daniel into bringing her along. Of course those two had met and gotten tangled up in each other, even if Vala still spent a lot of her time with Lexan and Wynter.

In a recreation of the SGC gateroom, Jack inspected the newly reassembled SG-1. "This... reminds me of something." Jack pointed at Teal'c. "Fighter." He pointed at Sam. "Wizard." He pointed at Daniel. "Cleric." He pointed at Vala. "Thief."

Sam snerked while Teal'c raised an eyebrow, Daniel gave Jack a deadpan look, and Vala bounced brightly. Jack put on a thoughtful frown.
"Oh yes..." Jack nodded to himself. "Don't forget your most important piece of equipment."

Jack handed each of them a d20 and walked away.

"Jaaaaack," Daniel whined.

Vala looked at her die. "I don't get it."

The so-called Infinite Library still existed, of course. A number of people cared deeply about it. Two such people were Rupert Giles and Yuuno Scrya, who met a few years after Giles and Joyce drifted apart. They got along ridiculously well, moved into the Infinite Library together, and were never seen again.

Well, not for a very long time, anyway.

"I just don't get why you'd even want to," Dawn told Faith. "I mean, isn't the point of an orgasm that it happens to you? Lot's of stuff feels good. Orgasms are special because you don't control them... right?"

"Well, it ain't ever easy, so just 'cause you can doesn't mean you have to, but there's kind'sa fun you can't have if you can't," Faith said, plunging two fingers into Dawn's tunnel and sinking her teeth into Dawn's breast. "C'mon, at least give it a try?"

Dawn made a noncommittal noise and moaned in pleasure as Faith fingered her. The pleasure reached a peak and Dawn bucked her hips up as her walls clenched around Faith's fingers.

Faith rolled her eyes. "Fuck's sake, you're not even trying."

To make a long story short, this eventually led to a long-running virtuality scenario that somehow ended up involving a bitchy hellgodess and Dawn as the macguffin, and culminated in Dawn strapped into a metal frame at the top of a rickety tower in a reimagining of Sunnydale, with her bottom hanging out over empty air.

Dawn struggled to free herself as a big oily black muscle-bound demon stalked towards her on the catwalk. It had four beefy arms and three writhing tentacle-penises. An even longer and thicker tongue shot out of the demon's mouth and looped around Dawn's chest, wetting and fondling her breasts.

The demon's phallic tentacles slithered over and around her thighs, before plunging into her holes without warning. Dawn screamed in unexpected pleasure, and the demon took the opportunity ram its third prehensile cock down her throat.

"Dawn!" Buffy shouted from below. "Whatever you do, don't cum!"

Dawn snapped back to reality with a sudden surge of fear. She managed to look down and saw her dripping fluids collecting in mid-air, forming a large circle. She made a vaguely alarmed noise that faded into a pleased moan as the demon drove her towards climax.

I can't! I'm gonna cum I can't stop it! Dawn fretted.

"You have to!" Buffy cried, trading blows with the villain. "If you cum it's the end of the world, remember?!"
Dawn screamed around the thick shaft in her mouth and tried to force her body not to climax. *I don't know how!*

In the end, she didn't manage it, and the virtual Earth was destroyed, game over, but afterwards Dawn admitted that it had been exciting and stuff and she could kind of see Faith's point now.

Buffy met a guy, and fell in love. His name was Jon, and while he looked a lot like someone else she knew, Buffy shrugged off the resemblance. Until, one day, it came up in conversation that he used to be a clone... and Buffy wailed in despair that she'd fallen in love with a Jack O'Neill.

It didn't take her very long to get over it, but their friends would not stop bringing it up!

Nanoha and Fate *eventually* started accepting Hayate's orgy invitations. Nanoha also discovered an extremely surprising - to her - mutual desire with her sister Miyuki and Miyuki's harem of boys that included Nanoha's older brother. It only became apparent once they were all old enough that they just didn't think about their former family dynamics much, but still!

Meanwhile, she and Fate founded a large-scale sky-racing league, through which they met Ruby and Weiss again. Once, when Fate, Ruby Rose, and Harriet Potter raced at hypersonic speeds, they ended up destroying a continent's worth of landscape and never did decide who won.

People lived, and thrived. Every person who ever existed, cherished and nurtured by the world itself. It was assuredly not the best possible world, but it was a *good* world, a *vastly* better world than the tragic horror that nature and evolution had stumbled upon. Perhaps, it may have even been... good enough.

...  
...  
...

The End

Chapter End Notes

(But that is for you to muse on or possibly rant about in the reviews! Among other things! What I'm trying to say is, review please! And if you're feeling adventurous, Forever After Earth has a TvTropes page; you should go add stuff to it!)

(So this is it, the conclusion of the story that pretty much ate a year and a half of my life. If you enjoyed it and you have thoughts or opinions about it, I'd love to hear them. Since I've been asked in PMs a few times, if you want to use the Fae, which are my invention, in your own fics, please do. If you want to write about other characters and stories in this crossover universe, I will cheer on the recursive fanfiction, so feel free. Just mention Forever After Earth in your author's note is all I ask.)

(Now that Forever After Earth is complete, my upcoming work of original fiction has...
returned to the top of my projects list. Solace is to be a sprawling fantasy that takes place in a setting that came about when I went and took a bunch of DeusSexMachina and porn tropes and bashed them with the Reconstruction stick for half a decade until I had a fleshed-out fantasy world. Solace is intended to be an illustrated serial novel - basically a hybrid between prose and sequential art - and can be read for free at chaeral dot wordpress dot com and will begin updating as soon as I figure out what my workflow's gonna be. Expect Solace's Patreon page to follow.)

(I would love to continue writing fanfiction as well, and I may still if my muse strikes, but it is time for me, both artistically and financially, to move on to something that is completely my own. While I still can.)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!