



DRONES, CLONES AND ALPHA BABES: RETROFITTING *STAR TREK'S* HUMANISM, POST- 9/11

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8: Extropia of Borg

The danger of nanowar could lead to One World Government; perhaps a horribly effective one, otherwise what is the point? – Chris Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen*, 64.

Whether positing the liberation of human potential or the total annihilation of organic life on this planet, nanologic demands that we think outside the realms of the human and humanism. Nanologic makes our bodies cyborg and redefines our material experiences, redraws our conceptual borders, and reimagines our future. – Colin Milburn, “Nanotechnology in the Age of Posthuman Engineering,” 291.

EVER SINCE JEAN-LUC PICARD was assimilated by the Borg, decimating Starfleet and escaping as something less than his rational humanist self, *Star Trek's* writers have created more opportunities to shine an unflattering light upon Starfleet's officers, especially its captains – and *most* especially Janeway. First, she's female; hence there is less anxiety on the part of the writers about keeping her moral integrity perfectly intact, since women are not thought to have much of it in the first place. Far more often than Picard, she is represented as being on the questionable side of whatever ethical issue happens to be up for exploration in any given week. In *TNG*, this role is frequently given to the Starfleet brass, but the remote setting of *Voyager* makes that impossible, so Starfleet's representative – Janeway herself – often stands in as the party that needs to be brought up to speed. This characterization of Janeway is nevertheless consistent with the morally suspect mission that brought her to the Delta Quadrant in the first place, a mission that relates to what can only be called, in this post-9/11 era, the Federation's “war on terror.”

To the Federation and the ally they are defending in this war, the repugnant Cardassians, the Maquis are terrorists. From the Maquis perspective, they are freedom fighters on behalf of colonies betrayed and abandoned

by the Federation. The *Star Trek* team of writers set the conflict in motion across several episodes of *The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine* long before the pilot episode of *Voyager* aired. Drawing inspiration from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the writers took great pains to avoid representing the war in black-and-white terms. Nevertheless, the Federation comes off rather shabbily, and Captain Janeway has to make her first appearance bearing the baggage of some of the Federation's most politically expedient and ethically questionable decisions – including some by her distinguished colleagues, Captains Picard and Sisko. When her crew and the “terrorists” she has been pursuing are forced to amalgamate under her command, her immediate task is to confront her Starfleet arrogance and her Federation presumptuousness vis-à-vis the Maquis (“Parallax”). But this is only the first of a whole series of hard and humbling lessons the writers put her through. What keeps *Voyager* within the utopian frame established for *Star Trek* by Roddenberry – and thus unlike anything we have witnessed in post-9/11 Washington and Whitehall (or Israel, for that matter) – is that she does manage to learn some of them.

The upside of this is that she's a more interesting character than Picard, whose dignified European masculinity is always a constraint for the writers. More important, Janeway cannot be just another Picard, or even another Kirk, whose gung-ho Americanism she echoes. The character of Picard was appropriate for the Reagan-Bush eighties; the character of Janeway had to be shaped for the much more unpredictable and ambiguous nineties of Bill and Hillary. Initially, Picard's way of dealing with humanism's unfortunate legacy was to acknowledge it and then enact the ways in which humanity has evolved to the point where it now lives up to its noble ideals (see Barrett and Barrett). But in keeping with *Star Trek's* move in the direction of the postmodern, Janeway *enacts* the limitations of humanism – some of them echoing Extropian ideology – but she will also get to demonstrate humanism's evolutionary potential. As the first episode of *Voyager's* new lease on life, occasioned by the addition of the Seven of Nine character, “Scorpion” is more about the limitations than the evolution.

On its surface “Scorpion” is a typically American story about liberal individualism versus the enslavement of collectivism. Even with the counterproductive clash of opinion that often undermines human projects, individuality is shown to be superior to the collective because cooperation among clever independent minds gives rise to innovative solutions. But seen through the lens of the humanist/transhumanist opposition, it's about

valuing individuality because some technologically driven alternatives to it could be violently intrusive – physically and psychologically. Both the swarm intelligence of the Borg hive mind and the telepathy characteristic of some alien species in the *Star Trek* universe are used to illustrate this point. In this respect the episode stands in contrast to cyberpunk's enthusiasm about “jacking in” and surrendering one's consciousness to cyberspace. The cyberpunk scenario demands that the autonomy associated with humanist subjectivity be reconceptualized in a way that would have been totally inconceivable to Enlightenment humanists – as inconceivable to them as post-Freudian rationality would also have been. In other words, it's never really been a matter of what characteristics of humanist subjectivity get left behind as we move into the posthuman but rather, of how those characteristics have been redefined and accommodated within new contexts. “Scorpion” sets that process of redefinition in motion, and for that reason it's worth looking closely at how the story unfolds and at the tropes by which the issues are introduced.

The episode's teaser, the scene described in the opening of this essay, appears to be drawn from Drexler's *Engines of Creation*, specifically an odd little subsection entitled “The Lesson of Leonardo,” in which Drexler sets his speculations about the future of nanotech in the context of a tradition that goes back to the Renaissance:

Some of [Leonardo da Vinci's] “predictions” were long-range, but only because many years passed before people learned to make parts precise enough, hard enough, and strong enough to build (for instance) good ball bearings – their use came some three hundred years after Leonardo proposed them. Similarly, gears with cycloidal teeth went unmade for almost two centuries after Leonardo drew them, and one of his chain-drive designs went unbuilt for almost three centuries. (62–63)

This passage is one of the few in Drexler's book that does not conform to Milburn's description of it as “a series of science-fictional vignettes.” Janeway corrects this inconsistency by turning it into one. By definition, her holonovel is a fiction. She has therefore programmed it so that Leonardo's gear-driven robot arm incorporating “one of his chain-drive designs” is represented as not only built but functional – until one of the cycloidal-toothed wooden gears fails. Leonardo removes the broken gear

and rummages around on his workbench: "Let's hope his big brother will be strong enough," he comments as he locates a larger model of the gear. If Drexler is correct, this one will fail too. Leonardo's "failures with aircraft are also easy to understand," writes Drexler: "Because Leonardo's age lacked a science of aerodynamics, he could neither calculate the forces on wings nor know the requirements for aircraft power and control" (63). Indeed, Leonardo da Vinci might have welcomed a scientist from the future with both knowledge and experience of aerodynamics. Enter Janeway, who steps in to corrupt the timeline. As she gazes up at the flying machine suspended from the workshop ceiling, Leonardo tells her: "I thought that because my imagination took flight so quickly, my body could do the same. I was *wrong*." "It's this flapping approach," says Janeway: "You designed your machine to mimic the way a bat or a sparrow would fly. So, what if you based it on the hawk instead?" "A hawk . . .," muses Leonardo – "a creature that *glides* through the air!" Leonardo is ecstatic: "We will design a new machine, and you, Katarina, will help me fly it!"

In its isolation from the complexity, contradiction, and unpredictability of life in the Delta Quadrant, Janeway's holographic recreation of Leonardo's workshop models the Extropian fantasy of "the safe, secure space of pure research [that] can provide for a range of utopian possibilities," a place in which "the human – or rather a humanist standpoint – becomes the safeguard against the threat of technological determinism." After all, as Janeway has just assured Leonardo, "all invention is but an extension of the body of man." Her imaginative transformation of the humanist past through the miracle of holotechnology mirrors Drexler's utopian vision of a posthumanist future transformed through nanotechnology. In Drexler's benign future, as in Janeway's delightful fantasy, "It is the human user that guarantees the right, beneficial use of otherwise value-neutral technologies" (Thacker 77). But back in *Voyager's* reality, the Captain is about to learn that, unlike Drexler, she cannot write the future quite so easily as her vivid imagination rewrites the past. She quickly becomes caught up in the consequences of social and political questions which in Extropianist fashion she leaves dangerously unexplored.

The Borg and Species 8472 – a species heretofore unknown to the *Voyager* crew – are engaged in all-out war on the edge of Borg space, a vast territory through which the crew is unable to plot a safe course. Fearing a confrontation with the Borg, *Voyager's* doctor – an intelligent life form inspired by an imaginative convergence of AI, the physics of matter-energy

conversion, and holography – has been studying a Borg corpse, which the crew had recovered in an earlier episode. The Doctor’s dissection of the cyborg has revealed the mechanism whereby assimilation takes place. He has discovered “nanoprobes” in the corpse and concludes that these are delivered into the victim’s carotid artery via twin tubules extruded from the knuckles of a drone – a gruesome demonstration of which we got in *First Contact*. The Doctor’s computer simulation images the tiny machines affixing to red blood cells, destroying them and turning them to dark grey, thus draining all colour from the victim’s complexion. These nanoparticles – “molecular assemblers,” in Drexlerian parlance – recall the procedure of “uploading by nanoreplacement” in that they destroy organic material and assemble hardware in its place, thus accounting for the star-shaped implants that erupt to such startling Special Effect on the faces of their victims. As we saw in *First Contact*, these “efficient little assimilators,” as the Doctor calls them, can rapidly transform a starship into a Borg installation, complete with regeneration alcoves for the drones. The Doctor and his assistant Kes – a telepathic Ocampan whose abilities are not yet fully developed – set to work on an “assimilation antibody” that might offer the *Voyager* crew some resistance.

The Borg appear to have met their match in Species 8472, and the *Voyager* crew are eager to learn more about a species who could inflict such damage on a force as unrivalled as the Borg collective. Upon their onsite inspection of the remains of a Borg cube and a Species 8472 vessel locked together in a fatal collision, the Away Team discovers that the alien vessel is a unique product of biotechnological engineering: it appears to be made of living biomatter with regenerative properties, and is in the process of repairing itself. Aboard *Voyager*, Kes has been receiving intrusive visions that convince her that “it’s not the Borg we should be worried about” but rather, Species 8472, whose thoughts have been echoing through her mind: “The weak will perish!” She now experiences a horrific premonition and warns that the Away Team is in imminent danger. The team is quickly transported back to *Voyager* – but not before Ensign Kim is attacked by a monstrous alien that appears as if out of nowhere. Kim contracts a viral infection so aggressive that the Doctor has no way of treating it. Upon examination, the Doctor discovers that what began as a few alien cells contaminating Kim’s chest wound have rapidly multiplied and are now consuming Kim’s body, cell by cell. As the Doctor, with the help of a computer simulation, reports to Janeway, each alien cell contains more than a hundred times the DNA

of a human cell: "It's the most densely coded life form I've ever seen," he exclaims. As the simulation illustrates, these cells have an extraordinary immune response: anything that penetrates the cell membrane – chemical, biological, technological – is instantly destroyed. This would explain why the Borg are unable to assimilate the species. "Resistance, in this case," says the Doctor, "is far from futile." However, the Doctor believes that Borg technology holds the key to saving Kim. He plans to reprogram an army of Borg nanoprobes and inject them into Kim's bloodstream, where, upon contact with the alien tissue, they will momentarily assimilate it, then denaturate, taking the alien cells with them.

Still unable to come up with a strategy for crossing Borg space without being annihilated in the military crossfire, Janeway returns to the holodeck to see if Leonardo can return her the favour of inspiration. The old man sits in the semi-darkness watching candlelight cast shadows on the wall. "What do you see?" he asks her. She sees only candlelight reflecting on a wall. "There are times, Katarina, when I find myself transfixed by shadows on a wall.... I stare at it, the hours pass, the world around me drops away, replaced by worlds being created and destroyed by my imagination." Thus is the scientist Leonardo reinvented through investment with the subjectivity of an author of space fiction. But his literary imagination fails when applied to the Captain's dilemma. Leonardo can only suggest a visit to the abbey to make an appeal to God – a not unreasonable piece of advice from a Christian humanist. But this won't work for a secular humanist like Janeway. Suddenly, she looks up at the wall, her eyes widening: "But ... what if I made an appeal to the devil?"

An appeal to the devil generally places one at the top of a very slippery moral and ethical slope, and Janeway's appeal is no exception. She assembles her officers and explains her intention to do a deal with the Borg: safe passage through Borg space in exchange for the Doctor's research, which will provide the Borg with a blueprint for how to reprogram their own nanoprobes for a biomolecular weapon that will destroy the enemy ships at the microscopic level. "It's only in the experimental stage, Captain," objects the Doctor, "I've only made a few prototypes." In other words, before this beneficial medical application of nanotechnology has even been tested, the Captain has already appropriated it for military use. She sidesteps the moral issue by grounding her defence of the plan in the difference between the epistemological styles of humans and the Borg which, in her view, gives *Voyager* a strategic advantage. The Borg know next to nothing

about their enemy, for the Borg acquire knowledge through assimilation: what they can't assimilate, they can't understand. "But we don't assimilate, we investigate," says Janeway, "and in this case that's given us the edge." To prevent the Borg from merely assimilating *Voyager* and obtaining the Doctor's research by force, Janeway instructs the Doctor to transfer all his data to his holographic matrix. That way, if the Borg attempt assimilation, she will simply delete the Doctor's program. This solution, in effect, means the annihilation of the Doctor. Not only does this highlight what has always been Janeway's difficulty accepting the Doctor as a legitimate life form, it also challenges the boundary she has just drawn between human and Borg intelligence. Clearly, she is every bit as capable as the Borg of valuing efficiency over ethics and compassion.

Bombarded by intrusive transmissions from the telepathic Species 8472, Kes functions as a kind of one-woman branch of the CIA. She reports that the Borg appear to be losing this war; therefore, contrary to their uncooperative nature, they may just be willing to strike a deal with Janeway. This is the only input from her officers that Janeway takes seriously. Ignoring their misgivings, she dismisses them, but her first officer, Chakotay, remains to give voice to their trepidation. "How much is our safety worth?" he asks. In an allusion to Federation policy against trading in weapons, he points out that "We'd be giving an advantage to a race guilty of murdering billions. We'd be helping the Borg assimilate yet another species just to get ourselves back home. It's *wrong*." "Tell that to Harry Kim," Janeway argues: "He's barely alive, thanks to that species. Maybe helping to assimilate them isn't such a bad idea. We could be doing the Delta Quadrant a favour," she says, rationalizing away the cloud of ethical murkiness gathering around her plan. Janeway chooses not to remember that Chakotay speaks from experience: he himself had once been forcibly "uploaded" by an interconnected group of Borg fugitives and manipulated into doing its will and still bears traces of Borg reengineering in his body.

But it's not the lingering after-effects of the experience that prevents him from getting through to Janeway but rather, his cognitive style. In contrast to Janeway's mind, honed to sharpness in Starfleet Academy's faculty of sciences, Chakotay's intelligence has been shaped by his Amerindian upbringing. He has tried to initiate her into the rituals and meditative techniques he practises, but she has never really got the hang of it. She sometimes recognizes this as an intellectual deficiency in herself. However, it wasn't her degree of multicultural literacy but rather, her exceptional

performance as a scientist that had greased her transfer to the command track. While her decisions are often a matter of choosing the most direct route through a maze of possibilities and then proceeding as if it were the only possible route, his preferred way of dealing with complexity is through narrative. He tells her the parable of the scorpion who made a deal with the fox. Promising not to sting the fox if he would give her a lift across the stream, the scorpion argues logically: “Why would I sting you? If I did, we would both drown.” Half way across the stream, she stings the fox, and as the poison fills his veins he asks her why she did it: “It’s my nature,” she replies. Insisting she knows the risks, Janeway dismisses the parable and reduces their disagreement to a question of trust – which Chakotay immediately dismisses as beside the point. “The time for debate is over,” she replies: “I’ve made my decision. Now, do I have your support?” “You’re the Captain, I’m the first officer,” he replies – and we are about to find out why.

Voyager locates a Borg ship and the Captain outlines her proposal, transmitting evidence of the viability of the weapon she is proposing. Suddenly, to the crew’s horror, Janeway vanishes from the bridge, captured by a Borg transporter beam. She materializes within the cavernous interior of the Borg vessel. “State your demands!” orders the multiple voice of the Borg. “Let’s work together, combine our resources. Even if we do give you the technology now, you’re still going to need time to develop it,” she argues: “By working together we can create a weapon more quickly.” This is not exactly the benign joint project Leonardo envisioned when he said, “We will design a new machine, and you, Katarina, will help me fly it.” Janeway goes for the bottom line: “If you escort us through your space we can perfect the weapon as we – .” Her Faustian bargaining is interrupted by an appropriately pyrotechnic demonstration of force, as several bio-ships coordinate an attack on a nearby planet, which expands to a molten mass and explodes in space. *Voyager* and the Borg ship warp into retreat. Rocked by the demonstration, the Borg agree to Janeway’s plan. But, at the Borg’s insistence, the work of designing a biomolecular warhead and a delivery system will proceed aboard their vessel. If there were ever a diametrical opposite of “the safe, secure space of pure research” where humanism “safeguard[s] against the threat of technological determinism,” a Borg ship would have to be it. Janeway orders her tactical officer, the hyper-rational Vulcan Tuvok, to transport to her coordinates, where another conflict over cognitive style ensues.

Imperiously the collective announces that Janeway and Tuvok will be fitted with neural transceivers to uplink them to the hive mind. Janeway resists. “Your primitive communication is inefficient,” the computer-generated chorus insists. “On the contrary,” says Tuvok, “we work better with our individuality intact.” “What about choosing a representative – a single Borg we can work with and talk to directly,” Janeway suggests: “You did it before, when you transformed Jean-Luc Picard into Locutus. *We will not be assimilated,*” she insists. “Choose a representative or the deal’s off!” The Borg comply: a female drone is disconnected from the network. Unlike the pliable Hugh, this drone is definitely a company woman. “I speak for the Borg,” she announces: “You may call me Seven of Nine.” Seven of Nine is a human cyborg, although Janeway isn’t fully aware of it just yet. When she later asks, she is curtly informed that “this body was assimilated eighteen years ago. It ceased to be human at that time.”

But at this moment, Janeway is about to discover how far out on an unethical limb her deal with the devil has placed her. “You are proposing a large-scale weapon,” says Seven of Nine, “we concur.” Tuvok suggests mounting the warhead on one of *Voyager’s* torpedo tubes. “Your torpedoes are inadequate,” the drone replies: “They lack the necessary range and force.” “Do you have a better idea?” asks Janeway. “We are Borg,” sneers the drone, thus revealing new insight into Borg psychology. Tapping out a schematic on a view screen, she states: “A multikinetic neutronic mine, five million isoton yield.” “That would affect an entire star system,” Tuvok notes. “Correct,” says Seven of Nine, “the shock wave will disperse the nanoprobes over a radius of five light-years.” Janeway’s eyes widen, as if recalling Leonardo’s vision of “worlds created and destroyed.” “What you’re proposing is a weapon of mass destruction!” she exclaims: “You’d be endangering innocent worlds!” Janeway might have avoided this gross understatement, had she used the word *annihilating* or *exterminating* instead of *endangering*, considering the possible fate of every biomolecule on every one of those “innocent worlds” – which could be many, given the incomprehensibly vast size of the target area. “It would be efficient,” says the drone flatly, the Borg gift for understatement unrivalled anywhere in the galaxy. Janeway argues for smaller weapons, ones that would destroy only a few bioships, persuading their adversaries to give up the war. “You are small, and you think in small terms,” answers the arrogant drone – and then backs down: “But the present situation requires that we consider your plan.” As their uncharacteristic cooperation suggests, Janeway seems to

have estimated the desperation of the Borg's predicament quite accurately. Seven of Nine begins to recite an inventory of *Voyager's* weaponry. "How did you obtain this information?" Tuvok asks. "We are Borg," she answers, recalling the biologically determined scorpion of Chakotay's parable.

There is a sudden attack on the Borg ship, and Janeway is seriously injured. The Borg quickly transport her, Tuvok, and Seven of Nine, along with assorted drones to *Voyager's* Cargo Bay Two just as the Borg ship explodes in space. *Voyager* warps to a safer distance. Janeway has suffered neurological damage, and the Doctor must induce a coma in order to protect her higher brain functions while he operates, but he warns Chakotay that the prognosis is unclear. Chakotay must now take command – and we find out why he's first officer and Janeway is Captain. Seven of Nine uses the excuse of the loss of her vessel to press for a modification of the agreement. Chakotay jumps at the chance to extricate *Voyager* from the alliance, but Seven of Nine is unwilling to accept his terms. The argument between them echoes that of his earlier one with Janeway. The drone insists that Chakotay change his heading and make for the nearest Borg vessel, which would mean taking *Voyager* forty light-years off course. Chakotay refuses. "There is no alternative," argues the drone in Janewayesque fashion. By threatening Borg retaliation, she gets him to back down: "I'll think about it."

Chakotay calls a meeting of the ship's officers and announces his intention to end the alliance. *Voyager* will ferry Seven of Nine and her companion drones to the nearest habitable planet, give them the nanoprobes, then resume course to the Alpha Quadrant. But negotiating this new deal with Seven of Nine is beyond Chakotay's skill. She threatens; he threatens back. This standoff elicits the drone's withering assessment of human nature:

When your captain first approached us we suspected that an agreement with humans would prove impossible to maintain. You are erratic, conflicted, disorganized. Every decision is debated, every action questioned. Every individual entitled to their own small opinion. You lack harmony, cohesion, greatness. It will be your undoing.

Seven of Nine has a point. "We work better with our individuality intact," Tuvok had argued aboard the Borg ship. But the recent behaviour of the Captain and her first officer would seem to suggest that individuals don't work at all well in groups. Indeed, the humanist values of autonomy and freedom do not preclude the imposition of hierarchy as a primary solution

to interpersonal conflict: without a military-style chain of command, a defence and exploration organization like Starfleet would drown in a sea of individualism. “Your archaic structures are authority driven,” the Borg had announced to the *Enterprise* in “Best of Both Worlds,” and both Janeway’s and Chakotay’s style of command up to this point would seem to bear this out. The power struggle between them and the conflicting messages the Borg have been receiving are part of what Eugene Ott’s multifarianism and Anders Sandberg’s borganization are intended to eliminate in their vision of the posthuman future.

If Chakotay’s leadership style is wanting, his more self-reflexive style of intellection allows him to discover quite quickly that Janeway, selectively interpreting Kes’s fragmented telepathic visions, has been misled by her assumption that it was Species 8472 who initiated this war. Chakotay provokes Seven of Nine into confessing that it was the Borg who started it. The drone explains:

Species 8472 was more resistant than we anticipated. Their technology is biogenically engineered; it is superior to that of all other species we have previously encountered. They are the apex of biological evolution. Their assimilation would have greatly added to our own perfection.

Convinced that human agency and choice are inextricably linked to individuality, Starfleet officers may be overly invested in the humanist ideology of individualism. But it’s transhumanist ideology that is suggested by the Borg’s single-minded obsession with perfecting themselves through ever more advanced technologies. A technologically determined species *par excellence*, the Borg may be read as transhumanism’s dream of the future turned nightmare. Indeed, it’s fun to speculate on the origins of this rapacious collective: perhaps it was once not so different from us. Perhaps the Borg originated in some transhumanoid species who, like Colin Milburn in the breathless epigraph to this chapter, dreamed of the liberation of its potential and responded to the demands of nanologic to “think outside the realms of the human[oid] and human[oid]ism.” But unlike Milburn, who assumes that this “liberation of human potential” is in natural opposition to “the total annihilation of organic life on this planet,” perhaps that originary species ultimately found that their potential could be most easily liberated *through* the annihilation of other organic life. For is this not what Seven of Nine sees in the biogenic engineering technology of Species

8472, “the apex of biological evolution”? Indeed, the collective gives new expression to the Extropian concept of “the Singularity.” Singularly focussed in purpose, they are only once removed from the apex of biotechnological perfection – and they are willing to risk their own annihilation in order to possess it.

A few scenes later, Seven of Nine proceeds to circumvent Chakotay’s plan. He responds by decompressing Cargo Bay Two, where the drone and her companions have set up shop, and Seven of Nine is the only drone who manages to avoid getting sucked out into space. But the remaining drone is the least of Chakotay’s problems. The Doctor has piped him to sickbay, where a recovered Janeway, briefed by the Doctor on the current state of affairs, is in a state of ill-concealed rage. She and Chakotay take up where they left off a few scenes back. “You never trusted me – you never believed this would work, you were just waiting for an opportunity to circumvent my orders,” Janeway accuses. “Trust had nothing to do with it,” he counters. They fling a few more stinging accusations at each other. She resolves once again to fight the aliens in full cooperation with the Borg. He insists once again that it won’t work. “This isn’t working either,” she finally concedes. “There are two wars going on: the one out there, and the one in here – and we’re losing both of them.” Chakotay suddenly drifts off: “*It will be your undoing,*” he murmurs. Janeway gives him a puzzled look. “Our individuality,” he explains. “Seven of Nine said we lacked the cohesion of a collective mind – that one day it would divide us and destroy us. And here we are, proving her point.” “I’ll tell you when we lost control of this situation, when we made our mistake,” replies Janeway: “It was the moment we turned away from each other. We don’t have to stop being individuals to get through this; we just have to stop fighting each other.”

We are not privy to their renewed plotting, but when Janeway returns to the bridge, where Seven of Nine is escorted to negotiate the final terms of the deal, the Captain informs her that Chakotay has been relieved of duty and confined to the brig. She orders Tuvok to give the nanoprobes to Seven of Nine and work with her to build the warheads and modify the weapons systems. “We’ve got to get this ship armed and ready in under two hours. We’re going to war.” In due course, several bioships are destroyed in a spectacular display of biogenic weapons-fire. Species 8472 retreats – whereupon Seven of Nine makes her move. “This alliance is terminated. Your ship and its crew will be adapted to service us.” She plunges her assimilation tubules into the helm controls. “Bridge to Chakotay,” whispers

Janeway into her communicator: "*Scorpion!*" On another deck, the Doctor fixes a neurotransceiver below Chakotay's ear and uplinks his thoughts to Seven of Nine's technology, throwing her into a state of confusion. "Seven of Nine, stop what you're doing. You're a human – a human individual. Our minds are linked; we are one." The drone struggles to resist. Drawing on his own Borg experience, Chakotay violently penetrates the drone's deeply repressed childhood memories and floods her consciousness with images. "I see a young girl; a family. Listen to your human side – to yourself. The little girl. *Anika...*" At this moment, Chief Engineer Torres throws a switch and initiates a power surge. On the bridge, a green flash arcs across Seven of Nine's body armour, and a circuit in her headgear shorts and sizzles out. She screams and slumps to the deck, her link to the collective severed. "Get her to sickbay," orders the Captain.

Usually, only an act of grace can deliver one from the ultimate consequence of a Faustian bargain – and for this, one should show some gratitude. Perhaps this is why the last scene of the episode takes place in Janeway's shrine: Leonardo's workshop, under the sign of a Christian cross that ornaments the wall behind her. "How's our passenger?" says Janeway to her first officer, as she records her entry in the ship's log with a quill pen, on antique paper: "This feels more human somehow." "The Doctor says she's stabilizing," Chakotay reports: "Her human cells are starting to regenerate." "I wonder what's left underneath all that technology – if she can ever become human again?" Janeway muses. "You're planning to keep her on board?" responds the startled Chakotay: "She may not want to stay." "I think she might," says Janeway: "We have something the Borg could never offer – friendship." This is the first intimation that what Janeway has missed most is the intimacy of female friendship. It sheds light on her insistence that Seven of Nine become as much like her as possible, and also on what she experiences when Seven insists on retaining much of her cyborg uniqueness, including her Borg designation. For her sins, this seems a small penance for Janeway to pay – although Seven will certainly take her to purgatory and back several times over the next couple of seasons. But for now, still in her body armour, Seven of Nine is stretched out on a biobed in sickbay, the camera angle accentuating her absurd foam-rubber breasts pointing at the deckhead and signalling an answer to Janeway's question. She will become human again. However, it won't be entirely on humanism's terms.

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In most popular entertainment, war usually makes heroes (or martyrs) of its protagonists, but there is nothing heroic about the behaviour of the major characters in "Scorpion." For it's in the nature of Faustian bargains to set in motion a chain of events, each one less ethically defensible than the last. Janeway and Chakotay escape the consequences of this ethical slippage, but more because of the force of circumstances than by their wits – and not without some lingering damage to their relationship. The Borg aren't the only single-minded entity made up of inarticulate bodies. By brooking no opposition to her chosen course of action, the single-minded Janeway renders her crew as mute as drones – without the advantages of interlinked minds. Her intellectual style, modelled on Western scientific methodology, allows her to win small, short-term victories because she is good at sizing up her adversary in the immediate context. But like a scientist fixated on the microscopic, she misses the macroscopic. Chakotay, on the other hand, lacks her skill in dealing with immediate, moment-to-moment crises, but his cognitive style, together with his past experience as a Borg "upload," gives him insight into what it is that makes this particular species so successful – namely, technological determinism. The Borg give Janeway the small victories because they are "irrelevant." Instead, they've got their eye on the bigger prize: all the hardware, software, and wetware that constitutes *Voyager*. As with the scorpion, it's their nature: *We are Borg*.

Chakotay undermines his own moral credibility when, after sharply criticizing Janeway's plan to arm the Borg, he decides merely to hand over the weapon to Seven of Nine and beat a hasty retreat. His part in bringing the crisis to an end crosses the moral line in an especially egregious way: his brutal violation of Seven of Nine's mind, like Species 8472's invasion of Kes's, is an effective challenge to the cyberpunk euphoria of "jacking in." But despite these questionable acts, Chakotay is nevertheless correct when he accuses Janeway of the inability "to accept that there are some situations that are beyond your control," and when he advises her against needless involvement in war: "We should get out of harm's way," he tells her: "Let *them* fight it out." He sees that her linear method of reasoning blinds her to other options. But it's her loss of moral vision that's especially disturbing. The quickness with which she dismisses the Federation directive not to trade in weapons; the ease with which she renders her holographic Doctor as dispensable as any other high-tech gadget on the ship; and the willingness with which she engages in developing a terrible weapon without so much as thinking to investigate the political circumstances that had led to

war in the first place – all these ethically questionable behaviours resonate with Eugene Thacker’s assessment of the Extropian set of mind. Watching a recent rerun of “Scorpion” in the context of the build-up to the Iraq invasion, I found myself experiencing the same sense of impending doom I felt watching Secretary of State Colin Powell deliver his dramatic presentation to a deeply suspicious UN Security Council.

As this episode suggests, the human user is no guarantee of “the right, beneficial use of otherwise value-neutral technologies.” Furthermore, what does “value neutrality” mean when, as the Borg would seem to demonstrate, the line between the development of end-use technologies and technology as an end in itself proves to be non-existent? The Federation regulates the development and use of technology precisely because its members have no confidence in such value-neutrality, but Janeway is far beyond Federation jurisdiction and thus at liberty to ignore its rules. Although she escapes the consequences, the narrowness of that escape may be read as a critique of Extropian opposition to any kind of state regulation of science. In ignoring Federation regulations, an act that essentially abuses the liberty that humanism guarantees her, she sacrifices humanism’s other two values – namely, equality and human solidarity. Thus, she echoes the Extropian contempt for “rational civic debate and democratic self-governance” (Hughes). While it’s largely the introduction of Seven of Nine that makes “Scorpion” among the most popular of the *Voyager* episodes – for voyeuristic *and* posthuman reasons – online fans were also eager to wrangle over its unresolved ethical issues long after the episode aired. And since many of those fans are the techno-savvy young men who find Extropianism appealing, this can’t be a bad thing.

