

*Summary: A J/7 point of view to "Unimatrix Zero." What exactly happened in that virtual world? Would Kathryn finally come out with her feelings for Seven? Or vice versa, either thinking it won't be remembered?*

# YOU AND ME IN UNIMATRIX ZERO

*by Lara Zielinsky*

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*From "Unimatrix Zero", part 1...*

"I know it's unusual, but Seven has discovered a weakness in the Borg." The captain turned. Seven was suddenly caught in a blue gaze that wouldn't let her go. The captain was assessing a plan, right there, the former Borg could tell, almost as clearly as if they were linked. She cocked her head to the side, inviting the captain to speak what she was thinking.

"We need to find out more about this place."

"Too bad you don't have the benefit of an interlink node." Chakotay's voice held a distinctive note of sarcasm which made everyone look sharply at him. Least of all, the captain, whose sharp gaze could have cut duranium.

Tuvok's dark eyes gleamed with possibilities as well. Seven realized that as she caught him stepping toward her and the captain. "There may be a way," he said.

Which grabbed the captain's attention. Janeway's look prompted Tuvok into explaining himself. "There is a Vulcan technique called the bridging of minds. It may permit the captain to enter Unimatrix Zero with Seven the next time she is summoned."

"Are you serious?" Seven heard Janeway and thought such a question obtuse. The Vulcan was always serious. Seven therefore concluded that the captain was expressing surprise or disbelief.

"I would serve as the conduit, and be able to monitor both of you," Tuvok supplied.

Seven watched Janeway contemplate the suggestion.

"Sounds like a conference call to me," the Doctor acerbically noted.

"Objection noted." Janeway cut him off with a glance and moved closer to Seven, looking up into the Borg's curious expression. "Looks like you'll be turning in early." Blue eyes met hers and the low voice sent a shiver down Seven's spine.

*Later...*

Janeway walked to the viewports and looked out, contemplating her decision as the rest of the command crew filed out of the conference room. *So, a mind-meld with Seven, huh, Kathryn?* she wondered to herself. *How much more can you take? How much more are you going to take before...?*

"Kathryn?" Thinking she was alone, she started at Chakotay's voice, but turned, altering her expression quickly. "I thought you were going to the bridge," she chided, unable to completely hide her distraction.

He cut right to the point; she could see the determination in his dark eyes. "You really are going to do this?"

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"Seven says they need help. They *want* help, Chakotay. I can't ignore that."

"Then let Tuvok meld with her -- alone. Hell, Kathryn, we don't know how interactive this link will be. It's dangerous -- and you shouldn't go."

"I know the risks," she countered. "*Voyager* received a distress call, and I *am* going to answer it."

His jaw firmed and Janeway braced herself for the argument. She tried to forestall it. "What would I be telling the crew if we started ignoring distress calls? I won't abandon our principles this close to home."

"You want that transwarp drive," he countered succinctly.

"It'd be a bonus," she admitted, neither acknowledging nor denying the possibility. "But the key here is the drones. They don't have the ability to do this themselves, though they want to. I'd like to find a way to help them."

"Kathryn Janeway versus the Borg." She felt the stab. He thought she was going off on her own again.

"It's not like that Chakotay."

"It isn't? Sure as hell looks like it to me," he shot back.

Kathryn wanted a breather, some room before she stepped into that alcove with Seven to God knew what, and stepped back from the confrontation with Chakotay. When he stepped forward thinking perhaps to press the issue, she cut him off before he could speak. "Chakotay, I've decided. Now, I've got to get to the cargo bay." She paused for a long beat, forcing him to meet her eyes. When he looked away, she asked, "Are you with me?" She meant it for more than the simple walk through the corridors, and he knew it.

"I want a full report when it's over," he replied stiffly.

"Tuvok will no doubt fill in anything Seven or I leave out."

"All right." He gestured for her to precede him to the door, followed her across the bridge, where Harry Kim held the conn; Tuvok was already down in the cargo bay no doubt. With Chakotay a half step back, the pair stepped into the turbolift and she ordered, "Deck 8, Cargo bay."

### *Cargo Bay 2, a little later...*

"Let's do it," Janeway came around Tuvok as Seven stepped up into her alcove. Both women focused on the smooth features and dark eyes of the security chief. Each had, on separate occasions, participated in a mind meld with the Vulcan. Kathryn had helped him locate subdued memories triggered by an encounter with a nebula. Tuvok had helped Seven contain several assimilated personalities triggered by her exposure to a damaged Borg reticulum.

Because of these experiences, each woman had a unique bond with Tuvok already, refined over the number of years together.

Just before Tuvok's fingers touched her forehead, Janeway wondered if the bridge would give Seven and herself a bond as well. At one time she had thought they had one formed caused by Seven's -- and her own, truth told -- desire to get along. Over the last year however many things had put them in virulent conflict. With a faint smile she remembered the last time they had been this close, and reached out, as she had not then, grasping the other woman's hand beneath the alcove support beam.

"I will be in control of the link," Tuvok said. "If anything goes wrong, I will terminate the procedure."

"Understood." Kathryn looked up when she realized she had echoed the Borg's customary phrasing. There was no more time to think then. Tuvok's fingers warmed against her temple and cheek and the steady voice began.

Beside the captain, Seven remembered her last venture into Unimatrix Zero and just as the regeneration cycle took hold, she let her fingers close over Janeway's. The captain's fingers squeezed back. Then it was dark.

### *Unimatrix Zero...*

Seven opened her eyes, looking around tentatively until she saw the captain standing just out of arm's reach, looking at the moment at the bush behind her. "Captain."

The smaller woman turned and Seven felt something akin to a blush surge in her face as the keen astonishment, and genuine pleasure, suddenly reaching out to her from beneath soft brows and tousled auburn hair. The entire effect made Seven ineffably pleased by the captain's reaction. Janeway's expression lightened even more at Seven's smile. "Seven?"

Thinking briefly that perhaps she had not accomplished her one last conscious thought -- to appear without implants -- Seven brushed her fingers over her left temple.

"Annika. I -- That's what I'm called here." She felt her chest tighten, remembering distinctly telling the captain once that she was not Annika, not remembering anything of the six year old girl she had once been. *Would Janeway understand, even when Seven herself wasn't quite sure, why she accepted it now?*

"Annika," Kathryn Janeway's smooth voice rolled over the name, filling Seven with a pleasant sensation. A sound, of people moving and talking, caught the captain's attention however and the slate blue eyes left her own. "Drones?" Janeway asked, making Seven turn her head to see.

Seven nodded. "Ummm hmmm. Come on, let's find Axum." Janeway quickly moved alongside her.

"It feels so real here," Janeway commented, brushing her palm over a flowering bush.

"Perhaps a comparison to *Voyager's* holodecks is appropriate," Seven responded.

"It seems somehow richer than that," Janeway countered, taking a deep breath. "If you were used to this, no wonder you thought the holodecks were 'irrelevant.'" The captain chuckled causing Seven to pause and glance back at her for a long moment.

"I do not recall being here."

"What about Axum?" Seven was uncertain, but she thought she detected, as she had in the conference room on *Voyager*, that the name, or the person disturbed Janeway...somehow. She did not know how to explain the combination of familiarity and unease she felt in Axum's presence other than "he was someone I apparently knew," which she fell back on now as they continued walking.

"Do you trust him?" Janeway waved her hand. "Forget I asked that. I'm here already. We'll deal with whatever happens. I certainly hope he's worth trusting."

Seven paused, aware suddenly of a feeling of concern, about safety. Not hers, but the captain's. She stopped on the path, letting the smaller woman pass her.

The auburn haired woman paused on the path and looked back at Seven, hands on her hips. "Seven?"

The blonde blinked. "My apologies." She shook off her discomfort. "Let us continue."

The captain reached out a hand and smiled. Seven took it; the moment their fingertips

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touched her uncertainties vanished, and the two women pushed deeper into the virtual world.

Janeway found it difficult to regain her sense of mission. Almost every thought had fled except a desire to see this entire world – with Annika.

*God*, she looked over again, at the profile beside her. Seven – *Annika* -- was poised. The cool look with which Kathryn had become so familiar was gone replaced by vibrancy. Uninterested appraisal had vanished in a flood of barely contained excitement. It gave Annika's cheeks high color and without her implants -- miraculously wished away -- cool ice blue eyes instead reflected the sunlight in depths as blue as sapphires.

The pair rounded a turn in the path and Janeway stumbled over Seven's rearmost foot. She reached out to steady herself. Her hand closed over fabric sheer enough and thin enough compared to the Borg's usual body-conforming biosuits, that it was like touching bare skin.

Seven's hands were suddenly on her own waist, aiding the captain in righting herself. "My apologies, Captain."

"That's -- I'm fine," she responded. "Why are we stopping?"

"We are here," Annika -- for Janeway could no longer see the vibrant woman before her as the Borg Seven of Nine -- said with a smile, her hand lingering on Kathryn's as the captain shifted to straighten her uniform and look around.

It looked remarkably like a campsite, Kathryn thought, locating a table, benches and sunshades in the clearing. A tall, spare man walked toward them, his race not familiar to her.

"Axum," Annika supplied. "This is Captain Janeway." The captain offered her hand and firmly he took it.

### ***Back on Voyager...***

Chakotay had cleared the cargo bay while Tuvok conducted the bridging. Janeway opened her eyes to find herself, Seven and Tuvok the only remaining occupants. She blinked to adjust to the lower lighting.

"Captain?" Tuvok's fingers dropped from her cheek as their eyes met.

"I'm fine, Tuvok." She looked down at her hands, finding the left one intertwined with Seven's. Following her gaze back up along the Borg's arm, she met blinking blue eyes as Seven began to come around as well. "Seven?"

Blue eyes, once again edged with a silver implant, still seemed to grab Janeway. *Was that a smile edging the woman's full lips?* "I am fine."

"Was your curiosity satisfied, Captain?" The Vulcan's calm, warm tone let Janeway know she was acting particularly distracted.

Quickly she pulled her mind to the tasks discussed in the virtual world. "Yes, Tuvok. Seven, I'd like to discuss this with you in one hour. I have to see the commander first."

"Yes, Captain." Tuvok and Seven's voices merged in their simultaneous reply. Apparently, Janeway thought, the bridge was going to make them all slightly attune to one another for another while longer.

Which suited the captain just fine. At least there would be fewer arguments to her plan of action. Now if she could just get Chakotay on board with the plan.

**TO BE CONTINUED**