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The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Chapter 35

Quark's Bar. Deep Space Nine.

Due to an unusually strong plasma storm, because apparently weather-like phenomenon was real even in space, life on the Bajoran space station at the mouth of the wormhole had slowed to a crawl, much to the consternation of a certain Ferengi bar owner. Sector traffic, like the customer foot traffic in his bar currently, was virtually non-existent as the danger to the station's resident population and the risk of catastrophic damage to (or the loss of) one's ship was so high. On the upside, the views from the promenade were breathtaking as the outside space was filled with undulating color and depth.

"This is ridiculous," Quark bitterly complained aloud, speaking to no one but himself, as he looked at the latest revenue projections generated by the financial omni-tool prototype Gothic had provided him to beta test under real life business conditions. So far, the device had exceeded his wildest expectations and he slept like a baby with it on every night, never deigning to take it off, even while in the shower. Sometimes he would wake up at night and unashamedly stroke it, like it was his own child, one that he was so, so proud of.

"What is?" asked the station's smirking Chief Science Officer, Jadzia Dax, as she slowly sipped her raktagino at the bar, an extremely strong Klingon coffee that the Dax symbiont's previous host, Curzon, had given (or cursed) her with a taste for. It wouldn't be Dax if she didn't always have that little knowing smirk on her beautiful face.

Quark sighed.

"Things finally start to calm down after Admiral Gothic handled that nasty business with the Circle and now this plasma storm had driven everyone off the station! My revenue barely exceeds my costs!" he complained, before dramatically sighing and practically falling/swooning/fainting into one of the many, *many* empty chairs at his bar. "I don't even know why I bother opening my doors anymore."

Kira, who had just entered the bar, true to character, had little to no sympathy for Quark's financial woes.

"Well, maybe if you'd listened to the station's announcements, then you'd have evacuated with everyone else before the storm hit and drove all your customers away," Major Kira said with a smirk, delighting in the Ferengi's misery, as she sat down at the bar within Quark's. "Were you too busy fleecing some poor bastard to get to an evac ship in time?"

Quark didn't reply to that, as he lacked a witty comeback. In any other situation requiring an emergency evacuation he might have acted as a valuable agent/broker to sell seats for a tidy commission per transaction, but the plasma storm had been seen coming for a while and there had been plenty of time to temporarily evacuate anyone who truly wanted off the station. Now

that the Bajoran people had certain proof that the Cardassians wanted to return to take the planet, they were unified in purpose in a way that he hadn't ever seen before, even during the Occupation itself.

Admiral Gothic had offered his brand-new starship to ferry passengers to the planet, but it truly hadn't been needed. Just how rich was that man to have his very own starship? And not just a small shuttle or something more attainable. Many Bajorans had been both embarrassed and ashamed at having driven away so many alien visitors/residents from the planet during the Circle crisis, many of whom had been tirelessly working side-by-side with them to help rebuild the planet. When they had learned that Gothic's Island had been attacked to get to them, they had been both ashamed and immensely grateful to Gothic for protecting those who couldn't leave the planet in time, offering succor and protection against some of their people's temporary insanity. He didn't think the Bajorans could hate the Cardassians even more, but *somehow*, *someway*, the Cardassians had managed it.

"Wait, why *are* you here?" Dax asked. "There's almost no one here to steal your stock and you can't do any side business without access to the subspace communications network."

Quark smiled enigmatically.

"If I left, who'd be here to lift the morale of the brave men and women who volunteered to stay behind and secure the station during this terrible storm?" he asked with a smirk, sounding magnanimous. "Even as we speak Commander Sisko, Doctor Bashir, Chief O'Brien, and Admiral Gothic are hard at work trying to keep this station whole and intact."

It didn't escape the notice of Jadzia or Nerys that they had left the men folk to do all the work while they sat drinking in a bar. But neither of them commented on this. Say what you will about the Cardassians, but they had built the station to last and there really wasn't much left to do but whether the storm, as it were, and wait for life to return back to normal.

"Where is Gothic anyway?" Kira asked, turning to Dax, before next turning to Quark. "I haven't seen him all day."

As if summoned by her words, a section of the bar's floor plating was lifted up and an empty table was knocked to its side. A moment later a large, intimidating form jumped from the dark hole in the floor plating, like a silent apparition, a form which carried two large, deadly looking energy pistols with long barrels, one in each hand pointing to the ceiling, close to his ears, as if he was ready to quickly bring them to bear on a target and snap fire, but probably had more to do with the narrow confines of the station's service crawlways. The figure's armor was dynamically changing and adapting to the new environment it found itself in, indicating that it had been in dynamic camouflage mode. This entire thing would have been rather frightening in lower light levels, or some out of the way, rarely frequented corner of the station, but thankfully, Quark's bar was decently illuminated.

"What in the name of the Prophets?" Kira asked aloud, recognizing the only idiot in her life who could so often act like a man-child, yet still set her loins on fire, and who played such a large and important role in her life these last few years.

She couldn't help noticing the half dozen or so extremely large examples of dead Cardassian voles her lover had hanging by their thick, wormy tails from his so called 'Batman-style utility belt,' like macabre trophies of the hunt. Whenever she asked who this 'Batman' person was, Gothic just laughed until she gave up, never getting an answer.

"Ah, now that's better, " said General Gothic as he gracefully fell or floated to the floor plating with nary a sound. There had to be some subtle gravity manipulation at work, because that was just *unnatural*, and exactly the kind of the thing Gothic would have thought up and added to his armor's litany of advanced technology. He was ridiculous like that, always with the gadgets. "It was getting a little cramped down there and the temperature in some of the conduits was practically balmy, so I thought I'd stop and get a refreshing drink."

"Why were you down there in the first place?" Dax asked curiously, amused as always at her lover's actions and unpredictability, characteristics which made him even more attractive to the joined trill.

Gothic was already probably the most gorgeous and perfect specimen of the male humanoid form she'd seen in her many lifetimes, but that was to be expected given his full genetic upgrades. It was everything else that made up the man's character, though, that kept her coming back for more, like a moth to a flame. His irreverence, his humor, his wonder at everything in this time, his outsider perspective, his unbridled creativity and willingness to push the limits in all things, his sheer power and willingness to be a true man made him a near perfect mate in her eyes.

"Chief O'Brien requested my aid in tracking down and eliminating the creatures that have been chewing on some of the station's power cables and causing several increasingly serious malfunctions since the Cardassian withdrawal. A malfunction in the station's shields or power distribution system during a plasma storm promoted this from a minor inconvenience or problem to a potentially deadly priority that needed to be dealt with as soon as possible, " Gothic explained as he let his weapons go in midair, only for them to return to their magnetic holsters on each side of his lower thigh with a satisfying snap/click, rather than falling straight down to the deck plates.

He proudly gestured to the 'monsters' he'd hunted and slew for all to see, showing off his kills. They really were quite large, bigger than any Kira had ever seen before actually, with sharp looking teeth. When the Cardassians had come to occupy Bajor, they had brought the stowaway pests with them on their ships and many had found a home on the planet these past fifty plus years. They were an invasive species now, destroying several native ecosystems and had resisted every attempt at eliminating them, though they'd actually been a relatively dependable food source for the starving Bajoran population at times, so it was debatable whether they were truly giving it their all.

"Turned out to be several large and particularly aggressive Cardassian vole nests and sub-nests left over from the time of the Occupation! Either the Cardassians released several mating pairs right before they left, which wouldn't surprise me one bit because they're fucking assholes like that, or they regularly hunted them to keep the population down when they were here, which

Starfleet obviously hasn't been keeping up on. I suspect it's a little of both. Don't worry, they didn't suffer much before they all died honorable deaths at this brave hunter's hands!"

"Congratulations to the brave hunter," Kira joked sarcastically.

Looking faux affronted, Gothic responded, "You laugh, Nerys! But Vole breed like fucking tribbles if you don't actively work to keep their numbers down, which was a Godsend to the Resistance considering how many of them we ate, remember? In some ways you could even say they were part of the reason we were victorious in the end," Gothic explained while trailing off, his smiled undimmed by her sarcasm. "I've detected over a thousand of them and have been vaporizing them wherever I found them! My kill count is 976 since I started a few hours ago. They're surprisingly clever and cunning little fuckers and know the station's many nooks and crannies probably better than Chief O'Brien, taking me on a long chase all over the damned station once they realized that I was hunting them."

"What about the ones on your belt?" Dax asked, giggling.

"Don't encourage him, Dax!" Kira moaned, though she hated to admit that Vole were actually pretty good eating.

"I'm so glad you asked, Dax," Gothic gushed with a proud smile. "These are the last of the Vole King and his harem; his great dynasty has ended at my hands."

The incredulous looks Kira sent Gothic's way were delightful to the man.

"I waded through his great vole armies, most of them his own children, slaughtering indiscriminately as I went, their cries of squeaky terror sweet music to my ears. My battle philosophy rang in my ears as I asked myself what was best in life, to which I answered, 'To crush your enemies, see them driven before you, and hear the lamentation of their women!'"

"I thought that that was your battle philosophy when fighting the Cardassians?" Kira asked with a smirk, before turning to Dax with a laugh. "The Shakaar certainly heard about it enough in the caves during the Occupation."

"It's multi-purpose!" I answered, before waving her question off as inconsequential. "I was attacked and besieged at every turn to slow my advance, before I eventually found the Vole King's royal *seraglio*, the birthplace of his great armies," Gothic bombastically told his story, his audience enraptured by his every word.

"His royal *seraglio*?" Kira asked incredulously, the word seemingly having no direct translation in Bajoran for her universal translator to provide.

"You know, where his royal harem is housed, the mother voles of his great armies; please keep up, Kira," Gothic explained, acting mock annoyed at all the interruptions. "Seeing the King in the middle of a royal breeding orgy, I, of course, being both a gentleman and a true Bro, temporarily extended the Bro Code to the vole species and waited for him to finish banging his harem," at this Gothic paused very dramatically, as if waiting for his audience, "before I then

killed him and his harem quite efficiently while they basked in the afterglow. You could not ask for a better death, my friends.”

“Amen, brother Gothic. You gave him a good end,” Quark solemnly acknowledged.

“Amen, brother Gothic,” Dax intoned in turn, having been a man (and a Bro) in several previous lives. She understood the Bro Code and lived by its sacred tenants when she could.

Looking around as if they were all crazy, Kira burst, “By the Prophets, what are you all talking about, Gothic? What is this ‘Bro Code?!’”

“It’s the golden rule of the Bro Code, Nerys,” Gothic solemnly explained. “It is one of the fundamental guiding principles by which all Bros live. *A Bro shall not cock block another Bro*, so say we all!”

“So say we all!” Dax and Quark solemnly repeated, heads bowed.

The Augment then leaned on the bar.

"Quark, my Bro, I need a drink!" Gothic yelled.

"Romulan Ale or Saurian Brandy from your private reserve, my Bro?" Quark asked with a devious smirk/smile.

Admiral Gothic’s private reserve at Quark’s was well known and almost legendary amongst the station’s residents at this point. It was well known that the finest non-replicated vintages of several exotic drinks, including Romulan ale, Saurian brandy, Klingon blood wine, Bajoran spring wine (pre-Occupation, very rare), and something called amaretto from Earth were kept around for the Admiral’s exclusive consumption. If the Admiral was in a particularly good mood or you had done something worthy of celebration or reward, Gothic would invite you to drink with him from his private reserve. It was the hope of many a Starfleet and Bajoran officer to get invited to drink from Admiral Gothic’s private reserve.

"Neither! Klingon blood wine, the 2309 vintage, barkeep!" the human bellowed. “It is the drink of the victorious warrior and conqueror, after all!”

"Coming right up," the bartender replied, amused at the Admiral’s good mood.

"You know you're not supposed to drink while on duty," Kira pointed out while Quark brought Gothic’s blood wine, not out of real concern but just to be snarky. “What if a civilian sees you and files a complaint?”

"Nerys, who would they even complain to?" Gothic asked with a smirk. "I'm the highest-ranking military officer on this station. There is literally no one to complain to or reprimand me. Even the First Minister wouldn't say anything considering how I exposed the Cardassian involvement with the Circle. And given my Augment physiology, unfortunately, I'd have to drink practically an entire barrel of blood wine to even get so much as *buzzed*, so the normal rationale for the restriction doesn't really apply to me."

The Augment drank deeply from his mug before slamming it down on the counter, after draining the blood wine in one long gulp.

"Ah, that hit the spot," he said, licking his lips. "Thanks, Quark."

"Anytime, Admiral," Quark replied with a nod.

"Well, it's time to get back to the hunt," Gothic said. "I need to check the upper pylons for more voles. There may be a few survivors that escaped *the purge*."

Then he literally back flipped back into the hole silently and was gone, like he had never been there in the first place, even the deck plate sliding back into place silently and the table he had knocked over righting itself. How did he do that?!

Open mouthed now, Nerys looked away from the former hole in the floor that her lover had just acrobatically jumped into, then at the dead voles that he had left on the bar top, knowing that he'd done that on purpose, and then glanced over to Jadzia with an exasperated and incredulous expression on her face. If he expected her to cook them like she used to during the Resistance, well, she probably would. With the right spices vole meat actually was pretty decent.

"Remind me again why we're sleeping with that guy?" she requested.

Dax only giggled in reply, loving how unrepentantly dangerous and silly and...protective...her lover could be at times

Quark loudly choked and did an impressive spit take in response.

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Airlock. Deep Space Nine.

"Welcome to the space station Deep Space Nine," said Commander Sisko, as he greeted the new arrivals alongside Chief O'Brien. "I am the station's commander, Benjamin Sisko, and this is our Chief of Operations, Miles O'Brien. I have to say, it's a good thing you arrived here when you did, our sensors indicate the plasma storm has been growing in intensity. Safe travel in the system simply won't be possible for the next several days or more."

"Thank you, Commander. We are glad you answered our distress call," said a woman in the group.

She was named Mareel, a Tyran female from the planet Khefka IV. For the most part Khekans appeared to be humanoid, like humans and Bajorans, but had distinctive foreheads.

"We were in the sector and wanted to see the Wormhole," she explained. "But we didn't know about the plasma storm, and were taken by surprise when we arrived in the system."

"Well, I'm sure that we can provide you and your crew with suitable accommodations until the storm blows over," Sisko said, as he discreetly observed the group's other members, two scowling and unfriendly looking Klingons, and a Trill male, who seemed to want to keep himself unnoticed in the back of the group. It was an unusual and eclectic group of travelers, for sure.

They started making their way through the airlock. "We are hardly lacking in space at the moment given the evacuation of most of the station's residents and visitors a few days ago to Bajor."

"Thank you, commander," Mareel said, as she quickly glanced at her companions, her expression hardening, as if she was readying herself to do something. "I-"

He was leading the mixed group away from the airlock when an armed figure silently dropped down from the ceiling, two energy weapons in hand, and gunned down the entire group with precision shots of neon blue energy pulses to the chest, all in the span of a second. It was Admiral Gothic.

"Explain yourself, Admiral!" Sisko shouted in the airlock, both startled and incensed at this display of violence.

"Sorry about that, Commander," Gothic answered Sisko, his weapons still unerringly trained on the people he'd shot, looking as if he was closely watching to see if they were still conscious. "Just doing a bit of pest control."

Sisko just glanced down at the unmoving bodies, stupefied, wondering if they were dead, and if so, what they had done that had merited being shot with no warning or anything in the way of provocation.

"Oh, don't worry, they're just stunned, not dead," the Augment assured the Starfleet officer, after holstering his weapons. "Now can you call for Odo so that we can put these people in a holding cell pending charges? Then I'll explain what they were planning to do."

Sisko had a feeling that the unending mystery that was Admiral Gothic was about to deepen once again. Not that there was much of a mystery in the end, it turned out. Quark had been contacted by one of the Klingons in this group, a pair of mercenaries for hire, asking for his help in disabling the airlock's security protocols, for a price. Needless to say, Admiral Gothic was a far more valuable, profitable, and long-term business partner to Quark, so after rooting out as much information as he could under the guise of negotiating a deal, the Ferengi happily sold out the entire group for a nice payday in both latinum and goodwill from his business partner. Quark must have been ecstatic at doing the right thing yet still making a tidy profit from it, all legal too.

As later questioning had revealed, the pair of Klingon mercenaries had been hired to help the trill male, named Verad, steal the Dax symbiont for himself after he had been rejected by the Symbiosis Evaluation Board as unsuitable. In Verad's mind, after a lifetime of preparation and sacrifice, he was entitled to a symbiont and the Dax symbiont was the most compatible to him, in his opinion. As he knew removing the symbiont from Jadzia would kill her within an hour, the man and his co-conspirators were facing a litany of criminal charges, including conspiracy to commit attempted murder.

The Trill planetary government would likely be seeking extradition in the days ahead, once subspace communications were reestablished with the Federation. Stealing a joined symbiont from another was one of their most heinous crimes and the Bajorans would likely be fine with

handing this group over for trial and imprisonment on Trill, even though the two worlds had no formal extradition treaty directly between them, only the larger agreement that connected the Federation with the Bajoran Provisional Government. Knowing both Admiral Gothic and the First Minister, the two men would likely leverage the situation to establish trade talks and diplomatic relations between the two worlds. Say what you will about either man, but they rarely missed an opportunity to establish relations and advance Bajor's interests.

Sisko was infuriated at not having been brought into the know from the beginning, but the Admiral did have the power, technically, to act unilaterally on his own authority, including making arrests on the station, and the very positive outcome had prevented Dax from being harmed or killed, so he was willing to let it go.

The Admiral's methods may have been extreme and undesirable, but a true tragedy had been prevented, and a close friend had been spared a *terrible* violation. He was truly grateful to the Admiral for that, but that didn't mean that he had to be happy about it.

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Captain's Ready Room. Onboard The *Flighty Temptress*.

While the bridge of my ship was more high-tech illusion than anything else, here in my ready room, which I thought of as just my private office conveniently close to the bridge, matters were different. As my ready room wasn't outfitted with controls capable of commanding the entire ship, it was an unnecessary security measure. If an unlikely intruder or infiltrator wanted to sit in my comfortable chair or lay on my couch or gaze on my glass cube sculpture with wonder, they could have at it.

Everything in here was real, from the opulent, comfortable, and high-tech desk with high-back leather executive chair behind it, to the desk covered in data pads at the moment, to the Kuhn glass sculpture in the corner, to the trophy case, which contained a number of objects I highly valued and/or had some personal significance to me since I'd been transplanted to this dimension. One such item was the very knife that I had used to cut out one of Gul Dukat's eyes, which had some of his dried blood still clinging to the blade. Now *that* was going to be a hit with any Bajorans who came to my ready room in the future and wanted to share war stories from the Occupation, like the veterans of so many wars throughout history were fond of doing, at least between themselves. That was yet another thing that hadn't changed, no matter the dimension or time period.

One of these days I'd have to find out if Dukat had actually gotten it replaced with a machine or a cloned organ, or maybe nothing at all and my attempt at permanently damaging the optic nerves had been successful. The many butterflies I'd introduced into the timeline had prevented any interaction with the man since the Cardassians had left and news out of the Union was extremely limited these days after they had closed their borders due to the Collector invasion. A pirate-esque eye patch on Dukat would be amazing, though! I'd have to come up with a good list of jokes early.

Currently most of the spacious room was taken up with a large canvas, paints, easel, and brushes as I attempted to become a competent artist. One of the true joys of this new life and body was in picking up new skills, both directly useful or not, made much, much easier by the incredible learning curve an Augment possessed. Learning how to play the drums, the guitar, and the piano, hadn't increased my chances of survival or provided any direct utility, but I had always wanted to learn, so I did, because *why the fuck not???* What was the point of being an Augment if I didn't try to pick up skills that I never had the time, money, or natural inclination to in my last life, just for fun?

In this case, my preternatural hand-eye coordination, keen eyes, and eidetic memory meant that I was able to paint, even in a hyper-realistic fashion. Painting in an impressionistic or surrealistic style, though, which was my goal right now, definitely wasn't made easy by my enhancements, but I felt like I was getting there, slowly but surely.

Learning how to hold the brush, how to apply the paint for different effects, or how to mix the paint to get the exact color I wanted, turned out to be the easy part, easily taught to me by Scarlett who'd read out instructions and demonstrated when needed with holographic examples from any number of training programs on the subject that were widely available in this time. These instructions had been put together by some of the greatest master artists of recent centuries from numerous planets and their holographic characters were readily available.

After I had gotten the basics down, the hard part had actually been deciding just what to paint! Like most beginners, I had decided to start with the traditional bowl of fruit, as I'd learned to see what I wanted to capture as nothing more than different shapes and colors to be rendered on my canvas.

When I became proficient at painting replicated fruit, I tried my hand at painting the wormhole itself, at various stages of opening, with the help of my ship's advanced sensors and my ready room's holo emitters. It was perhaps an attempt at running, when I should have been learning to walk, but go big or go home, right? My choice in subject wasn't because I wanted a painting of the wormhole to decorate my ready room, though maybe that would be nice, but because I planned to present the painting of the wormhole in all its glory to Lt. Commander Data when the *Enterprise* next visited the station as a thank you for all his help over the years. That shouldn't be too long from now as the flagship often visited the Bajoran system in order to remind the spoon heads of Starfleet's presence in this part of space and its ongoing commitment to protect Bajor. Maybe the senior staff of the *Enterprise* would finally take me up on my standing offer and spend a few days lazing around on the beaches of my island?

"Scarlett, I'm definitely going to need some more cerulean blue for this biatch," I jokingly requested, turning my sharp eyes to my work in progress. Moments later the bright white light of my replicator provided me with more of the requested oil paint. "The wormhole has got all *kinds* of blue in it."

Letting my thoughts wander to my next scheduled meeting, I wondered what my island's current guest thought of my home's expansive gardens and orchards which had recently been brought back to where it should have been all along. My island home was huge and the gardens that

surrounded it were meant to be 50 acres of flowers and orchards for fruit, walking paths crisscrossing everywhere with pools and fountains and waterfalls and many private, quiet places to meditate and take in the beauty and serenity of nature.

While all of this had been carefully and painstakingly designed, laid out, and built by the most skilled Bajoran landscape architects on the planet during the initial construction, including the planting of the various plants and installation of the fountains, etc., I had dragged my feet on hiring anyone to maintain all of it because of the obvious security risks involved with granting people ongoing access to my home and island when I wasn't there. This beautiful design, though, had never been intended to essentially be left alone and abandoned, to grow as it will, for a long period of time. No, it was supposed to have been very carefully maintained by a team of professional gardeners and horticulturists who would lovingly guide its growth, harvest all the fruits as they ripened, trim the flowers and bushes, and maintain all the pieces and parts that kept things like the water features running.

Well, I'd dropped the ball on that one, big time.

In the time since my home was built, those 100 acres of gardens and private spaces had grown into an unmanageable and nearly impassable *jungle* with a bunch of stuff not working right anymore. Stagnant water, it turned out, was a pretty bad idea on most planets, for example.

I had, of course, been *vaguely* aware that this was something that I needed to address, but life and my duties and the many daily dramas of real life in a television show had taken up all my attention and time. I certainly had far less time to spend on my island than I truly wished I had. Getting the gardens back to what they had been designed to ideally look like had gone from a very low-priority project to a much higher one, though, when my island home had suddenly found itself filled with hundreds of alien guests and their many mischievous, curious, and wandering children who could find trouble in the most unlikely of places. Impassable jungles and children with no sense of self-preservation just don't mix, who knew?

As a good boss and leader does, someone who knows how to manage his limited, valuable time for maximum effect, I promptly dropped that clusterfuck in B'Elanna's lap; I mean, I *delegated*, the problem to her to solve. B'Elanna, after the requisite 'I'm an engineer, not a gardener' type complaints, having taken inspiration from my home and ship's design, had devised an ingenious method of deploying holo-emitters throughout the grounds of my island, in a dynamic and most importantly, *scalable* network. This included all the land on top of the hill on which I'd built my palace fortress and the various hot spots around the island, like the various beaches and waterfalls and other spots I'd built or that had been popular with my one-time guests.

Because of my concerns regarding security and the desire to run a very lean crew on the *Temptress*, the ship had holographic crew members and engineering staff to crew and maintain the ship. Their holomatrices, like Starfleet's EMH, were quite complex due to the complexity of the duties assigned to them. B'Elanna had expanded on that theme and created holographic servants and maintenance personnel for the house itself, and gardeners and groundskeepers for the lands surrounding my home. These holograms, obviously, did not require matrices anywhere near as complex as those needed on a state-of-the-art starship which could see combat regularly.

Her plan was to use these new holograms to bring order to this chaos, to battle with and conquer my garden jungle, bringing it back into the shape it had been designed to be in.

How to execute on this jungle warfare plan away from my home and ship and out in the open air around my island, though, was where B'Elanna's engineering genius really showed through. B'Elanna's solution had been to design a holo-emitter module, using mixed Minosian and Husnock technology, shaped like a sphere a foot in diameter, which contained the emitter, a basic sensor package, a small networked processor, a link up to Hermione and the island's computers, and a micro-fusion reactor with geo-thermal power taps. Many races, both in and outside the Federation, had created some incredibly advanced geo-thermal power technology and she had liberally borrowed from that tech base. Since the holo-gardeners wouldn't be continuously displayed in any one area for overlong stretches, projections indicated the modules' internal power and components, coupled with the geothermal power, should last for a 100 years or more before needing replacement.

An overlapping grid network for the emitters was designed with the help of the topographical surveys initially used during construction to determine the placement of the modules, and even better, B'Elanna had devised a way to bury them six feet in the ground via the transporters, a process which would simultaneously beam the dirt/rock away and place the module in its place, so no digging was required! This would make deploying them initially, retrieving them should they malfunction or were upgraded in the future, far easier. In the event of a serious malfunction, or damage to the hardware, the effected module could be beamed out, recycled, and a newly replicated module beamed into its place and automatically readded back into the emitter network. Because the emitter modules had overlapping fields of coverage, it would take three adjacent modules to simultaneously malfunction or become damaged before there was a gap in the holographic coverage area. As this network of emitters was controlled by Hermione, all the safety protocols I had designed for my island's holography was imposed on this new network as well.

After replicating the several thousand modules required (thank the Prophets for my large Collector power cell and advanced industrial replicator or else this would have cost me a fortune in fuel for a fusion reactor!) Hermione had mostly handled the transport of all the modules into place over the course of several days. We had brought the system online a few weeks ago and my home was spotless now after the scantily clad holo-servants meant for cleaning (rather than maintenance), designed to look like beautiful French maids, went through the place with a feather duster and a bunch of modern cleaning technology. My maids even brought fresh flowers taken from the island's gardens to fill the many crystal vases throughout the house which brought some lovely colors and natural scents into the place for my guests to enjoy. The palace was so clean now, you could probably perform surgery on virtually any surface of the house without worry of infection.

With the holo-gardeners going to war against the jungle, the gardens *closest* to the house had been returned to the state it was meant to be in in short order, the many ponds filled with all manner of colorful fish, reflecting pools with water lilies, and fountains and waterfalls, etc., were now working and providing a lovely tinkling sound of flowing water and delights for your eyes

to behold. The further you got away from the palace, however, the more jungle-like it became. The gardens and orchards were still a work in progress as hundreds of holo-gardeners were still at war with the land, working 26 hours a day to tame the jungle I'd (inadvertently) allowed it to become.

That was the best part of all, these holo-gardeners had been programmed to be experts specifically in every plant and feature of my gardens, but they also had access to the horticultural database of the entire Federation. They could work in the dark of night or in the rain, never took breaks, never slept, and never got sick! They required no pay and none of them could be co-opted by my enemies to gain access to my island or bribed to learn my secrets and they were as hard to hack as Hermione herself.

The holo-servants in the house were a bit more sophisticated, as they needed to maintain and repair the house's extensive technology, but so far they'd done an excellent job with Hermione directing everything, as usual, in a symphony of computer designed efficiency. I'd have given them my thanks if they were real, so my thanks mostly went to Hermione and B'Elanna who was looking mighty smug these days at her plan coming together so well.

I had to say, I was very happy with my decision to hire her.

Being the paranoid bastard that I was, I had also added the same deadly holograms for security and combat that I had installed on my ship into the systems on my island. Holograms that looked like Bajoran or human security personnel were options, but when death and destruction needed to be handed out Space Marines, Predator aliens, and Xenomorphs could be deployed, instantly, anywhere within the holo-emitter network, in the house or on the grounds. If there was a problem that needed killing, they were the perfect killing machines and far more intimidating than non-descript depictions of humanoid security personnel.

The door to my office chimed as I added a touch more mixed cerulean blue to my 'masterpiece.' The wormhole was many shades of blue at the same time when it opened, creating a hard to capture visual, but I would do it justice, even if I had to spend days on a single painting. I was far too stubborn to simply give up. Maybe I should add a depiction of the station in the corner to provide a bit of contrast or perspective and perhaps a standard Starfleet runabout in flight, its approach having caused the wormhole to bloom open in the first place... Damn, I think that would work very well. No one would know just eerily similar it would be to Deep Space Nine's opening credits.

Thoughts of using a depiction of the *Temptress*, instead, had crossed my mind, perhaps as a result of my own vanity thinking that my ship was much prettier than a runabout, but as Data was a Starfleet officer, it felt more appropriate to use a Starfleet ship. The little yip of happiness from the puppy in the back of my mind, probably because I'd called her pretty, caused me to smile unconsciously as I gave her a mental pet and made yet another bold (at least I felt it was) brushstroke on the canvas.

"Enter," I invited, already knowing who was there. Through my dynamic permanent connection to the ship via the Husnock neural transceiver, nothing escaped my notice on this ship or on my

island. With the ship's powerful sensors trained on my guest, I could literally paint an accurate model of my guest's DNA or tell you the number of molecules her body was made up of.

The door opened and allowed access to my ready room someone that I'd not seen for quite a while, escorted by Scarlett, in her holographic avatar form, wearing the tight, black leather outfit Natasha Romanoff was famous for in the MCU. It was T'Maz, a Vulcan agent of Section 31 who I'd worked well with in the past and had some personal history with.

That *she*, specifically, was here, didn't truly surprise me, given our positive interactions in the past, nor did it seem like a coincidence that Section 31 would send someone to meet with me just after the new and improved *Flighty Temptress* had made its debut to the galaxy in quite so public and flashy a fashion. The timing was prescient as the ship was being readied for its shakedown cruise. A response from Section 31 in some fashion was inevitable and expected, regardless of how the existence of my new ship became known. Part of me had just expected a subspace call from Sloan, though, rather than T'Maz showing up in person, a key member of the team tasked with preparing response plans for the Collectors. The Collectors were still very much a threat. Had I really surprised them that badly that they had sent her?

Until now I'd delayed meeting with her, claiming that I had no time in my schedule. While she waited I let her enjoy the more public parts of my home after I'd given her limited access to my island home, including the meditation gardens and fountains, the beaches and the holosuites. So far, Hermione had reported that she'd been on her best behavior while she patiently waited to meet with me, often working on some issue regarding the Collectors. Despite the constant and intense surveillance that she'd been under by Hermione, there had been nothing untoward detected, even with the ample opportunities to. No attempt to break into the island's computer systems, no attempts to clandestinely place listening devices, no attempt to even scan the home with the tricorder she'd had in her bag, nor any transmissions out to report to Sloan. As Section 31 likely had many gadgets or toys designed to resist detection in a situation like this, Hermione had been closely monitoring and on the lookout for any anomalous transmissions, microburst or otherwise, or any energy spikes at all, in fact anything that couldn't be explained and a bunch of things that could be. Nothing had been detected by the VI, even with all the processing power and advanced sensors my island had to offer. I really didn't think Section 31 would be able to resist their natural urge to gather intelligence on me, even though they probably knew I would be watching for it.

As I had surveillance and sensors technologies from two races that the Federation was unfamiliar with, it was very unlikely that Section 31 had provided her with something capable of entirely circumventing my security undetected. No, as best as I could tell, she had passed the test and had not otherwise tried to gather information on me and my home. That had earned her this meeting.

Turning my thoughts back to the present, I quickly looked T'Maz over as she strode into the room, and not for the first time I was perplexed by her ability to look so fucking sexy while totally covered from the neck down in a white/silverish one-piece bodysuit that was a bright silver white in color. It was skintight on her, of course, and it hugged those perfect curves. Maybe it was those large, voluptuous, perfectly formed tits with an hourglass figure, and long

legs that never ended. And those pointed ears. The shows had been right! It was humanity's kryptonite, our great weakness against their race.

Still, it really shouldn't have aroused me so much to look at her in that outfit. I attributed my acute arousal to the sheer power of nostalgia to someone living a life like mine. She looked so much like her beautiful and sexy great aunt T'Pol from Star Trek: Enterprise, and the fact that she was wearing the outfit that I had once given her that T'Pol often wore on the show. Damn my dick for giving her the outfit my libido would best respond to. It was going to get me into trouble one day.

"Greetings, Admiral Gothic. It is gratifying to meet with you once again, though you appear to be busy," she calmly commented as she took in the room and my attempt at art, offering the most minimum of greetings, Scarlett's hologram promptly disappearing back into the digital ether.

"A new pastime of mine," I answered. "I apologize for how long it's taken to meet since you arrived in-system. You've been exceedingly patient so far, so thank you for that. This meeting was long overdue."

"I understood," she replied. "The demands on your time have been extreme during this period of upheaval on Bajor, especially with the recent changes to the Bajoran military."

I had meant to clean up, but between my painting and the many reports I needed to submit daily, I'd been very distracted. As it turned out the transition from the Bajoran Militia to the Bajoran Defense Force had not been as pain free for me as I'd initially hoped.

Reorganizing the off-world militia into the Bajoran Defense Force Navy had always been a long-term plan of mine, as Bajor needed a proper military, and that, for the most part, had gone as planned. The Navy wore nice blue uniforms with clear rank insignia and had kept their old ranks.

On the other hand, I'd failed to take into account the status of Odo's security people on the station. On Bajor the new police force was seen as a very positive change, because no one wanted the military on the streets keeping order day-to-day as the jobs and skill sets required for each were quite different. But police officers were a different matter, and having a clear division between the military and civilian law enforcement had helped calm things down after all the tension the Circle had created. Without the Cardassians supplying them with weapons and resources, that terrorist group didn't have the support to be more than a nuisance any longer and the civilian police could handle them as the last of that organization was eliminated.

No, the issue I'd had to deal with was the fact that Odo and his deputies were Bajoran Militia officers, and according to the new policies, if broadly applied, should be civilian police only. The charter Shaakar had gotten the other ministers to sign off on limited what the new civilian police force could do and what their official purview was. They officially had no authority off Bajor as keeping the space lanes free of pirates and smugglers was my job, and thus for the military.

But DS9, while 'off Bajor' wasn't a strictly military installation, nor was it a strictly civilian one. It was a bizarre hybrid, yet still the primary defense installation for the Bajoran system and the wormhole specifically. It had many residential civilians and a large contingent of Starfleet

personnel living onboard, many of those with families of their own. On paper, there was a good argument to be made to transition the station's security forces to civilian law enforcement, or even to create an entirely separate branch of the military on DS9 in addition to the police force, but I was extremely hesitant to do either. Transitioning those forces out of the Militia or the new Navy would diminish my authority on the station and would potentially put the station more at risk as the training regime and resources for this new power center on the station would be inadequate to handle the many military challenges that I knew the station would face in the future. Creating an entirely separate military force, had its issues as well.

Thankfully, my direct appeal to the First Minister kept things as is. Odo and his security forces would be transitioned into the new Bajoran Defense Forces, akin to the Navy, like the rest of the former Militia personnel. The station security forces would still operate as they had before with Odo continuing to report to Commander Sisko and Major Kira, as they ran the station as administration, with a dotted line in the chain of command above them to me as Admiral. This would preserve my ability to commandeer and issue orders to BDF Navy personnel in the event of an emergency or an attack on the station. Sisko and Odo had not been happy and had filed official protests with the Provisional Government, but my star was flying too high at the moment given my recent actions to protect Bajor and their complaints had ultimately been rejected.

As for the Bajoran medical, scientific, and engineering staff, they transitioned as well to the BDF Navy, so not much would change. Even their rate of pay wasn't going to be effected.

"Yes, Bajor is rebuilding on many fronts and recent events have shown just how fragile the current form of government is, especially when outside forces with their own agendas and vast resources, like the Cardassians, are working to undermine their best efforts by fanning the flames of division," I said to the Vulcan woman, who nodded in agreement. "The Bajorans are a resilient people, though, and they're willing to see the breaking points in the system and work to fix them because they know that their very freedom is at stake, because *nobody* wants the Cardassians back. Even just allowing the Cardassians to defend Bajor in the event of a Collector attack, an existential threat if there ever was one, was a very hard sell for me. Their willingness to change and shore up the system, though, is something to be proud of, but my workload has substantially increased as a result."

In the aftermath of the Circle crisis, it became abundantly clear to everyone that the support of General Krim and ostensibly the military forces that he commanded on Bajor, were a big part of the Circle's nearly successful overthrow of the government. As such, the military in general was under a lot more scrutiny than before, so I had many more reports to write than ever before and a lot more people looking over my shoulder. On the other hand, as the Provisional Government was a great deal better informed now on issues affecting the military, I was getting a lot more support and my recommendations were being given a lot more weight.

There was even broad support in the Chamber of Ministers for my proposal to set up a small naval academy on Bajor to train new officers for the fighter squadron with the idea to eventually expand it down the line when more resources became available to purchase new ships, or *seize* them, as the opportunity presented itself. There were plenty of independent worlds out there with

such schools, so it shouldn't be too hard to find and hire experts to teach at such a place. Former or retired Starfleet officers would be ideal to smooth the transition of the Bajoran Defense Forces into the Federation, once Bajor was admitted in the future, but I was hesitant to bring in too much Federation thinking, idealism, and morality when it came to matters of combat and training.

"I fear I must add to your workload," T'Maz said, before handing me a padd which I quickly read through.

In essence, her cover job, which was with the Vulcan Science Institute (not to be confused with the Vulcan Science Academy, that was a similar but somewhat different organization), had officially sent T'Maz on a long-term research assignment/expedition to study the wormhole, nearby scientific phenomena in both the alpha/gamma quadrants, and the species and cultures of the gamma quadrant, including the Hur'q/Collectors. Her remit was extremely broad, but there was plenty of precedence for such a thing in the wider galaxy and it did overlap her actual work for Section 31. Annika Hansen's parents' being a prominent example from the shows of a widely traveling scientific expedition conducted separate from the science a Starfleet ship might routinely engage in. Of course, this was all a cover for her real work for Section 31.

Also on the PADD was a formal request from Section 31 for me to take T'Maz on as the science officer for my new ship so that she could study the connection between the Collectors and the Hur'q and the Gamma Quadrant using my ship's sensors and facilities, notably referencing that museum where I'd found the sword of Kahless, though no one knew that I had that legendary artifact specifically. The request also included a financial enticement to accept T'Maz as part of my crew, and it was a ridiculously high sum of 500,000 bars of gold pressed latinum per year plus additional pay for any Section 31 missions I accepted. If there was ever a question of Section 31 being intimately involved in this fake research trip, it was gone now, only they, with their extensive psychographic profile of my personality, knew that I would want to be paid for taking her on and risk my unique technologies falling into Section 31's hands.

On the surface, this seemed like a really good deal for me. I'd get a first-rate science officer on my ship for free, a position that I had been still struggling to fill. T'Maz was perfect for it too, she was one of the best of Section 31 and someone well used to secret missions and combat and she was easy on the eyes and down to fuck whenever I wanted. I'd even get paid an obscene amount of money just to take her on, rather than having to pay someone to work for me. Of course, on the other hand, could I trust her in that position??? Section 31 would be getting one of their top researchers/agents into an excellent position to gather information on me and my overall capabilities, allowing them to better prepare to kill me if I ever became a threat to the Federation, and to gather information on any unique technologies I had in my possession. My thoughts raced as I considered all this.

'Why now?' was a prominent question on my mind, though I had some pretty good suspicions.

I had, after all, just invited hundreds of Federation citizens into my home; how many of them had been intelligence operatives, or intelligence adjacent, or had filed official reports with their home governments on what they'd seen during their stay that then ended up in the hands of the various

intelligence agencies in the galaxy? Given the wormhole, you'd have to assume at least a few of the 'aid workers' on Bajor were intelligence operatives or reporting to one of the various intelligence outfits. That was a common cover story even in my time, where CIA agents were often placed with NGOs abroad to gather intelligence. How many had been with Section 31?

They'd had a closeup view of my island's firepower when I had successfully defended against an attack mounted by six heavily armed Cardassians gunships. That wasn't exactly *normal* for someone's personal home.

Then I had debuted my highly advanced starship in the skies above Bajor, which, in their minds, had probably seemed to come out of nowhere and was of an entirely unique and unfamiliar design. Starfleet Intelligence's analysts and researchers, much less Section 31's, were probably turning the galaxy upside down trying to figure out where I had had it built and how on Earth they'd managed to not realize that I somehow had a huge starship of my own under my house.

They were also probably wondering just what else they didn't know about me and what else was being hidden on my private island, afraid that all of their worst fears regarding Augments were coming true. What kind of damage could I do with this unknown starship, they'd wonder? Did I have enough firepower under my command to take over Bajor entirely? Given how prolific an inventor and creative force I'd been, what might I have come up with away from prying eyes on my private island and in my hidden 'mad scientist laboratory'?

To my chagrin, I realized that I really did have my own 'mad scientist laboratory' if you squinted just right. Already, the sensor readings from the gunships I'd disabled and captured had already been stolen/downloaded and was at this moment being intensely scrutinized by multiple parties. From those readings they'd have data on my shield strength at least. I had considered erasing the data myself while they sat in my cargo bay, but decided to let it out into the world. That information, at least, might dissuade them from attempting anything against me for a time. Being too good at hiding any information on my capabilities was a risk of its own.

So no, T'Maz showing up now probably shouldn't have been a surprise.

Was accepting T'Maz as my science officer truly worth the risk?! Was it also worth the risk to say 'no' to Section 31?! What would the consequences of that be? Paranoid secret intelligence agencies didn't like being denied, especially when there was possibly an unknown threat.

After further reflection, perhaps adding T'Maz to the crew perhaps wasn't as much of a security risk as I'd first thought; I'd already sold Section 31 the database I'd stolen from the Collector Hive, which included the Husnock database. It would still be *extremely* difficult to find in that proverbial haystack, if not next to impossible, given the sheer size of the database, especially because the Husnock data had been misfiled centuries ago. They also lacked the key to having it make sense and put in a useful context as they lacked my knowledge from the series which was a big reason behind why I'd been able to both find it and make it as useful as it had been so quickly. Any technology derived from the Minosian database, *would* be at risk, however.

I also knew that Section 31 had advanced starships of their own, with technology they'd likely acquired/stolen from advanced alien races, both living and extinct, or some kind of time travel

shenanigans. The bottom line was that I could *definitely* use a good science officer with flexible morals and the ability to see the big picture, unblinded by Federation idealism and willing to get her hands dirty. I also liked T'Maz and certainly enjoyed fucking her, which was a nice bonus. And, finally, Section 31 was paying me an obscene amount of latinum to take her onboard my ship. That was hard to pass up, especially when I knew I needed more live crew to use the ship at anywhere near its full potential. The *Flighty Temptress* wasn't quite as big as *Voyager*, for instance, but it was pretty close, and with only two other permanent crew members in B'Elanna and Neela, whom I had permanently reassigned to my staff and to my personal ship, and a whole slew of holo-engineers and officers, it was going to be difficult to operate if the ship saw extensive combat operations or we encountered one of those ridiculous spatial anomalies that were so common in Star Trek.

With these thoughts, my mind was mostly made up.

Her access to the computer systems, technical databases, engines, weapons, and any other advanced technologies onboard would have to be carefully controlled, but that wasn't as problematic as it might seem. She would need to use the computers in her role as science officer, but that didn't mean she'd be able to easily figure out how to reproduce my technology through that access alone. Many people use their computers and software very well without knowing anything about the hardware, especially as to how to recreate it in the first place. And barring her from engineering should be fine.

Scarlet would have to closely monitor her and all her computer use while onboard, and report anything odd to me. And if T'Maz truly betrayed me, well, I'd just kick her off the ship. *Maybe* I'd be kind enough and do it while the ship was docked somewhere, instead of out of an airlock in deep space. Section 31 probably already knew from their profile of me that I would not tolerate betrayal and would kill anyone who betrayed me, no matter who they were.

"Officially, isn't the Vulcan Expeditionary Group already sending a ship to study that outpost?" I asked curiously, trying to get more information to think this through properly and to evaluate the strength of her cover story. "In terms of your cover identity, can't you just get the information you supposedly want from them?"

I'd not kept that mission a secret; an explanation had been needed, after all, to justify my absence from the station during that crisis, regardless of how ridiculous and unfair that was, so I had reported most everything back to Bajor and Starfleet. Sisko was in charge of the station, including its defense, *not me*, yet during that crisis some eyebrows had been raised when I'd left to investigate what the Collectors were interested in. Sisko and the Starfleet crew had always seemingly worried I'd usurp command of the station during a crisis, but when I wasn't there during a crisis, somehow they had a problem with that. That just made me sigh in exasperation.

The mission report didn't include any dangerous information for me, nor did I leave anything dangerous or overly valuable behind. I'd taken the sword and just about everything else that was intact. My looting game was strong! All that remained there was a bunch of mostly smashed up pottery and other artifacts, including some technology. I had, however, learned later that the

Vulcan Expeditionary Group was planning to send a ship there to investigate further. They could have at it.

"The Vulcan Expeditionary Group is very select when it comes to choosing who is allowed to travel on one of their ships," T'Maz explained why the cover story would make sense to anyone hearing it with even a tiny bit of knowledge. "It is also well known that they do not always share their research findings as freely as some would like. In any case, their expeditions can take months, if not years, before their research is complete. We do not have that amount of time. We must learn all we can of the Hur'q and your ship seems like the ideal base of operations given your proximity to the wormhole and the number of times you've encountered them thus far. Unofficially, it has been noted and talked about that your presence at or near a number of significant events is a...statistical anomaly...that we must take into account."

"The Kirk/Picard/*Enterprise* effect, you mean," I said with a grin. The shows wouldn't be what they were if events in the Star Trek universe didn't revolve around those men and that ship.

T'Maz looked thoughtful at my response, "I have never heard it described that way, but it is an apt description. For centuries, captains of the ships bearing that name, in particular, have been at the center of important galactic events more than is statistically probable, even for the flagship of Starfleet."

I leaned back in my chair and sighed, gazing thoughtfully at T'Maz who remained at attention.

"I'm hesitant to accept, T'Maz," I admitted, though I had probably already made my decision. "We've worked well together in the past, fought together, shed blood together, and nearly died together. But my ship and home has a lot of advanced technology that I have no desire to see stolen and given to Section 31, just as they have no desire to give me any. When I rendezvoused with a Section 31 starship, I wasn't even permitted to see the hull configuration before I flew into the cargo bay. What assurances do I have that you will not work against me, or steal my technology, or outright assassinate me should Section 31 desire it?"

"Valid concerns, Admiral," T'Maz admitted, looking down before visibly steeling herself. "First, to assuage your most serious concern, I am a scientist, researcher, and analyst for Section 31, not strictly a field operative trained or skilled in the art of assassination. Should Section 31 wish to assassinate you in the future, I lack the skills necessary to ensure a minimum required probability of success, nor is it likely that I would be trusted with such a mission by Section 31 given our close personal and working relationship in the past."

I nodded in acknowledgment of the truth of her words, pleased that she didn't even try to pretend that there weren't circumstances in which Section 31 might want to have me killed.

"Second, my orders are to join your crew as part of my cover mission, however my primary mission objectives are to continue studying the Collectors, to assist you as you take on missions for Section 31, and finally, to act as a liaison between you and the organization should you have any surreptitious encounters which Section would be interested in, not to work against you in any way, to steal your unique technologies, or to report on your every movement or capability," T'Maz explained. "I can continue my work involving the Collectors from anywhere with a

subspace communication link, but it was viewed as ideal for me to be present with you should the 'Kirk/Picard/Enterprise effect', as you put it, take place again."

"Third, in addition to whatever surveillance or restricted access you will no doubt impose while onboard, I have been authorized by Agent Sloan to provide you with every report I intend to send back to Section 31, before I send it. Should you wish a topic to not be reported, you only need to say so and it will not be. Agent Sloan anticipated many of your potential objections, including the ones you have already voiced and wishes to assure you that there are no 'shenanigans' in our request. If you wish to sell or license to us any of your advanced, unique, or personally designed technologies now or in the future, Section 31 would be most interested in purchasing it, but we will not engage in any clandestine intelligence gathering by leveraging my role on your ship."

I internally cringed at the use of the word 'shenanigans.' Being predictable could be a very dangerous thing. So far, Sloan seemed to have gone out of his way to assuage my worries. For some reason, that made me worry even more.

"Thank you for sharing all that, like I said, I am still hesitant--"

T'Maz interrupted, "Agent Sloan instructed me to tell you, should you be still hesitant to accept this offer, that this would clear all debts you owe to the organization. In his words, 'we would be even.'"

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

This was exactly why I hated owing anyone, anything. These moments when a marker gets called in and you end up doing something not because you truly wanted to, but because you had to. It was irrelevant that I had been leaning towards accepting T'Maz, now I really didn't have a choice and that irked me. The great game of favors between two powerful parties was a perilous one, and refusing to pay back one's debts when called in could have serious consequences. The debt I owed for Section 31's assistance with sourcing those computers and helping out with the Circle situation and probably running interference with Starfleet since my home and ship's capabilities had been shown so publicly, had come due. And though they hadn't said anything about running interference for me, I'm sure it had happened and they were just being polite about it by not explicitly telling me that I owed them for that. If you were a serious player, you acknowledged the debt without having to be told it was there.

Sigh...

"I see. Well, with it understood that all my debts to Section 31 are paid and those assurances that you've already offered in mind, I'm willing to give this a shot, T'Maz," I said. "I like you a lot, I think we could work well together, but make no mistake, if you *betray* me, you will not like what I will do in response, no matter our relationship. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I believe I do, Admiral."

"In that case, welcome aboard the new and improved *Flighty Temptress*, science officer T'Maz," I told the Vulcan happily. "Of course, your access to various critical areas or advanced technologies will be restricted. Just don't go messing with the ship's systems without permission

or attempt to access restricted files in the ship's database, and we'll be just fine. I'm placing a lot of trust in you, please don't make me regret it. If you need anything done that exceeds your clearance level, you can always come to me with your request or seek out my Chief Engineer, B'Elanna Torres."

The second she was out of my ready room I'd tell B'Elanna to lock down engineering and to prevent T'Maz's unaccompanied access to any of the more sensitive areas of the ship, with the exception of the bridge, and any parts of the database containing sensitive information. Scarlett could activate any of the internal force fields if necessary to keep her out of restricted sections if need be.

"Thank you, Admiral," T'Maz spoke in her normal calm monotone. "I will endeavor to prove myself worthy of your trust in the days ahead."

"Do that."

With that heavy conversation out of the way, the air in the room lost that heavy, oppressive feeling.

"Tell me honestly, T'Maz, was Section 31 surprised at my island's capabilities?" I asked, trying to keep my tone light.

"The defensive capabilities of your island were anticipated by our predictive models," T'Maz admitted. "While your efforts to hide your final goal were admirable and were successful with regard to Starfleet Intelligence and all the other intelligence outfits we routinely monitor, your many interactions with Section 31 allowed us to predict your actions before we found the pattern in the data to confirm our predictions. The data on those items and critical resources you were forced to purchase, that could not be sourced locally or produced by your industrial replicator, confirmed the prediction of our psychographic model."

"Wait, wait," I said, waving my hands in the air. "You are saying that your predictive model on my personality indicated that I would arm and shield my island to a high degree, and that it was only with that conclusion *already* in mind, that you were able to find and detect the pattern in my purchases to confirm it? That you wouldn't have spotted it otherwise."

"Yes, that is correct. We did not find that pattern at first, but concluding that it was there, but we could not yet see it, gave us the determination to continue searching until successful," she responded. "Starfleet Intelligence, however, has had little first-hand access or interaction with you, thus their psychographic model is quite inaccurate and flawed compared to ours. Their model also has a predictive bias towards those preconceptions or prejudices often associated with the Augment Khan Noonien Singh from Earth's Eugenics Wars. Every public action, since you became a member of the Bajoran military, has been viewed through that flawed lens, thus their model is fatally flawed from the outset and incapable of accurately predicting your behavior and actions."

"So, how do they view my donations to charity, just out of curiosity?" I asked.

“They believe you are buying goodwill and influence in a long-term plot to take over the planet and government of Bajor to rule as its King,” she answered.

“As its *King*?? Wow, that’s ambitious of me,” I laughed, amazed at just how absurd a turn this conversation had taken. “My reason for stopping the Circle and thus preserving the Provisional Government?” I asked next, amazed at what I was hearing.

“The same as previous, you wish to rule unopposed and the Cardassians’ return would interfere with that plan.”

“Makes perfect sense,” I snarked. “Loaning the funds to expand the Bajoran militia, including helping them acquire a dozen fighter craft?”

“Strengthening the Militia will help ensure that when you do take over the planet, external parties will have a more difficult time deposing you from your rule.”

“Well, that’s just good long-term planning,” I deadpanned. “Helping to rebuild the planet?” I asked, afraid now at the possible answer.

“As it has been noted by Starfleet Intelligence that you are an unashamed voluptuary, similar to the Risians, it is thought that you do not wish to rule a planet that is not both luxurious and beautiful, which may be tempering your more violent, bloodthirsty, and destructive tendencies as an Augment,” she explained.

I slow blinked in response.

“Good for the Bajorans, I guess, though I’m not even sure what that word means, T’Maz,” I admitted. “Scarlett what is the definition of ‘Voluptuary?’”

“Noun and adjective, early 17th century Earth, old calendar, from the Latin volupt(u)arius or voluptas, meaning pleasure. A person devoted to luxury and sensual pleasure,” Scarlett answered in response to my query. “Synonyms include philanderer, ladies’ man, playboy, rake, roue, loose-liver, Don Juan, Lothario, Casanova, Romeo, lecher, seducer, womanizer, debauchee, hedonist, reprobate, degenerate, fornicator, gay dog-”

“That’s enough!” I practically shouted, though part of me was still stuck on ‘gay dog?’ That must be a truly archaic idiom or term because I sure as fuck had never heard it before. “What the fuck, T’Maz? I like women and I like sex, and I like to live luxuriously and make money, but fuck me, that’s some rude shit right there and a seriously messed up way to view everything I’ve done on Bajor.”

“To be clear, this opinion appears only to be held by a hard-liner faction within Starfleet Intelligence, though many of this faction are highly placed and ranked in the organization,” T’Maz clarified.

I tiredly rubbed my eyes at learning this latest bit of insanity.

“And my new ship?” I asked.

“While Section 31 predicted you would continue to upgrade your ship as more resources became available to you, or from the cache of resources taken from the Cardassian freighters you captured using our intelligence data, it was not considered possible that you would be able to build and launch an entirely new ship without our becoming aware of it long beforehand,” T’Maz replied. “The time frame in which it could have been accomplished also would have been thought previously impossible given current methods.”

Finally, I had managed to surprise Section 31. That was something at least.

“And now?”

“Section 31 believes you have used your genetically enhanced intelligence to substantially improve current shipbuilding methods or have created a new form of shipbuilding with previously unknown techniques or technologies,” T’Maz admitted. “As all of your actions to date have been in furtherance of the Federation’s continued existence and prosperity, or at least not in opposition to it, it was deemed unnecessary to take any further action at this time. You may not drink the Federation ‘Kool Aid’, as you put it, but you have no desire to harm the organization or assist its enemies, despite the possibility of potentially making more money by doing so.”

“A wait and see approach then?” I asked.

“Yes. In the future, as we become more aware of your and your ship’s overall capabilities, Section 31 will likely offer you highly lucrative missions that leverage your new capabilities.”

“Please let Sloan know that I am open to the idea of that,” I said, “and should I encounter anything Section may be interested in, will offer it to them first for purchase.”

“I will pass that along.”

“Just for shits and giggles, how they do view my saving humanity as a whole from God-like beings, when my own life was not actually at risk?” I asked.

When even T’Maz visibly hesitated for a moment, I knew I was in for a doozie.

“They believe that you did not wish billions of potential human sexual partners, and future subjects, to die,” T’Maz answered.

I banged my head on my desk a few times. T’Maz looked unaffected by my behavior, looking around my office with interest.

“Given your fondness for the naked female form I am surprised that you are not painting nude female models. It seems like a natural step in your artistic expression,” T’Maz commented, as she took a moment to inspect my nascent attempts at fine art. “It is unlikely that you lack for suitable volunteers to model given the harem you are amassing, according to reports.”

That did sound like me, didn’t it? And did she just admit she had been checking up on my love life? Did my ears deceive me, was there a hint of jealousy in her voice?

“Are you volunteering?” I asked, with a mischievous smile.

T'Maz appeared to give it some thought.

"We are friends, lovers, and fellow crew and should assist each other whenever possible," she said after a few moments. "Therefore, I will pose for you, if you wish."

Well, that could certainly be fun and lead to even more fun activities. Maybe my ready room and bedroom onboard the ship would soon be getting some erotic artwork on the walls! That would be another way to show that this wasn't some stuffy Starfleet ship.

I could see it now, Picard walking along the corridors with me giving a surprised look at nude portraits of my female crew and wondering just what the hell was going on. That made me laugh.

Just how raunchy should I get?

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Corridors. The *Flighty Temptress*.

Despite all the work we'd recently done to overcome the computer's insufficient processing power when making phase variance calculations at slipstream speeds, the ship still wasn't quite ready. However, the other systems still needed to be tested in the field, as such we'd docked the *Temptress* at Deep Space Nine prior to beginning the ship's shakedown cruise, something that my crew and I were quite excited by.

This had allowed us to test the impulse drives on the short trip from Bajor to the station, as well as the thrusters, both docking and maneuvering. We'd also taken the opportunity to do some rather crazy barrel rolls and fast sharp turns and other piloting shenanigans which had prompted the station to quickly hail us, asking if we were having an emergency and needed assistance. While the majority of our recent attention had been on the slipstream drive, every system on the ship needed to be thoroughly tested in the field, including the sublight engines. So far, they had performed even better than expected. The crazy maneuvering also caused no problems, which confirmed the ridiculous numbers of inertial dampers I had added to the ship were working as I'd intended.

Many people on the station had shown an interest in my new ship, especially given the unusual hull design that many had never seen the like of before, the red and black color scheme, the intense maneuvers we'd done on the trip from Bajor and the fact that the station's sensors could not penetrate the hull even with shields down. The only person I'd actually let onboard, though, was Jadzia Dax, since she'd already known about the ship and had helped greatly in the preparation phase to build it, and as such she knew not to divulge anything she learned when she reported to the Commander later on, beyond what I permitted. Not that he had any right to classified information on the new flagship of the Bajoran Navy--though everyone understood that the ship belonged to me personally and not Bajor--as it had been designated a military special project, but letting him think that he knew something about the ship should smooth any ruffled feathers he had.

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“Like many Starfleet ships, I decided to put the crew quarters near the exterior hull,” I explained while giving Jadzia a tour of my new ship, opening a door leading to one of the many currently unoccupied guest rooms on the ship and walking inside with her. “In addition to giving the occupants great views of the surrounding space, which is probably what actually motivated Federation starship designers, what motivated me was that in the event of a hull breach, the quarters would act to contain and seal the damage from the rest of the ship. If those quarters are occupied, well, better to lose that one person than many or a main ship corridor for travel.”

“A bit grim in thinking, but that makes sense if you’re expecting a lot of potential combat damage, I suppose,” Dax responded as she walked into the guest corridors, looking around in awe. “It’s quite spacious compared to a Starfleet ship. A multi-room set of quarters like this would be reserved for senior staff, guest ambassadors, or VIPs on a Starfleet ship. And you certainly didn’t spare any expense on the décor,” she said looking intently at the room’s bed in particular.

“No, I didn’t,” I laughed, looking around at all the ultra-high-end materials and the futuristic quarters. “My ship was never intended to have a crew complement the size of something like an Intrepid-class. Where I could, I automated, and where I couldn’t, I used a combination of live crew and holographic crew members.”

“It’s innovative and unique and brilliant, just like I’ve come to expect from you, Gothic,” Jadzia responded, with a smile. “The EMH is probably the most similar concept Starfleet has pursued, but you’ve taken that idea to a whole new level, which could put many of us out of a job. By the way, I’ve got to ask, why is the bed floating?” she asked, incredulous, while pointing at the bed.

I laughed at the question, wondering when she was going to ask considering she’d been eyeing it the whole time.

“It is. Almost every stateroom on the ship has a King size bed like that,” I explained. “It’s equipped with an anti-grav system to account for any motion of the ship, should we be traveling through rough space, but at the moment it’s attenuating the gravity plating in the room the bed is resting atop of to keep the bed in the air, but not floating around uncontrolled either. It has a bevy of sensors and potential adjustments for temperature and environmental controls, and to monitor sleep patterns or any anomalous readings. It also has a small life support and shield unit in case of attack and the bed and its occupant are ejected into space.”

“Like a bed and an escape pod mixed together; that is some paranoid stuff, Gothic,” Jadzia joked, smirking in my direction. “I’m assuming that’s another of your personal designs?”

“Guilty,” I answered. “Almost, every cabin has a bed like this and an advanced workstation and office area as well, facing the window into space.”

“Almost every cabin?” she asked curiously.

“My quarters has a bed that’s quite a bit bigger,” I replied in a sexy voice. “A good orgy requires some room to maneuver around, you know.”

“Oh, I know it. It’s a beautiful set of quarters, Gothic,” she said with a laugh, still looking around. “It certainly puts to shame every living quarter I’ve ever been assigned throughout my Starfleet career.”

“Well, this room is yours, if you want it, should you find yourself onboard again for whatever reason,” I offered.

Jadzia looked touched at my offer, “Thank you, Gothic, I might just take you up on that someday.”

“Should we continue the tour?” I asked, gesturing back into the corridor. She nodded in response and we left the room.

As we walked, Jadzia continued to curiously look around, turning her head back and forth.

“Why am I not surprised that you even made your corridor design unique?” she joked.

“The corridors are like the arteries of the ship, moving power and people throughout,” I answered, gesturing around, happy to talk about the ship, like I was a proud father. “My research indicated this rough octagon shape would strengthen the ship’s overall structural integrity. The floor material is similar in appearance to carpet, but I took inspiration from flooring typically found in a freighter’s cargo hold. It’s actually an anti-slip, anti-vibration, soft gel coating.”

“I really like the color scheme,” she said. “You’d think this red-orange and silver color palette wouldn’t work, but it actually does.”

“Not my work, I’m afraid,” I answered, taking it in myself. “That choice was made by my girls. The color pattern here is based on a tiger, a large predator feline native to Earth. Much of the rest of the interior design work was done by Commander Data and he came through big time for me, once again.”

“What are these ribbed protrusions on either side of the corridor every 10 meters or so?” she asked. “Internal force fields?”

“Correct,” I answered. “These sections can be independently activated as needed, to keep the deck from decompressing or to prevent movement. They’re the backbone of my counter-boarding program. Each of these units has its own backup internal power supply and emergency lighting, should the ship lose power, for whatever reason.”

“They’re quite oversized compared to the ones on *Enterprise*, from what I can recall. I’m assuming they’re capable of giving lethal shocks if touched.”

“Correct again,” I answered. “If someone is boarding my ship, they’re my enemies and I want the ability to set the force fields to a lethal setting. The power requirements to kill a Collector warrior, for instance, is quite high.”

She nodded, looking thoughtful at my answer, thankfully not condemning me for being bloodthirsty or something silly like that, or asking how I knew even that much about Collector physiology.

“Merely making more power available to the force field generators shouldn’t make them this thick, though,” she said confusedly, still examining each section.

“Good eye,” I said. “You’re right. Each section here can be sealed physically. Hardened, interlocking doors like those you’d find in a shuttlebay can be deployed. The two doors are recessed and come from either side to close and lock and will seal the section even if the entire ship lost power.”

“Interesting,” she remarked. “You’re quite a fan of redundancies in your security, aren’t you?”

“Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst,” I said simply, to which she nodded.

“I’ve noticed that there are no touch panels on the corridor walls,” she pointed out, in a lighter tone. “Given your tendency to overengineer and use advanced technology all over the place, including in your *beds*, I would have thought you’d have touch panels all up and down these corridors.”

I smiled again at her snark. I suppose that that had a kernel of truth to it, though I disputed the ‘overengineered’ bit of it. Stepping closer to the corridor wall, I pressed my hand between the two horizontal black lines that were present on either side of the corridor walls at a height that would reach the upper chest on most humanoids. A large holographic control panel was projected in front of me, activated by my touch.

“Touching either of these lines or between them will activate a holographic touch panel, well, for authorized personnel or guests it will,” I clarified with a smirk. “The black lines are actually the main holographic emitters for this area of the ship, though there are backup emitters as well.”

“Of course, you’d use holography again,” she snarked.

“You could also just call for Scarlett, she’s the avatar of the *Temptress*’ computer.”

“Scarlett, can you assist me?” Jadzia called aloud, looking up and around.

“How may I be of assistance, Lieutenant Commander Dax?” Scarlett’s voice immediately responded, though her avatar form did not appear.

“Can you direct me to Gothic’s quarters?” she asked, a saucy smile on her face now, to which I only raised an amused eyebrow.

“Of course,” Scarlett responded, a complete map of the ship’s corridors with a glowing ‘you are here’ equivalent and a highlighted path in bright yellow leading to my quarters appeared.

“Admiral Gothic’s quarters are located on deck 3, section 10. A map to that location is currently being displayed. Please follow the projected map as you move along the corridor to your destination.”

“Thank you, Scarlett,” Dax responded, looking impressed. “That is one sexy, smoky voice you gave your computer, Gothic. I wouldn’t mind hearing something like that whenever I interacted with the computer on the station.”

“Life is too short to not keep it sexy, Jadzia,” I said, as I pulled her close and gave her a kiss. “I can never get enough sexy, beautiful things in my life.”

“You flirt,” she said looking up into my eyes, after wrapping her arms around my neck and kissing me passionately for a few long seconds. “Gothic, there was something I wanted to say to you.”

“What’s that?” I said, pulling away from her a bit to better look at her, the tone of her voice now quite serious and earnest.

“I wanted to thank you, so very much, for stopping Verad from stealing my symbiont. You saved my life and so much more,” she said seriously, looking into my chest, rather than my eyes, her eyes glistening. “Taking the Dax symbiont from me would have eventually killed me, at least my body, but there is no greater violation, no act of violence or harm you could do worse than taking or stealing the symbiont from a joined trill. At the end of one’s life, it can be such a beautiful and wonderful thing to pass on the symbiont to the next host, the next link in the great succession of lives. But to take it through violence, before its time, before the host is ready for the separation, is so much worse than rape, so much worse than torture or even murder... It would be like someone ripped away part of your very soul while living and left you a husk of yourself, diminished, slowly dying, an incomplete shell of yourself.”

At that she trailed off, obviously struggling to find the right words.

“You’re welcome, Jadzia,” I replied quietly and heartfully. “I doubt I have the ability to fully understand or appreciate what you’re saying, but I probably understand enough. I would do *anything* for one of my girls to keep them safe from harm.”

“Am I? Am I one of *your* girls, Gothic?” she asked, looking deeply into my eyes.

“In my heart you are,” I answered honestly. “You’re beautiful and sexy and vibrant and so, so alive, I can’t help but want to be with you in a more formal, long-term capacity. But I know you might not be ready to commit fully yet, and not many would be open to sharing me with other women.”

“Well, as you know, I’m not like other women and have never been afraid of alternative pairings,” she said with a smile, before her voice turned downright sinful. “If I recall correctly, our first time together was a *threesome*.”

“I will have to convene a meeting of the Royal Harem and seek their permission to add a member,” I joked. “There may be tests of strength and bouts of sexual combat, but I think you’ve got what it takes.”

“Bring it on!” she growled, which made me kiss her silly once again.

Since I had begun this new life in the Star Trek universe, I had been hesitant to completely hijack an episode from the outset, keeping it from happening virtually at all. That seemed like all kinds of trouble, with unpredictable consequences to me *and* the timeline. But after the Prophets had stopped me from exposing Winn, I had felt like acting out a little, especially as my presence in

this universe had led to Quark warning me about the upcoming conspiracy to steal the Dax symbiont even before it happened. Keeping our relationship strong and profitable was worth a hell of a lot more than the profits from some one-off transaction with those dishonorable Klingon criminals. So I had said ‘fuck it’ and derailed the events of that episode from the start, saving Jadzia from a horrific experience.

If this was the outcome of that interference, if it meant Jadzia realized the full extent of her feelings for me and wanted to get more serious, those were consequences I would happily see through.

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After following Scarlett’s interactive holo-map, Jadzia and I had reached the most luxurious set of quarters on the ship, in my humble opinion, the captain’s quarters, and I was giving Dax the grand tour. For a so-called *voluptuary* like myself--fucking Starfleet Intelligence assholes--it was fit for a king and was downright palatial.

Lying supine on my large and comfortable couch near the ‘window’ was T’Maz, a few pillows propping her head up so that she could look in the direction her artist would be, if I hadn’t left to give Dax a tour of the ship.

She laid partially on her back and side facing my empty chair, a high-quality sketchpad and a charcoal pencil sitting on top. She was also entirely nude, arms relaxed and above her head, her large, heavy, pert breasts rising and falling with each breath, nipples soft after I had raised the temperature in the room to ensure her comfort. Her legs were crossed, hiding the treasure between her legs. And topping it all off was a stunning 171-carat flawless blue sapphire shaped like a heart, in a platinum filigree setting, and flanked by 103 diamonds in a platinum necklace. In another time and dimension, this necklace would be famously known as the ‘Heart of the Ocean.’

No one but me, in all the universe (besides some uber god-like multiversal beings, of course), knew that I had shamelessly put T’Maz in the classic nude pose from the 1997 film Titanic and on a whim had virtually designed and replicated the famous Heart of the Ocean to put around her neck. For a new artist honing his craft, it seemed apt, and kind of hilarious, a bit of an inside joke for a dimensional traveler like myself. Maybe I should write a holonovel mirroring the Titanic movie? I had a feeling it’d sell really fucking well in the Federation.

I had barely started my sketch when Jadzia had signaled that she was asking permission to board. The timing wasn’t ideal, but I decided to flex my new power over T’Maz and subtly, or perhaps not so subtly, remind her that I was her new commanding officer and had ordered her to remain where she was. This new status would be a significant change in our working relationship. When we last worked together before, she was my trainer and arguably my superior in Section 31. Now, though, she worked for me and was under my command. Her soft ‘Aye, captain’ and the scent of new arousal was downright exciting for me and confirmed that she accepted her new station under me and was perhaps aroused by this new power dynamic.

"Jadzia, I'd like to introduce you to my new science officer, T'Maz, a member of the Vulcan Science Institute, who will be conducting her own research while serving onboard my ship. T'Maz, this is Lieutenant Jadzia Dax, a member of Starfleet and Chief Science Officer of Deep Space 9," I formally introduced the two to each other, despite one being nude and semi-provocatively posed. It was still pretty classy, in my opinion. I couldn't even see her pussy!

T'Maz, to her credit, didn't move an inch, try to cover herself, or even bat an eye at the unusual circumstances of this meeting, which made her even more attractive in my mind. Jadzia too, barely reacted beyond her customary smirk and a display of visible amusement at this situation. I thought myself exceedingly lucky to be surrounded by these extraordinary women.

"You always manage to surprise me, Gothic. I think I love that about you," Jadzia said.

"Well met, Lieutenant Dax. Welcome to the *Flighty Temptress*," T'Maz offered in return.

"Nice to meet you too, T'Maz," Jadzia greeted right back.

I merely glanced at each of these women, closely watching their reactions and loving it.

"As you can see, T'Maz and I were working on an art project before I was distracted by your coming onboard," I explained to the Trill while gesturing to the unfinished nude charcoal drawing, before stepping close to T'Maz and taking a full breast in my hand, playing delicately with her nipple.

"I can see that," Jadzia replied, quite obviously checking out T'Maz's beautiful body and what I was doing to her, obviously finding it desirable, maybe even as much as I did. "I suspect I know how you two would be celebrating the completion of this new masterpiece," Jadzia remarked with a giggle.

"Yup," I agreed, as I glanced at T'Maz. "A team building exercise or two, a merging of interests, as it were."

The sketch truly was to practice my art, but if I was honest, was probably more foreplay than anything else in this situation, but if it turned out well, it'd be going up in my quarters in a very nice frame.

"Do you wish to join in on the sex?" T'Maz rather bluntly asked, abandoning our wordplay.

I quickly moved out of the way and sat back, taking my sketchbook back in hand, as the beautiful Trill moved over to the couch and nodded in agreement, throwing a mischievous wink my way when I showed some surprise at just how easily she had agreed to join in. I thought I would need to subtly massage the situation to get group sex out of this encounter, but Jadzia was quite unpredictable at the best of times. It had been a *travesty* to pair her up with someone as incredibly boring as Worf; she was just too much *woman* for that fool and he'd never have been able to keep her wild side happy. As a fan of the show part of me felt that if she hadn't died when she did, that their marriage would *not* have lasted in the long-term.

"It shouldn't surprise you," Dax said while grinning at me lustily, absently taking T'Maz's breasts in hand herself, pinching and squeezing the nipples. "This wouldn't exactly be our first

threesome, and you know I'm always up for trying new things. It's the explorer in me, you know. To be fair, I normally spend *some* time getting to know someone before I go to bed with them, though in this case I'll make an exception. You have impeccable taste in women, Gothic, and I've come to trust and value your judgment."

After I got a few alcoholic refreshments from my advanced replicator for everyone, I continued to sketch T'Maz as we traded small talk. Jadzia continued to do her part by keeping T'Maz's nipples constantly hard with those skilled fingers. During the course of our conversation, T'Maz shared the cover story regarding how we met, while obviously omitting certain facts, Jadzia doing the same.

Soon enough, I finished my sketch and threw it onto my work desk as T'Maz and Jadzia had begun to make out on my couch, though it was far more tentative on T'Maz's part.

Coming up behind Jadzia, I reached behind her neck and found the clasp that held her bodysuit together. With a gentle tug I pulled the clasp slowly down to her waist, revealing the two large, round, perky breasts that I'd had plenty of chances to play with before in the past and thankfully would again.

"In all my seven lives, these breasts are probably in the top 10 most lovely," Jadzia said, before leaning down and taking one of T'Maz's nipples into her mouth, her tongue visibly circling the nub. T'Maz moaned in acute pleasure. "Vulcan women can be so beautiful."

Throughout this entire meeting my beautiful T'Pol lookalike had not bothered to dress, showing zero inclination to cover up. In fact, I felt like I could ban her from ever wearing clothes while on this ship and she would happily comply with my order. In fact, I might just do that for fun.

"You know I totally forgot that you had a thing for women too, Jadzia," I said to her.

She pulled back from those breasts, wet with her saliva, and smiled again.

"I've been both a woman and a man several times over now," she reminded me. "And Curzon, my last host, was a *very* sexual person who loved the ladies, any ladies, of practically any species. I've inherited that trait, among others."

Rather than reply to that, I pulled her up from the couch to face me and started to lick and suck on Dax's delicious looking nipples, occasionally pulling at the nipple softly with my teeth. From her laced fingers in my hair and the way she gripped me to her bosom, she liked what I was doing. After a bit of my expert love and attention, both nipples had risen to attention.

My hands were busy also. One was gently pinching the nipple that I had just sucked on and the other was fondling her tight ass gently, spreading her cheeks and rubbing my fingers in her wet folds when I could reach them.

I had to focus on the reality of having two horny, willing, and very, *very* sexy women ready to do *anything* I wanted. Assuming of course that this was all real, and I wasn't living in some virtual reality erotic fantasy on an advanced holodeck. If I was, it would certainly explain quite a few

things, like that weird adventure on Risa with the Section 31 agent I'd never seen or heard of again, despite my time with 31.

"Hold on a moment," Dax requested.

She quickly peeled down the rest of her bodysuit and stepped out of her suit's pant legs and stood before us totally naked. Then she laughed and kissed me, pressing herself tightly against me. There was a flagpole tenting my pants and I'm sure that the material was about to give way under the sheer pressure. Jadzia must have felt it poking her thigh and she decided to grab it, running her fingers up and down the turgid length.

"Well, someone is definitely *up* for this," she commented.

I quickly undressed as T'Maz got up from the couch to begin alternately kissing and licking Dax's many spots, running all the way up and down her body.

"My knowledge of Trill physiology indicates that these markings are highly sensitive," the Vulcan explained between kisses and quick licks.

Well, I suppose they should serve some purpose. Perhaps they had something to do with attracting a mate? Or perhaps they were the cause of a trill's higher libido? Something to look up later.

"Yessss," Dax squealed/moaned, as she opened my pants and pulled my cock free to vigorously stroke, "... don't you dare stop!"

Damn, Trills must be *really* sensitive to tongues in that area, as I'd not observed anyone else stimulating Jadzia quite like this beyond that Risian priestess, Arandis, and I had thought that that was her sex magic voodoo at work. I'd have to add that to my bag of tricks when pleasuring her. Hmm, I wonder what would happen if I applied my bliss baton/pleasure rod directly to those spots?

From the way she was now gasping and moaning and squirming in total ecstasy as T'Maz moved her tongue elsewhere, the Vulcan woman must have had some experience with cunnilingus. I spent some time just watching and enjoying this prime example of interspecies lesbian lovemaking.

"I'm cumming! I'm cummming!" the Trill screamed.

While the Vulcan woman seemed relatively controlled, I could see that she was equally aroused as I was from the glistening wetness between her legs.

"Do you want Jadzia to eat you out?" I asked her.

"Yes," she said while nodding. "I would like to experience this sexual technique as given by a woman. I have only been orally pleased by men, but I also wish to try other things. Perhaps we should simply 'go with the flow' as you humans put it."

I kissed T'Maz deeply and then stopped. For a moment she seemed extremely surprised when Jadzia began kissing her too shortly after. T'Maz hesitated, but after resisting a few probes of her

tongue from the very sexually experienced Trill, she opened her mouth and they began to kiss each other hungrily, their large breasts mashing and rubbing against each other, nipple to nipple. Jadzia began to stroke T'Maz's breasts and pinch her nipples between them.

After a minute or two of intense making out while I nibbled on T'Maz's ears, Dax then turned to me, and she was smiling in a way that let me know that I was in big trouble, but in the 'oh so good' variety.

"Now it's his turn!" she declared.

T'Maz must have understood what her fellow woman needed of her since she pushed me down onto the couch and held me there, placing me like a king on his throne.

"Payback time," the Trill said mischievously.

She then spread my knees apart and knelt between them, her tongue lapping at the very tip of my cock which already had a good bit of precum ready to be tasted. Gingerly at first, then with an ever-increasing boldness, she licked up and down the length of my considerable tool, her tongue lashing out wildly, occasionally circling the head quickly with her tongue in a very sloppy blowjob. With one hand rhythmically pumping my shaft, the other fondled my balls gently, moving them in her hand.

After several minutes of this loving worship of my cock, she perched up and opened her mouth wide as possible and placed it directly over the head of my cock pushing downwards in one steady downward plunge. She was trying to swallow my ten inches whole. I watched as she first took a few inches into her mouth, then more and more down her throat, without gagging.

T'Maz, having patiently watched thus far, showed that even her people's legendary stoicism and patience had its limits for she couldn't resist any longer from actively participating. She stepped up onto the couch, bent my head back, swung her leg over and mounted my face, grinding my lips and tongue into her dripping cunt. She was facing away from Jadzia who was still sucking my cock vigorously, her face rising and falling on my cock. My mouth and nose, were now smothered by the sweet scent of her hot Vulcan cunt. Part of me hoped that some of DS9's ship traffic saw what we were doing through the window.

"Stop holding back, Gothic!" Jadzia interrupted, pulling herself off me with sound of failed suction. "I want that hot cum to fill my fucking mouth. I promise to swallow every last drop. Give it to me!" she shouted before practically face fucking herself on my cock, making obscene sounds. She knew how much of a fan I was of messy and enthusiastic blowjobs.

I brought my hands up to T'Maz's firm ass and took hold of those cheeks to keep her still, dominating her from the bottom, my tongue flicking out automatically to lick the snatch that I was quite familiar with, my eidetic memory reminding me exactly what she liked best from our past sexual encounters. This cunt was extremely wet and already slightly open, showing that the sexy spy was heavily aroused. My strong, dexterous tongue pushed in and opened even wider exposing the inner part of her pussy to my deep probing tongue. My hands rose behind her back tightly gripped her soft, yet very firm ass cheeks, alternately caressing them and kneading them,

gently then strongly, while I pleased her as best I could. This wasn't a position I was overly used to these days, but I felt like I was performing quite well if the quiet, but intense moans T'Maz was emitting were any indication.

I let go of one of those cheeks and threaded my fingers in Jadzia's hair just as I was about to cum, forcing her all the way down to swallow my entire cock as I held her down and exploded in her mouth, just like she had demanded.

I could hear her noisily swallowing every last drop, just like she promised.

Near the end T'Maz began to shake and tremble gently, almost trying to pull away from me which I didn't allow, but when her orgasm came there was no mistaking how intense it was. She came so loudly that she startled Jadzia, who yelped while trying to swallow every last drop of my cum, spilling some of it, as I was cumming inside her mouth at the time.

She pulled off when I was done cumming.

"It's like the most wonderful drug," she dreamily whispered, probably not realizing that I could hear her.

"You two ladies amuse each other," I told them when T'Maz had finally calmed down and collapsed to the side of the couch, her legs having given out from under her. The visible, uncontrolled muscle twitches in her legs filled me with pride at my good work. "Give me a moment to recharge."

Jadzia nodded at me, swiping the leftover cum from her face with a finger and bringing it to her lips to finish, trembling a little as she swallowed, like a junkie getting her fix. She knew from experience that I'd recover much quicker than was normal for a baseline human.

"Let's put on a show for our man!" she said to T'Maz with a downright sinful smile. T'Maz looked tired, but determined.

Moving over to my huge bed, Jadzia laid down and directed the other woman to get on top of her on all fours, but in a 69 position, Jadzia's head near the edge of the bed. Happy to go with the flow, T'Maz complied and they began to slowly eat each other out and the incredible sight made my cock ready to go again very quickly. God bless genetic engineering.

When fully hard, erect, and ready to go again, I gripped her wide hips and positioned myself just behind T'Maz and placed the tip of my cock against her wet slit, teasing her by rubbing it up and down. I moved it up and down the length of her slit a few times making sure it was thoroughly lubricated with her pussy juice.

I glanced down and even while vigorously eating out her partner, Jadzia's eyes were locked on the sight of my cock almost penetrating the beautiful Vulcan. The Vulcan desperately pushed her ass backwards against me, trying to spear herself on my cock out of impatience and sheer need.

"Have you missed my cock, T'Maz? How badly do you want it now? Beg me and maybe I will," I growled.

T'Maz lifted her mouth off of Jadzia's cunt, much to her displeasure.

"I *have* missed your cock, Admiral. My cunt has felt so empty since we last copulated, and my thoughts have often returned to our time spent together, missing you. It disrupted my work and impacted my productivity. Please, please fill me up again with your superior human cock," T'Maz softly begged. "If you do, I promise to do anything you ask of me!"

'Disrupted her work and impacted her productivity???' Whoa, that was dirty talk coming from a Vulcan!

"I'll remember you said that, T'Maz. You serve me now; you're mine!" I growled loudly before I thrust my cock forward and she gasped as I penetrated her deeply for the first time in quite a long while.

She was very wet and hot, and her tight Vulcan cunt clenched my cock firmly like a glove. Without any hesitation I thrust in my full length again, hard, while closing my eyes and enjoying the feel of her magnificent pussy, fucking her slowly, increasing and varying the rhythm at times, pushing in and pulling out my cock. I could feel her internal muscles rippling and trying to suck my dick back in even further as she pushed back at me. Jadzia had her head just below my cock and was watching the intense sight of my cock plunging deep into the beautiful Vulcan woman she was eating out. I could even feel her hot breathe tickling my balls.

"Yes, his cock is wonderful, the best I've ever had, now get back to eating my cunt, *you fucking Vulcan slut!!*" Jadzia complained while shouting, loudly slapping T'Maz's ass very hard with both hands, digging her nails into the soft flesh, then locking a leg behind T'Maz's head and forcing her face back into her cunt, grinding it roughly against her snatch. T'Maz's loud squeal of surprise, a mix of pleasure and pain, was extremely titillating while I was fucking her.

I guess Jadzia had lost her patience when my actions had thoroughly distracted T'Maz from her task, it seemed. Jadzia was moaning continuously now as she roughly face fucked the Vulcan woman, taking her pleasure from the woman now by force. Hearing and seeing her like this aroused me to new heights. This made it even harder to focus as I vigorously pounded T'Maz like a beast, like I owned her, which I knew she liked from times past. It was an amazing feeling to mostly let go and not have to worry about hurting my sexual partner, like I usually had to. Vulcans were a hardy race.

After several powerful thrusts of my cock, T'Maz's back arched sharply and she began to thrust backwards into me in a bruising frenzy.

"Pinch her clit, Jadzia!" I ordered.

She must have done it, because T'Maz bucked wildly for a moment before she had an intense orgasm, her cunt rhythmically gripping my cock, trying to drain me of cum. Probably multiple ones judging by how much her body shuddered and her cunt rhythmically squeezed my cock in her for much longer than normal. It was a testament to her self-control that she didn't scream out.

I withdrew my stiff, dripping dick from her well-used cunt, plunging it into Dax's mouth for a few pumps, before I slapped T'Maz's ass hard and pushed her to the side of the bed where she

fell onto her back and was breathing hard, obviously overwhelmed and exhausted by all this. Without warning, I forced Jadzia to rotate and turn over, lying her flat on her front, before I laid on top of her, putting all my weight on top of her as I prone-boned her. From our previous encounters I knew she quite liked this position as it made her feel quite helpless to stop me, not that she wanted to. My hot breath on her face making her sweat even more.

I wrapped her hair in a tight fist and forced my tongue in her mouth before I lined myself up and thrust in her thoroughly soaked cunt from on top of her.

“Fuck!!” she screamed. “Give a girl some warning, Gothic,” she complained, but not seriously.

“Still want to be one of my girls and join the group?” I asked, as I pounded that ass like a drum. When I didn’t get an immediate answer, I stopped mid-thrust. She squirmed in impatience, trying to get me to start moving again.

“Yes, you smug bastard,” she answered, with a moan as I thrust into her again. “Now keep fucking me!”

“May I submit my application?” T’Maz asked tiredly from the side, to which Jadzia and I both laughed, not even stopping my fucking.

XXXXX

The Bridge. *Flighty Temptress.*

I sat down in my incredibly comfortable command chair and smiled. After weeks of preparation and modifications, the secondary computer cores I had ordered from Earth had arrived and been installed. Every simulation we had run had been very promising.

My new ship was finally ready and the *Flighty Temptress* would soon make its maiden voyage to Earth. It seemed wise to use the slipstream engine for the first time over a shortish distance in a part of space that was well travelled and regularly patrolled by other races, just in case anything went wrong, though I would be doing it entirely while under cloak and only after we were far away from any prying eyes. No reason to advertise what I was doing. Of course, 'shortish' distance was relative, as Bajor was roughly 52 lightyears from Earth, which was approximately 12.5 days at a constant cruising speed of warp 9. Most ships would struggle to maintain that speed for such a long period.

Of course, we wouldn't be coming out of slipstream within the Sol system; that would draw way too much attention and most likely alarm a lot of people, even if the notice-me-not magic Q had applied to my old ship seemed to be working, albeit at a reduced strength. That was my best guess at this point. While people had expressed interest in my new ship, no one, at least that I was aware of, had called for its seizure. If there wasn't something protecting my ship, I can't imagine that someone wouldn't have already tried.

My current plan for shakedown cruise was more of an outline, in order to grant me the greatest flexibility. First, I planned to test the traditional warp engines for a while, stopping in the middle of nowhere once satisfied that everything was working properly.

Then, at some point, I wanted to test the other systems, like the weapons and sensors.

If all that checked out, I wanted to test the slipstream drive at the drive's *lowest* possible speed, which was 50 light years per hour, for approximately 15-30 minutes only, and then, if we hadn't killed ourselves, stop and run extensive diagnostics.

After all that, I had a few plans I wanted to execute on simultaneously, including a long overdue detour to Minos to take advantage of all that extra time we should have been traveling from DS9 to Earth via conventional warp.

Secrecy aside, a shorter slipstream jump test on the way to Earth just made more sense since the technology was untested. Plus, it greatly reduced the chances of something going catastrophically wrong, considering I didn't have a large crew to call upon in a serious emergency. Sure, Scarlett and the holograms could handle most things, but I would have felt better with more live people onboard. Not that there were any experts on slipstream engines around in the alpha quadrant to call upon if the shit really hit the fan.

On the subject of crew, I'd informed the rest of them, which was just B'Elanna Torres, Ro Laren, and Neela, about T'Maz joining us as science officer. I'd listened to their opinions on the matter, even took some of their suggestions to limit her access, but ultimately decided not to change my mind about taking her on.

"As you all know, the plan is to first test the warp engines. If everything checks out, we'll next do a short, 30-minute cruise, at the slipstream drive's lowest speed, stopping in interstellar space," I said, summarizing what I had planned to my crew who were all arrayed around me on the bridge waiting for my orders. "Since we've never done this before, and computer simulations can only tell you so much, we can't be totally sure what will ultimately happen. Hopefully, it will be smooth sailing and from this short trip we'll be able to gather the data needed to prove that the ship can handle longer distances and higher speeds in the future."

I continued after a quick glance at each person to confirm they were following me. This wasn't the first time they'd heard this.

"I intend to make a detour on the way, but when we do eventually arrive at Earth, we won't be stopping there all that long, so keep your communicators on you at all times so I can get in contact with you when I need to," I continued. "I just want to pick up some stuff I left behind and check in on a few people."

While I'd not stayed on the homeworld of humanity for all that long, I had acquired a few items of value which I'd left behind in my San Francisco apartment and in storage. I'd kept it up as the credits per month were a pittance compared to my overall wealth and it was nice to have a place to stay on Earth if needed. Lugging all my stuff all the way to a Cardassian-occupied Bajor hadn't been practical or sensible at the time so I'd just left it there.

As for people I might want to see on Earth, well, there was only one person I really wanted to see again, and that was this timeline's version of Seven of Nine. Before our last conversation, I thought that there was no chance whatsoever to get her off Earth, but I felt there was a glimmer

of hope there. It was still uncertain whether she'd ever want to join my crew, but that 'Imagination alien' taking her form and our bout of 'phone sex' had *aroused* my desire to see her again if the opportunity presented itself. Perhaps she'd join me in bed for real, for old time's sake. If nothing else, I should just drop in to see if she was doing well.

Knowing Section 31, if Sloan was on Earth I'm sure he would pop up unexpectedly for a meeting too, so I was prepared for that as well, though T'Maz hadn't said anything.

"B'Elanna, if there is anything the ship needs that can only be gotten on Earth or Mars, please make the arrangements to acquire it and bring it onboard. I want this ship full stocked with everything that could be needed on a long voyage with no ability to resupply. Be paranoid, think outside the box, imagine extreme and increasingly bizarre emergency situations where desperate repairs are needed with no external assistance available. And don't worry about the expense."

"How bizarre are we talking, Gothic?" B'Elanna asked with an eyebrow raised.

"Like seriously bizarre, like in an uncontrolled burst of acceleration we end up a million light years from Earth, bizarre," I said waving my hand in the air. "Or we accidentally time travel to a period where they have no advanced technology to assist us or common materials available, and we're essentially on our own, with a need to not contaminate the timeline, etc., that kind of crazy shit."

"Understood," B'Elanna replied slowly, nodding and looking thoughtful, as if she was amending her supply list in her head. "So, maybe even the equipment to mine and refine our own dilithium or create our own antimatter?"

"Exactly!" I said with a smile. "That's the kind of thinking I want. Of course, we're not going to have room onboard for a full suite of mining tools or refining equipment, but do the best you can. Download or purchase schematics for stuff we can replicate if we actually needed to, but not actually keep onboard. The memory core on the ship is 100x what is normal for a ship this size. And keep an on-hand inventory of any non-replicable materials."

T'Maz had raised an eyebrow too at these outlandish examples.

"Okay, any questions?" I asked to the room.

There shouldn't be considering how long and exhaustively we'd planned this voyage. This last-minute summary was meant as just a refresher. We should be ready to go.

"I have one," said B'Elanna Torres while pointing. "*Why is she naked?*"

She was referring to T'Maz, who was sitting at the main workstation in front of me completely nude, since I really had no one else to serve on the bridge all the time, though I could have B'Elanna work from the bridge too, I suppose. This was the station that Tom Paris would usually sit at on *Voyager*.

In a moment of whimsy, I had forbidden T'Maz from wearing clothes. She hadn't protested or even batted an eye at the order. I'd likely keep that up only for a few days and then have her wear

clothes like normal. My 'harem' of women was already an open secret, pretty much, best not to make it even worse by such a display.

"Because I like looking at her when she's naked and like a good officer she obeys her captain's *every command*," I told the hybrid like she was a child, smirking evilly, getting a kick out of her angry/insulted expression. "Please feel free to similarly disrobe too if you're jealous. I may go nude too, fair warning."

She didn't directly reply, though she blushed and just shook her head, muttering something under her breathe at my words and the wink I threw at her. She must have forgotten about my enhanced hearing, because her whispered words were quite rude. Ah well, I'd break her down eventually. She was the only woman on the ship I wasn't sleeping with at this point and it was only a matter of time before she caught me fucking Neela and T'Maz on the bridge or some other public area for her to get horny too and break down. It had worked on Neela, after all.

"Okay, I really don't have an inspirational speech in mind, or possibly famous last words should the ship unexpectedly explode or we're forced to crash land on some ice-planet, so let's just do this," I told the small crew.

T'Maz returned to her workstation and began tapping away on her console, while Neela and B'Elanna got up and entered the turbolift to return to engineering to monitor things from down there, getting the ship ready to engage the *Flighty Temptress'* warp drive for the very first time. T'Maz would be pulling double duty, maybe from now on, as the ship's science officer and pilot, at least when I didn't want to use the neural interface to pilot the ship, or perform every task on the ship simultaneously myself.

"Gothic to Deep Space 9," I spoke aloud, engaging the comm system. "The *Flighty Temptress* requests permission to depart."

"This is Ops, Kira speaking. You are cleared to depart, Admiral, docking clamps released. Safe travels."

"Thank you, Ops," I replied at hearing Kira's voice. "See you in a bit. Gothic out."

Kira and Dax had their duties on the station and despite wanting to, couldn't get away to come on this cruise. I totally understood. Asking Sisko if I could borrow his second and third in command for 4-6 weeks was also unlikely to be well received at the moment. For some reason, Sisko wasn't all that happy with me these days. Ro Laren, too, wouldn't be coming. She'd be handling most of my workload while I was away, but had the ability to contact me at any time, no matter how far away I was if needed.

"Once we're far enough from the station, T'Maz, engage cloak," I ordered.

"Aye, captain," T'Maz replied.

The station began to fall away in the holo-viewscreen in front of me, getting further and further out.

"Engaging cloak now," T'Maz reported.

From an outside perspective, the image of the ship began to bend and fluctuate like a mirage before the ship disappeared from view entirely. I had intensively studied the Klingon cloaking device I'd once gotten as a bounty when I'd turned the Duras sisters over to the Empire and had created my own version from what I'd learned, scaled up for a ship the size of the FT. My ship also possessed the phase cloaking device I'd stolen from the USS *Pegasus*, but using that would be gross overkill at the moment and entirely unneeded.

In a small window in my vision, I was watching a camera feed from Ops in anticipation of this exact moment. Sisko did not disappoint, as his mouth dropped open in stunned surprise at my ship disappearing from the viewscreen and sensors, obviously having cloaking capabilities. I'd have to print out a copy.

My fun over, it was time to start my journey.

"May the various God-like beings of this universe watch over us and grant us their favor," I said in prayer, thinking of Q and my patron in particular. "Warp 1, engage!"

Somebody or something had to be. My life was just too strange to be anything other than some god-level existence's main source of entertainment.

XXXXX

"Commander, you have a priority communique from Starfleet Command," Major Kira reported while looking at her beeping console showing the active subspace communique.

Sisko stopped talking with Lieutenant Dax and looked over to Kira, surprised.

"I'll take it in my office, Major. Send it there shortly," Sisko answered, before walking up the stairs and taking a seat behind his office desk.

Pressing a button on his computer, the communique opened to show the scowling face of Rear Admiral Eric Pressman of Starfleet Intelligence.

"Admiral Pressman, it's good to hear from you. What can I do for you?" Sisko asked, a polite smile plastered on his face to hide the grimace that was his real reaction. He and the man had had a tumultuous relationship at times and a call from him rarely meant good things.

Sisko leaned forward, hoping to show his caller that he was giving this call his full and complete attention, already suspecting he knew what this call was about.

"What you can do for me, Commander, is tell me just what the hell is going on on that station of yours!" Pressman replied, looking agitated.

"I'm sorry, sir. I don't understand what you mean," Sisko answered slowly.

"Can you tell me why, *Commander*, that I have just received a report from several eyewitnesses saying that that...*Augment*...has a private home and island with two city-class shield grids capable of withstanding more than 2 minutes of constant bombardment by 6 Nedar-class Cardassian gunships?!? And furthermore, that that so-called private home of his has hidden

weapon turrets that easily disabled those same ships,” Pressman shouted, looking extremely angry. “How in God’s name am I just now hearing about this?? How did *you* miss this?!”

Sisko suspected that the Admiral had wanted to call Gothic something a bit more impolite, something like *freak* or *monster* when he spat the word ‘Augment’, but had held back out of fear of censure for using such obvious slurs against the man.

“Admiral, we had-” Sisko tried to explain.

“You were ordered to keep a close eye on the man, Commander,” Pressman interrupted, pointing accusingly at Sisko from his comfortable office on Earth. “To report back anything that even *hinted* that he had any nefarious plans to disrupt the legitimate, duly elected government of Bajor or take over the planet like those mad men from Earth’s history. And now I learn, for the first time, that the man has a home more akin to a heavily armed military base or fortress! What may a man like that do with such a place, do you think?! What could he be getting up to hidden from everyone’s view?”

“Sir-” Sisko tried, before being interrupted again, struggling to keep calm at these unfair accusations being lobbed at him with no chance to defend himself. Letting Pressman wear himself out might be the only way forward now.

“My operatives stole the sensor logs from the gunships; his shields barely wavered! My analysts think that it would take multiple ships of the line to even put a dent in those shields. Does that sound *normal* to you man, for someone’s private residence?! *It certainly sounds like something that should have been reported!*”

“Sir, if you’d let me answer,” Sisko tried, Pressman giving him an angry wave to continue speaking. “There was no indication or even a hint that Admiral Gothic’s home had those capabilities. The home was built prior to Starfleet assuming administration of the station, so we had no sensor readings taken during the construction phase or any assets that participated in the building. Per your orders, which I protested but carried out to the best of my ability, I have given standing orders to my people for our runabout complement, which are the best assets I have under my command, to take clandestine sensor readings of his island and home whenever in range. I have dutifully sent all of these many scans to Starfleet Intelligence in each instance. None of these newfound capabilities were detected by my people *or yours*, despite our best efforts. Admiral Gothic is a very private man, a very intelligent man, and obviously took some measures to prevent detection. He also had dispensations from the Provisional Government, I later learned. His home and its defenses and armaments are legal for him to possess under Bajoran law.”

“Stop calling that man an Admiral, Commander; it’s a disgrace and an insult to the many millions of humans that died on Earth during the Eugenics Wars!” Pressman ordered.

“Sir, I only refer to him that way because that *is* his official title in the Bajoran Defense Forces. I work hand-in-hand with him and the Bajorans daily during the performance of my duties,” Sisko tiredly explained. “There is nothing I can do about that. Trying to ignore his position and title by calling him something else would undoubtedly be viewed as disrespectful and ultimately harmful

to my working relationship with the Bajorans. They simply don't understand or share humanity's prejudice towards Augments. It's not part of their culture or history."

"Are you also telling me that you knew *nothing* about this starship of his, Commander Sisko? Or its capabilities?" Pressman asked pointedly. "Perhaps you've grown too close to the man or to the Bajorans and it has interfered with your duties and loyalties to Starfleet and the Federation. Perhaps a reassignment is in order?"

Sisko was becoming increasingly frustrated and desperately wanted to snap back, but held it in. This man was now unfairly questioning his loyalty.

"No, sir," Sisko answered sharply and honestly. "Prior to it showing up in the skies above Bajor recently, I had no idea it even existed, much less what it was capable of, nor do I know where the design came from or how Adm- Gothic was able to build a ship like that undetected. Several months ago, Gothic did request that my Chief Science Officer be loaned to him for a special project, which I only recently learned was related to finalizing the design of his ship."

"You watch your tone with me, boy," Pressman cautioned. "You don't ask your people what they're doing for a known Augment, Sisko?"

"I did ask, at the time, however Lieutenant Dax reported that Gothic had designated it a special military project of the then Bajoran Militia," Sisko tiredly explained, knowing that this answer wouldn't go over well with the Admiral. "She declined to answer any further questions as it had been classified. Per the Federation's agreement with the Provisional Government, I could not force her to share any more information on the project."

"I don't like this at all, Commander. Not one damn bit," Pressman complained, glancing to the side. "A fortress-like home protected by powerful shields and weapons, and now an advanced starship of unknown capabilities just shows up out of nowhere. Does no one else see how troubling this is? How history might be repeating itself?"

Sisko found himself glad that the news that Gothic's ship had a cloaking device hadn't yet reached the Admiral. He considered sharing that news with the man, but he wasn't feeling overly generous at the moment, nor had the desire to be the Admiral's whipping boy once again.

"Sir, with regard to investigating Gothic, I have done everything I have been ordered to do and have the *capability* to do while preserving my position and relationship with the Bajorans," Sisko defended himself. "Both your analysts and mine have failed to detect anything. If you believe more investigation is required, I strongly recommend that you initiate an investigation within Starfleet Intelligence itself as I obviously do not have the required personnel, expertise, or capabilities to do more."

"Don't you think I've tried that, Commander?" Pressman ground out. "Every investigation either comes back clean or is quietly deprioritized and resources transferred away to other missions before it languishes and dies. I have been in Starfleet all of my adult life and I can tell when someone is running interference in the background. The man obviously had powerful unknown

supporters within Starfleet and the Federation, ones that even I can't smoke out. And I'm not talking about the Betazoids."

"The Betazoids?" Sisko questioned.

"At the urging of Ambassador Troi they're going to be giving the Augment a medal for his service to Betazed," Pressman bitterly complained. "The Trill may very likely do the same in thanks for what he did for your science officer and for uncovering a wider conspiracy that his capture of those people revealed on Trill."

"I see."

"No, I really don't think you do, Commander. But I do. The man may have designs to be a King, to rule planets, but I won't allow it," Pressman vowed. "Continue your surveillance on the Augment and his home. Immediately report back to me should you discover anything. If there are any more surprises, Commander, you and I are going to have a problem. Pressman out," the admiral said, leaning forward to terminate the communication.

A King? What the hell was this about Gothic wanting to become a King???

Sisko could only tiredly lean back in his chair and rub at his eyes. For some reason he felt that they were only scratching the surface of the many mysteries that were Admiral Gothic, and the many headaches the man would be giving him in the future.