

Disclaimer: I own nothing related to or part of Star Trek.

Last time on The Adventures of Augment Gothic

A quiet buzz sounded, indicating that there was an incoming important communication for me, but the equivalent of this time's email, so I didn't bother getting out of bed. Mentally opening the message with my omnitool it appeared in my visual field so that I didn't disturb my lover's rest. As I read the message my smile got larger and larger. There was nothing like a plan coming together. Being a hero of the Federation opened all kinds of doors didn't it?

I glanced at my lover and amended my current plans to include her. She had sent me some vibes indicating she may now be open to it, so why not give it a shot? If my efforts at persuasion failed, well, at least I could take solace in knowing I had given it a shot.

My trip through the multiverse had been profitable, but it had also exposed some rather obvious issues with the way I ran my ship. It had shown me that it was indeed possible to run my ship effectively with a crew of four, including myself, but it was far from ideal. And there may be times in the future where I may not be able to leave my post on Bajor to go on some mission and may need to entrust my

ship to T'Maz. She'd need more people. My quickly growing businesses needed more people too, damn it. As much as I loved my AI children, and Carl was certainly capable of a lot of the business side, I still very much wanted an organic being to help me.

The issue was finding highly skilled people who would be loyal to me first and foremost, and ones that had the right mindset for the kind of work I routinely did, people willing to get their hands dirty, to play fast and loose with the law, to kill their enemies with utter ruthlessness when it was called for. It would be even better if they were beautiful women who shared my bed, but you couldn't have everything.

Was that too much to ask? Nah...

It was time to do some recruiting and I had two great prospects right here on Earth, maybe even in this very bed.

The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Chapter 53

1 Day Earlier. Federation Awards Ceremony. Arc de Triomphe. Paris. Earth. United Federation of Planets.

The Arc de Triomphe was an interesting, but poignant choice for this awards ceremony and speech, I thought. It had been inaugurated in 1836 taking over 30 years to build, meant to honor those who had fought and died for France in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. The Federation loved their history and symbols, and setting this awards ceremony here, in Paris, the capital of the Federation, and the place that would have been destroyed had I not stopped that cargo ship from striking the surface, was on point. They'd probably make mention of all those who had given their lives in the defense of Earth and the Federation.

It was near dusk and the Arc de Triomphe was lit up rather beautifully with multi-colored lights, making the over five-hundred-year-old structure appear modern and majestic. The weather was temperate and lovely and the clean air on Earth was invigorating to an Augment with olfactory senses as acute as mine. Unfortunately, on Bajor, even on my island, very far from the worst of the Cardassians' strip mining and poisoning of the land, I could still faintly smell the damage the Cardassians had done in the very air. It would be decades of concerted effort and careful rehabilitation before the ecosystem of Bajor fully recovered, though many plants and animals

had gone extinct during the Occupation and as such would never recover.

The Arc was the star, or juncture formed by its twelve radiating avenues. The elevated stage the President would speak at, covered in chairs for the many VIPs and award recipients, was at the western end of the Champs-Élysées. The street itself had been closed to traffic and it was gradually filling up with several thousand more spectators with every minute that passed. When it filled it up, as I fully expected, it would be an impressive sea of life, both human and alien, though of course the entire event would be broadcast throughout the entire Federation and beyond courtesy of the dozens of anti-grav camera drones that were even now flitting about chaotically, continuously broadcasting as various talking heads on the Federation News Service gave commentary in the lead up to the event kicking off.

Walking up the steps to the VIP section of the stage where the medal recipients had reserved seating, I resisted the urge to unconsciously and nervously adjust my Bajoran dress uniform. As the ‘uniform’ was not strictly *real*, but a reproduced product of my nano-armor, it was always perfectly situated on my large frame and impeccable in every manner. Indeed, my armor had made the ‘Picard Maneuver’ of Star Trek: TNG fame obsolete

in my case. I idly wondered if Picard would be jealous of that fact, given how the standard Starfleet duty uniform constantly rode up the man's frame and needed to be smoothed out when he sat down. Somehow, I suspected the fastidious man would miss it.

Given the VIPs of the Federation on this stage, including eventually the President himself, I had had to beam in far, far outside the area around the ceremony to get to the event. In fact, a five-mile anti-transport field perimeter and a 10-mile no-fly zone had been set up to protect the ceremony site, the crowd, and the many VIPs scheduled to attend. Having my ID credentials and myself scanned yet again, for literally the 11th time tonight, I was allowed onto the stage and oh boy...it was a Who's Who of Federation Council representatives and the Admiralty of Starfleet.

Milling around chatting were some of the most powerful people in the Federation, at least those who could return to Earth in time for this event. Starfleet was well represented too as I recognized full admirals like Admiral Bullock of Starfleet Command, Admiral Owen Paris, father of Tom Paris of Star Trek: Voyager fame, Admiral Strickler and Admiral Whatley of Starfleet Headquarters.

Then there were the Vice-Admirals like Thomas Henry, Chief of Starfleet Security, Vice-Admiral Leyton, Chief

of Starfleet Operations who was still holding up the adoption of my omnitools, then Vice-Admirals Nakamura, Nechayev, and William Ross, who would take on a very large role in leading the Federation's war efforts in the part of the galaxy near Bajor.

Then there were the Rear-Admirals like Brand, Superintendent of Starfleet Academy, no surprise she was here considering that she was based on Earth, and Erik Pressman of Starfleet Intelligence who had spotted me and was sending me a scathing glare. The man hated me, according to Section 31 and it was only the shadowy intelligence organization's efforts that kept the man at bay.

I sent a wave and a smile at the fuming man. It would drive the man mad if he realized that it was only due to the butterflies that my presence had let loose that had kept him from disgrace and his actions on the *Pegasus* from coming to light. I took solace in the fact that at least I had stolen the phase cloak from him.

My eyes lit up in recognition as I caught the eye of someone that I was actually eager to speak with.

Walking over with a ready smile on my face, Captain Picard of the USS *Enterprise* waited with a pleasant smile on his face as I moved to where he was standing. If the

smile was any indication, it appeared that the man had come to terms with the fact that I had pounded Dr. Crusher's pussy like a drum. Or perhaps he was actively repressing the knowledge.

"Captain Picard, I'm so happy that the universe deigned to allow our paths to cross again," I said, reaching out to shake the man's hand. "My congratulations on your defeat of the Collector world ship. Earth, the Federation, and the entire alpha quadrant owes you their thanks. On behalf of myself, my crew, the First Minister and the people of Bajor, I thank you."

"Mr. Got- Excuse me, *Admiral* Gothic. Thank you for your kind words. It's a pleasure to meet you again, as well," Picard smoothly replied, while correcting himself, genuinely looking pleased to see me. If it was anyone else, I'd be suspicious that not addressing me by my proper title had been on purpose, but I could not see any deceit in his eyes as he appraised my Bajoran military uniform. "My congratulations to you, and your crew, as well. You saved the lives of a lot of good men and women during the battle, several of them friends and former shipmates of mine, in fact, people I've served with during my career. You saved even more by stopping that cargo ship from hitting Paris. Millions owe you their lives."

I let Picard's words hit me. As much as I might have complained about the Federation and Starfleet, and even this man's actions or inaction at times, it was a heady thing to be recognized by one of your heroes. And Picard was a hero that lived up to the hype, even if he made some dumbass decisions at times.

"Thank you, Captain," I softly replied with a wide smile, feeling a little self-conscious all of a sudden. "Your recognition means more than I can say. How does your ship and crew fare?"

Picard looked pleased at my question.

"The *Enterprise* suffered significant damage and is currently in drydock, but that also means much of my crew have been able to take some well-deserved and much needed shore leave on Earth," Picard answered with a smile. "It's rare that we're back this way, after all. How does *your* ship fare? The after-action reports I've read say that your ship turned the tide of battle in your battle area but saw some very heavy combat."

Before I answered, I instructed Jarvis to emit an interference signal which would muddle our audible conversation in the memories of all these floating camera drones. The information wasn't particularly secret, or

even damning, but that didn't mean I wanted people to have easy access to our conversation.

“That’s true. Unfortunately, *The Flighty Temptress*, too, suffered significant damage in the battle, but for every bit of damage we took, I’m proud to say that we doled out 10x more to the Collectors. They paid dearly for it in their blood and lives,” I answered, trying to keep it vague, so as to hide the extent of my ship’s offensive and defensive capabilities. Considering how widespread the battle was, I was hoping the sensor records would be incomplete or non-conclusive.

“May I ask what happened?” Picard inquired, causing me to internally sigh.

“Despite my best efforts at the helm, the ship suffered a direct ramming attack from a Collector craft. The damage from that ramming attack weakened the shield grid in that area, which then allowed a Collector boarding torpedo to penetrate the hull allowing several hundred Collector warriors to continuously board the ship via an active transporter relay,” I answered grimly.

Picard looked horrified at my answer.

“*Several hundred?! I had no idea. I’m so sorry for your losses, Admiral,*” Picard replied solemnly and emphatically, in practically a whisper. “*The Enterprise*

was infiltrated by approximately 45 Collector warriors during a shield failure, a standard boarding team complement I'm told. We lost over 150 security personnel and crew while repelling their boarding. If not for the boarding simulations Starfleet Intelligence released and the heavier weapons and armor they provided for ship security personnel, the number would have likely been even higher. I am still drafting condolence letters to the families."

I glanced sharply at Picard feeling very frustrated in that moment, not that the man noticed. Picard had closed his eyes, looking momentarily very old, like the weight of this responsibility was, at that very moment, pressing down on his shoulders and no amount of awards or accolades could help.

The battle simulation he was talking about was the program I'd run on the *Tikuma* boarding by three Collector ships, using the ship's own sensor records. Afterwards, I had written a comprehensive and detailed report with a myriad number of recommended security upgrades in both equipment and tactics. Heavier weapons and armor for shipboard security personnel were a few of the simplest changes I had recommended. Had Picard seriously not implemented any of the rest?? The *Tikuma*

and the *Enterprise* were both Galaxy-class ships. The report was perfectly tailored for the *Enterprise*.

“Oh, no, no, I didn’t lose any of my crew, thank the Prophets,” I said, now feeling both frustrated and amused at his mistake, wanting to make a point and hurt the man at the same time. “I run a very, very lean skeleton crew of 4, including myself, so I’d be in deep shit if we lost anyone.”

Picard’s mouth dropped open in surprise, then shook his head as if to clear his ears.

“I’m sorry, did you just say that you didn’t lose *anyone*? Despite your ship being boarded by several hundred Collector warriors?” Picard asked uncertainly and incredulously. “Did they retreat upon the destruction of the worldship?”

“Oh no, they continued to fight to the death even after the destruction of the worldship, in fact I had to join my security forces to assist in putting down the rest of their forces as they practically turned into berserkers, from one moment to the next,” I clarified. “They put up a good fight.”

“But you just said that your ship only has a crew of 4?” Picard questioned.

“It does,” I answered. “My advanced, automated, anti-boarding security measures repelled the Collectors, no live personnel were needed until the end, and even that was because I had some frustration to work out.”

Picard’s mouth dropped open again.

“I’m assuming you are referring to force fields and barriers?” Picard asked.

“Lethal force fields and physical barriers at set intervals, the ability to vent decks to space, weapon turrets, vaporization and variable gravity attacks, holographic security, etc.,” I answered. “I designed my ship from the ground up.”

Picard looked horrified, searching my eyes as if checking to see if I was bullshitting him.

“Why include such lethal and barbaric countermeasures?” Picard asked, aghast.

“*Barbaric?*” I quietly repeated, shaking my head slowly in surprise, suddenly feeling very disappointed and frustrated, any remnant of my former hero worship well and truly gone in the light of this stupidity. “Is that why you didn’t implement the security upgrades that were recommended for dealing with Collector boarders? I know what that report from Starfleet Intelligence recommended. I was provided a copy to better prepare our

security and military forces on Deep Space 9, should the Collectors ever board the station.”

Picard said nothing in response, his face blanked and hardened, but I could still detect hints of shame, guilt, and regret. To his credit, the man did not even try to make the semi-legitimate excuse that I had been expecting, that it would have been too dangerous to install such lethal countermeasures on a ship with so many civilians and children who permanently lived onboard. Picard’s silence told me that he had been asking that same question of himself many times in recent days, probably each time he wrote a condolence letter. I hesitated for several long seconds as I searched his face, now debating how much to truly say. If there was ever a time when Picard might listen, it was likely now. If I could get through to the man now, how many lives could be saved during the Dominion War?

“I included such lethal and barbaric countermeasures because unlike Starfleet and the Federation, I had no desire for 150 of my people to die on the altar of my advanced morality and civility, my forbearance, my ability to forgive, or my unshakeable belief in a fundamentally good universe where such *barbaric* tactics are unreasonable and unnecessary,” I bluntly replied, watching Picard flinch back as if struck. “Unlike them,

when my enemies try to kill me, I respond in kind, with no mercy. That doesn't make me a murderous augment, like Khan, like many in Starfleet think of me because of my genetic enhancements, no, it makes me realistic and pragmatic, it means that I'm not an idiot! That I value the lives of my crew over my enemies!"

I paused for a time.

"I assure you, Captain, the Collectors, doubly so, are undeserving of your mercy or concern, and they do not request or require your civility. They certainly won't thank you for it, or show you mercy because of it. They are incapable of that. I watched a Collector Queen eat a Federation officer *alive*. During my liberation of Kessik IV from the Collectors, I found the corpse of a little girl, barely 12 years old. The Collectors had torn off one of her legs, while she was still alive, to eat. The last sight she had was likely of a Collector tearing the bloody flesh from her leg to eat. Thankfully, she probably died quickly from blood loss."

"I apologize if my words upset you, Admiral, that was not my intent," Picard tried.

I nodded.

"When I began the design process for my ship, my goal was to design a luxurious warship," I admitted.

“Something powerful, fast, and well-armed, a ship meant for war and sustained combat. A home if need be, should I ever be driven from the home I had made for myself on Bajor.”

“May I ask why?” Picard said. “Surely, the Occupation was over at that point. Bajor was at peace.”

“Si vis pacem, para bellum.”

“If you want peace, prepare for war,” Picard translated, ever the scholar.

“Earth and most of the Federation may be a paradise, but the rest of the 24th century doesn’t lack the horrors of my time,” I explained. “I’m proud of how I helped liberate the Bajorans, but the years of fighting the Cardassians proved that equivocally. Whatever horror stories from the Occupation reached your ears, captain, multiply that by a 100 and you’d approach the *barbarism* I witnessed during the Occupation. And yet the Federation did nothing.”

Picard wisely stayed silent.

“Perhaps we should speak of lighter topics. This should be a happy occasion, not one of regret and recriminations,” I tried, forcing a diplomatic smile on my face, Picard nodding in agreement, ever the diplomat, perhaps happy that I was changing the subject. I glanced thoughtfully down at the veritable cornucopia of medals

and awards that Picard was wearing. At a formal ceremony like this it was expected and appropriate for Picard to wear all of the medals and awards he had earned throughout his long, illustrious career in Starfleet. “The tensile strength of your formal duty uniform is astounding. It’s a miracle it doesn’t rip under the weight of all those medals and awards, captain.”

Picard looked appreciative at the change in topic as he laughed a bit, nearly a half dozen other admirals nearby laughing as well, I noticed with a touch of embarrassment. It seems that our discussion had attracted a bit of an audience, several admirals looking rather thoughtful at my words.

Under normal circumstances it was easy to forget that Captain Picard was one of the most decorated officers in all of Starfleet. The man was self-effacing and humble in virtually all of his interactions. At this moment, though, looking at his rows and rows of overlapping medals, it was hard to ignore. The man was even a two-time recipient of the Starfleet Medal of Honor. I wonder how many times that had happened in the history of the Federation. Kirk was probably the last one.

“A career of youthful misadventures,” Picard joked, self-deprecatingly, glancing down at his medals, then pointedly at mine with a twinkle in his eye. “It appears

that you have had your share of misadventures as well, and in a much shorter time.”

I glanced down at my own medal board and only found four medals. The first was the Bajoran Commendation Medal, earned for my role in saving the lives of everyone onboard the station from that virus. It was notably the first medal the Bajoran military had awarded in the post-Occupation era; that was something. The second and third were medals of commendation from the planets Betazed, for protecting Ambassador Troi and her retinue during the Circle insurrection, and Trill, for stopping the theft of the Dax symbiont by a Trill citizen. The last and highest honor I had received, was the Karagite Medal of Heroism, for stopping the Collector attack on Kessik IV.

“The Karagite Medal of Heroism is no small matter. I can’t remember the last time it was awarded to an allied military officer, rather than a member of Starfleet,” Picard complimented. “I read the after-action report on that incursion; it was well earned. Once again, you have done a great service to the Federation, and we are in your debt.”

Several of the admirals listening to our conversation nodded in agreement, their rank ensuring that they were privy to the classified after action report on Kessik IV.

“Thank you, captain. From you that means a great deal to me,” I replied. “With the permission of President Moss, I intend to do even more, offering her planetary protection for years to come.”

Picard looked confused, though some of my audience appeared like they already knew what I was referring to. With the Who’s Who of the Federation on this stage, many of them listening to our conversation, it was the perfect time to do some guerrilla marketing.

“Kessik IV, like many of the more recently admitted, far flung Federation member worlds, don’t possess many ships permanently based in their system to defend themselves. Nor are there many Starfleet assets nearby, most being more than a day away at maximum warp,” I explained. “When the Collectors attacked, Starfleet was much too far away to offer assistance once their planetary defense forces were destroyed. It was only luck that my warship was the closest in range.”

Picard looked ready to protest.

“It’s unfortunate that there were no Starfleet vessels in range for a quicker response, but this war has put an incredible strain on Starfleet’s limited resources,” Picard tried with a grimace. “We cannot be everywhere, all the time.”

“Yes, very unfortunate for the many killed on Kessik IV. I have strong feelings on that particular topic, but I really don’t want to get into it at this time,” I replied, trying to keep the conversation on track. “I’m offering the planet an orbital defense net, the Gothic Orbital Defense System or GODS Net. The GODS net is comprised of hundreds of armed and networked orbital platforms, a network that can generate a planetary defensive shield and offering powerful, but immobile offensive weapons. We ran several hundred conservative simulations, based on all the available sensor data, and we all concluded that had Kessik IV possessed my defense net, they would have been able to repel the Collector attack without my help, or alternately, withstood the Collector attack long enough for Starfleet forces to arrive in time.”

Picard looked thoughtful.

“As I recall, orbital defense nets were quite popular during the Federation/Klingon war of the 23rd century,” Picard remembered. “However the costs of maintaining such a system in peacetime, notwithstanding the cost of true upgrades over the many years since, was cost prohibitive. Not many planetary governments were willing to spend the exorbitant funds during peace, with no true threats to their safety and security facing them. I

do not believe many of those defense nets are still operational from that time.”

“No, very few actually. I know that Betazed’s defense net from the Klingon War is still operational, but I suspect only on paper. Ambassador Troi is in the process of investigating that,” I offered. “Part of the deal I’m negotiating with Kessik IV is that the system is only being rented, rather than purchased outright, thus all the maintenance expenses and future upgrade costs are borne by my company, rather than the individual planetary government. Should the individual planet lose interest in paying for the system long-term, they can simply choose not to renew their lease when the term expires.”

“Thus allowing you to keep the underlying technology secret and proprietary. I assume you have built in provisions to your contract with them allowing you to deactivate and reclaim the technology should the planetary government not pay the rental fees or if they allow the technology to be examined by anyone you do not approve of,” Picard speculated, gazing at me shrewdly and thoughtfully.

“For someone who eschews money and matters of business, you would make a fine businessman, captain,” I complimented. “You’re right, renting the technology grants both sides distinct advantages.”

“A planetary defense net capable of withstanding modern threats would require extremely advanced technology and manufacturing capabilities,” Picard pointed out, several nearby admirals nodding in agreement. “My understanding is that Bajor is still struggling to recover from the damage done during the Occupation, indeed even struggling to feed themselves and heat their homes. I did not realize that Bajor possessed such advanced technology or capabilities.”

“They don’t, but my company does,” I admitted somewhat reluctantly. This wasn’t exactly a secret or something that no one couldn’t figure out with just a bit of research, but it also wasn’t something I was eager to admit to openly. “The Gothic Arms and Defense Corporation designed and manufactures the GODS net.”

“Your impressive starship, you designed and built that yourself, didn’t you?” Picard asked. “It’s your personal ship, not the Bajoran military’s.”

“I did and it is,” I again reluctantly admitted. My thoughts raced as I tried to find a way to politely cut off this topic of conversation before anything else that I didn’t want to discuss openly came out. Thankfully, I was saved by the bell, or in this case, a soft chime, telling everyone on the stage to return to their seats as the awards ceremony would be starting shortly. As Picard and I were receiving

the same medal, we actually were sat next to each other in the VIP reserved seating section.

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The Champ Elysees was full of life as far as the eye could see. It was an impressive turnout for the event. Given the recent events, I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised at the number of people who wished to attend today's ceremony.

“Today, I will be presenting the Federation Council Medal of Honor to two men who have done a great service for the Federation. This award is given for conduct which distinguishes him or herself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his or her life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the Federation. It is the *highest* military decoration awarded by the United Federation of Planets.”

The President, a gifted speaker, paused for effect, allowing the crowd to cheer and to build up the emotion.

“The first to be given this honor today, Captain Jean Luc Picard of the USS *Enterprise*, hardly requires an introduction. He has spent all of his adult life in the service of the Federation and is one of Starfleet's most decorated officers. Captain Picard and his crew, at great

risk to themselves, flew into massed enemy forces to prevent the Hur'q Worldship from fully entering Earth's system. By successfully destabilizing and collapsing the spatial anomaly that allowed the Hur'q forces to enter the system, they destroyed the enemy's Worldship mid-transit through the anomaly. The citizens of the Federation owe him a great debt and for this great act of service, we present him with the Federation Council Medal of Honor. Captain Picard please step forward."

Captain Picard, who had been standing at attention by his seat while the President introduced him, stepped forward to receive his medal. The President with appropriate gravitas, put the large medal around the captain's neck with a light blue colored silk neck ribbon. Picard gave a crisp military salute, shook the man's hand, and turned sharply to return to his seat.

When Picard sat down I stood up and stood to the right of the President's lectern at parade rest. Right now, billions upon billions of people throughout the Federation and beyond were watching me. I had considered, for a time, not participating in the awards ceremony, as it would make any kind of clandestine mission near impossible in the future, but the First Minister of Bajor had practically begged that I come in person to receive the reward. In the

end, the benefits outweighed the costs as I did have a number of ways to alter my appearance if necessary.

“The second to be given this great honor today is Admiral Gothic of the Bajoran Defense Forces, captain of his warship, *The Flighty Temptress*. Bajor, like many independent worlds, signed the alpha quadrant mutual defense treaty against the Hur’q, and in our time of great need, he and Bajor answered the call. As a military officer of an allied military, he will be the first non-Starfleet officer to receive this great honor in the history of the Federation.”

Many in the crowd cheered, both human and alien alike.

“When Admiral Gothic arrived in Earth’s solar system and saw it embroiled in desperate battle with an overwhelming number of Hur’q forces, he immediately came to the Federation’s defense and destroyed many enemy ships. His ship also performed vital search and rescue operations, saving the lives of 263 Starfleet officers and personnel from severely damaged and crippled starships, as well as escape pods fleeing those same vessels, which the Hur’q were actively firing upon and destroying mercilessly. And finally, and most importantly, when he saw a captured Federation cargo ship traveling at full impulse on course to destroy Paris, like an ancient kinetic weapon, he put himself and his

crew at great risk by slowing the ship down with a tractor beam, then using an experimental warp drive, to propel the cargo ship past Earth and out of danger. Admiral Gothic saved the city of Paris, its millions of citizens and guests, and the entirety of the Federation Council and its member representatives. For these reasons, we honor him today with the Federation Council's Medal of Honor."

The President placed the medal around my neck and shook my hand. In that moment, I felt a familiar feeling, not quite happiness, not quite joy, but still profound, it was *victory*. My ship and crew had been sorely tested against an implacable and fearless foe, and yet we'd emerged victorious. There would be consequences for this victory, both good and bad, that was certain, but in this moment, I let the roar of the crowd, their cheers and adulation, wash away all my worries for the future. Whatever hardships and horrors the future held, at least I had this feeling of victory to remember, to keep me going.

"Congratulations, Admiral," the Admiral quietly offered as he shook my hand.

"Thank you, Mr. President. I am honored," and I truly was.

The President turned to the side with our hands still clasped and allowed the many camera drones to take our picture together.

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Present Day. Apartment of Admiral Gothic. San Francisco. Earth.

I took a moment to admire the tantalizing view of an utterly naked Annika Hansen lying on her side before I slowly turned on my side and loosely took on the role of big spoon, running my fingertips slowly and gently down her side from shoulder to sculpted ass cheek. Her skin felt silky and warm to the touch, an unblemished pale white, like fine porcelain, which told a story of limited exposure to the outdoors and to sunlight. This was a woman who spent a lot of time indoors, in a dusty library. That said, she was an amazing specimen of womanhood, akin to an ideal, which was curious on its own. In canon Star Trek, Annika had been assimilated as a very young child and placed in a Borg maturation chamber. Her body and DNA had been biomechanically augmented to the peak of human physiology and thus the perfect body of 7 of 9 in Star Trek: Voyager had been made possible.

Annika perhaps lacked the defined musculature of 7 of 9, but she was by no means lacking in that department. She

had told me that she had been a workout nut during her youth, simply because there was little else to do onboard the ship, wanting to get away from her parents. Physically carrying heavy books around the library she worked in now, ones that could be damaged by exposure to anti-gravity fields, probably helped there. She was also practically a master practitioner of yoga, several varieties in fact, I'd learned during our relationship, and routinely kept that up.

How was it possible then that Annika Hansen, the human, who had never encountered the Borg and been enhanced by them, was otherwise not demonstrably lacking when making that comparison between the two? Was this a quirk of dimensions? Some bleed through, perhaps, from the multiverse?

The example of womanhood in front of me was damn close to that Borg augmented perfection, both physically and mentally, which was a pleasant mystery in some ways, though I had always had some unconfirmed suspicions on that subject. She had spent most of her life on a starship with her parents, eating from the carefully designed and monitored selections of a Starfleet replicator. Her parents were also accomplished and arguably maverick research scientists, willing and able to push the boundaries of science, regardless of what was

morally right or legal. I had long harbored some suspicions that on their little ship, far, far from the ever-watchful eyes and laws of the Federation, far from the routine and mandated medical care and checkups that would have detected something off or a major change, that her scientist parents had engaged in their own homegrown research project and may have chosen to make some less than legal genetic enhancements on their child.

They would have been skilled and knowledgeable enough to be able to hide their enhancements from Federation medical technology upon her return as an adult, especially since the Federation medical establishment wouldn't have had any records to compare Annika to besides the ones her parents carefully curated, further hiding any of her potential enhancements and painting them as natural. But I had the advanced medical knowledge from several very advanced races to make that assessment on my own, not just that of the Federation, which her parents would have known how to evade or trick. The Vidiaan harvester's onboard medical database was a treasure trove of data on the subject, as they were designed to make quick, detailed, in the field scans and determinations on whether a person's body could be harvested and used.

If Annika knew or suspected, she hadn't said a word to me.

A few scans, a blood sample easily taken in this vulnerable situation, and I'd know for sure, but I held back. I was not a good man in many ways, I knew that with certainty, but I wouldn't betray her trust like that. And besides, did it really matter?? Yes, there could be some added closeness from knowing that we were both Augments, a shared background, but it wouldn't change the way I felt about her or her about me, most likely.

As my fingers made their silky journey up and down her side, dipping low at her narrow waist, rising again at her hip, Annika shivered and unconsciously, even in her sleep, pushed herself tightly against me. My thick length, ever hard in her presence, was hot dogged between those tight ass cheeks.

Since her side was no longer as easily accessible, both my arms snaked around her, one hand immediately going for a full breast, the other sneaking behind to run my middle finger up and down her wettening slit.

She squirmed in my arms, but her breathing remained the same as I kept my touch gentle, slowly and purposefully ramping up her arousal. When she finally did wake I wanted her to be ravenous for me.

Wanting to enhance the experience, I had a profound and sudden inspiration. At this point, with the sheer amount of nanotechnology running through my bloodstream, I was practically a cyborg, a stealthy one to be sure, but a cyborg, and had more options than the rest of humanity when it came to my sexual game, so why not embrace that?

Mentally linking up to the *Temptress*, I accessed my onboard design database and pulled up the design schematics of the Bliss Baton. Jarvis silently, but helpfully, brought up a chart showing the monthly sales figures. Each month saw a huge increase in replicator license fees in Federation, especially on Risa, as well as from other advanced, independent worlds. Those worlds supplied by the Ferengi and my burgeoning traditional distribution network saw a similar uptick in sales, albeit slower, but with a higher profit margin per item as a result.

I focused on the energy emitter portion of the design, my nanites essentially recreating and mimicking the emitter technology and its energy frequency. Reluctantly pulling my left hand away from Annika's breast to avoid potentially hurting her during the testing phase, I commanded the nanites under my fingertips to begin emitting the copied energy. Each finger lit up in a soft

aqua blue, like the blue of shallow, clear Caribbean waters on Earth. I smiled at successfully recreating this effect on the fly.

‘Jarvis, run a scan on the nanite created energy emissions, compare them to the Bliss Baton’s energy frequency,’ I mentally ordered.

‘Energy frequency is a 97% match,’ Jarvis reported.

‘Adjusting frequency. Energy frequency is now a 100% match.’

‘Excellent. Run compatibility safety check with Annika,’ I further ordered. This would have been done automatically by the bliss baton, an analysis program created by my EMH doctors, but I was creating my own miniaturized version of the device via my internal nanotechnology, on the fly, thus it paid to be cautious.

‘Per local scans, energy emission is within safe parameters for subject species and health,’ Jarvis dutifully reported.

‘Begin logging physiological effects on Annika and send results when we’re done to Dr. Gadot for review and suggestions for improvement,’ I ordered.

The Bliss Baton also had this onboard function, to learn how the user’s body (or anybody it was used upon) reacted to the pleasure energy it was imparting and thus to

better understand how to give the maximum pleasure to its owner/target, designing custom programs to match. The user themselves could create their own programs and could share them online with the broader bliss baton user community, even share stories of usage that read like a letter to Penthouse. Risa, as you could guess, had a robust user community that happily shared everything they learned and did with the bliss baton.

Buried in the user agreement, just like back in my time, was a provision that automatically transmitted all this user sensor data back to my island's central database. That database was continually growing and would prove invaluable when developing future biotechnology products for sale.

Bringing my left hand back to Annika's large, full breast, I ran my index around the nipple. Just like the painstick this technology had been inspired by, her breast lit up in a soft blue, which I always thought was cool. Her sharp intake of breath was more akin to a moan of pleasure as she woke up.

“What are you doing to me?!” she moaned, her eyes clenching tightly shut as her body practically shivered, trembling in my arms like a leaf the wind, her ass, a work of art in its own right, grinding hard back into me, and her thighs rubbing together.

“The short answer is *whatever I fucking want*, Annika,” I whispered/growled, pinching and releasing her nipple to start. “The long answer is that I am suffusing your body’s soft tissues and nerves with an energy wavelength designed to cause pleasure in humanoids. Right now that energy is feeding into your breast and traveling through the many nerves present there and flooding your system with all kinds of pleasurable natural drugs. One of my companies sells a product called the Bliss Baton, it’s a pleasure aid, a *sex toy*.”

“It’s *amazing*,” she moaned out loud.

“The breast has hundreds of nerve endings, the clitoris has over 10,000,” I explained. “If I fed energy into your clit right now, you’d probably have the hardest orgasm of your life and pass out on me, so we’re going to take this slow.”

I pulled her unresisting and moaning body to the middle of my king-sized bed and put her on her stomach, straddling her upper thighs. I pulled her pillow away and tossed it to the floor so that her head was directly on the mattress, face to the side, her arms spread out relaxedly.

“No, keep going, Gothic,” she complained sexily.

“I will, but I want to try something first and also want to talk a bit,” I explained. “I don’t think you’re going to be up for conversation if I keep playing with your tits.”

Leaning forward I began to massage her back for a moment before I activated my replicator and produced some Risian massage oils, specifically bioengineered to increase pleasure, by enhancing nerve sensitivity and conduction, which might be overkill given the technology I was using, but overkill was my life’s philosophy. Using this massage oil had actually been one of those recommendations in the user community that had come out of Risa.

Spreading the oil gently with my hands and simultaneously heating it up, the scent of honeysuckle filled the room, while I carefully kept my pleasure energy deactivated. Once her back was liberally coated in the oil, I activated the bliss energy at its lowest setting, her back lighting up blue and spreading much faster than normal under each of my fingertips due to the oil. The nanites, just like my bliss baton was designed to do, noted the pressure I was using. The more pressure I applied, the greater and faster the blue energy spread and expanded from my fingertips to suffuse the underlying tissues and nerves.

Annika moaned quietly as she fell near instantly into a deep state of relaxation, her muscles relaxing under the effects of the energy. A 21st century masseur of great skill would have had to expend a considerable amount of time and effort to reach the same relaxed state, and even then that state wouldn't contain the buzz of pleasure Annika was constantly feeling under my hands.

“Last night, while I was fucking you, you called me a few things, including one you’ve never called me before,” I relayed gently.

“What was that?” Annika asked, drowsily, moaning each of her words.

“You called me your captain,” I answered. For a kid who was raised on a starship and spent most of early life there, that was a title with some serious metaphysical weight to it.

Annika didn't tense up or do anything like you'd see on television, but she remained quiet.

“Have you been thinking about the offer I made so long ago, the one that led to us breaking up when I left Earth?” I asked gently, continuing my massage, careful to keep the tone light and the pleasure I was inducing hopefully keeping her relaxed enough to get honest answers out of her.

“I have,” Annika quietly admitted, no longer moaning now, though. “I still think it was the right decision, at least at the time, but I’ve often wondered if it’s still the right choice now.”

“Why is that?” I asked.

“You’ve put down roots on Bajor. You have a home and an important job there,” she said. “It’s not all endless travel and exploration now and living on a starship all the time, which you know I have my issues with.”

She trailed off, like she wanted to say more but was struggling to.

“Go on,” I softly encouraged, pulsing the bliss energy a bit, slowly increasing the intensity of the emissions.

“And I’ve missed you,” she said slowly. “I tried to see other people, men that checked all the boxes, yet it just wasn’t the same.”

I stayed quiet.

“I started to realize that all the reasons why I thought we couldn’t be together or wouldn’t work, well, they just didn’t feel real anymore. Then you called me and told me some shapeshifting alien had taken my form and we watched a video of you fucking someone that looked just like me and we masturbated together watching it,

watching as she said all the things I had been thinking, watching as she begged you to fuck her. I was so, so jealous of that alien in that moment and wanted it to be me in her place,” she admitted, before chuckling. “Even knowing that I would never be your only girl, you man whore, didn’t scare me way. You’re probably fucking every woman on your ship, aren’t you?”

“I’ll have you know that I’m only fucking 2 of the 3 women on my ship,” I admitted with a laugh. “B’Elanna and I have had our moral differences and is proving a difficult sexual nut to crack.”

We laughed together quite loudly at my admission and how silly I sounded.

“You could have that job on Bajor if you wanted, the one that will help you complete your thesis. I made a large financial contribution to their rebuilding, so they’ve kept the job open at my request for the next six months,” I admitted. “If that doesn’t interest you, I have several companies that I could definitely use your help with. You could have your pick of them. I also would love to have you on my crew. I’ve literally got 3 full time crew members on a ship that should probably be crewed by a hundred, one science officer doing the work of multiple crew, and 2 engineers. Well, and one guest that is still trying to figure out his place in the universe (literally).

Whatever job you want, or any combination thereof, is yours if you want it.”

“I’m tempted,” she admitted with another moan.

“You wouldn’t even need to live on the station. I have a long-range transporter that can get you from my island home on Bajor to the station, instantly.”

“Would I get to be with you, whatever option I choose?” Annika asked quietly, almost shyly.

I lowered myself fully on top of top of her, likely making her feel helpless. Then I reached between us and guided my cock’s tip to her soaked nether lips. Rubbing it up and down her wet slit, I growled, my lips pressed up against ear before spearing my cock deeply inside her.

“You couldn’t keep me away!” I growled as I filled her, her gasp of pleasure sending a thrill down my spine.

As I prone-boned her, the nanites that filled the blood of my cock and balls activated, releasing bliss energy directly into Annika’s clutching cunt. As if I was punctuating a point, I set the intensity quite high, causing Annika to orgasm explosively, practically screaming.

“My captain!!” Annika screamed, her cunt clutching me so tightly I nearly came.

“Mine!” I growled right back, continuing to draw orgasm after orgasm out of her.

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The Institute. Earth.

As I walked up the carefully manicured driveway to the Institute, a retrofitted mansion now turned medical facility, several civilians and uniformed Starfleet officers stopped to shake my hand and offer their sincere thanks or otherwise gave a brief nod of appreciation with a wide smile on their face as we passed. This had been happening all freaking day. The recognition was surprisingly nice and was much better than the existential angst I could also detect at times. Defending Earth, saving Paris, and then being awarded the Federation Council Medal of Honor had definitely had an effect on how the people of the Federation viewed and treated me.

I had known that winning the Medal of Honor was a big deal, winning the Congressional Medal of Honor had been a huge deal in my time as well, especially among those who were serving or had served in the military, but it was surprising just how differently even random strangers treated me now. This was yet another reminder that the celebrities of this time weren't pop stars or movie stars, but diplomats, scientists, and decorated Starfleet

officers. Carl had reported how all of my companies had seen a nearly 30% increase in sales revenue practically overnight from the Federation since I had been given the award. My companies had obviously benefitted from so much free marketing and goodwill, people looking me up and finding that I was an author and inventor with numerous products they could buy.

Of course, with all the 24/7 news coverage, my genetic status as an Augment had come up repeatedly, but for once, most simply didn't seem to care. To these newscaster's credit, they gave credible reports on my time fighting on Bajor during the Occupation and had even conducted live interviews with people who had served with me, including the First Minister and even Kira. There would always be detractors, but most simply chose to focus on my actions and the causes I had fought for, rather than their prejudices, for once.

Winning the Medal of Honor also had some official, practical benefits as well, benefits that mirrored many from my own time actually. The first of which was a monthly pension from the Federation that I would receive for the rest of my life. It wasn't much compared to my current wealth, but it would come in like clockwork for as long as I lived. The second benefit was priority access to all official Federation and Starfleet facilities and bases,

including priority docking, maintenance, and repair for my ship, which the *Temptress* was benefiting from right now, as well as access to facilities and assets that only active-duty Starfleet personnel could usually access. The third benefit was priority travel on all Starfleet vessels. If they were not on a classified mission and assuming that they had the space, I could board any Starfleet vessel and go along for the ride to wherever their destination was. Again, this was a benefit I wouldn't likely make much use of considering I had my own starship, but it was a very valuable thing.

The fourth benefit was an invitation to attend every presidential inauguration in the future, which included paid travel back to Earth. In other words, whenever a new Federation president was sworn in, I would be officially invited to attend the inauguration and given a place of honor. The fifth benefit was an exemption from any quotas mandated for Starfleet Academy. Any dependent of mine would receive a priority appointment examination for the Academy, even if my dependents were non-Federation citizens. How this benefit, codified into law, would interact with the ban on the genetically engineered serving in Starfleet was anyone's guess, but it would certainly help muddy the waters further if one of my future children decided that they wanted to serve in

Starfleet. The sixth and final *official* benefit was the right to full military burial honors.

Perhaps the best benefit of winning the Medal of Honor from my time was the fact that from the time you got the award to the end of your life, your drinks in any bar frequented by those in the military would be paid for by the many servicemen and women who wanted to thank you for your service. In the modern Star Trek age, where drinks onboard ship or on starbase were free, that unofficial benefit was of dubious value. It would be interesting to see if the many Starfleet officers and personnel stationed on DS9 would ever allow me to buy my own drinks in Quark's now.

Coming up to the main entrance I pulled open one of the fancy 10-foot-tall doors open, my mind flashing back to my last visit to the Institute, several years previously. Almost immediately after that visit I had left Earth to join the Resistance, so I had not been back here in person in quite some time. I had kept in contact with my fellow Augment misfits, but those communications were infrequent and short given how closely the Cardassians monitored subspace communications around Bajor during the Occupation. Afterwards, when they'd abandoned the planet, I had far too much on my plate to regularly communicate with them.

At the back of the large reception room was a human woman sitting behind a large reception desk. Approaching her, I put on my best diplomatic smile which made the woman blush profusely.

“Good morning, I’m Gothic. I have an appointment with Dr. Karen Loews,” I informed the receptionist. “She should be expecting me.”

“Admiral Gothic, yes, of course! She informed me that you would be coming today,” the woman gushed, her words running together, before turning sultry and inviting. “You can proceed to the secure unit yourself, if you like. Or I could take you there personally. There are so many hidden and private places to get lost in around here, after all.”

Normally, I’d be all for accepting what was being blatantly offered here, but I had things to do and places to be.

“Thank you, I think I can find it on my own,” I said with a smile, pretending I didn’t see the look of disappointment on her face before leaving.

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Outside the door to the day room where my fellow augments spent most of their time, I took a deep breath and then slowly released it, hoping to be granted the

strength to deal with the chaos I'd likely find behind this door. The last time we'd met I had been challenged almost immediately by the group of hyperintelligent genetically engineered misfits, as they virtually dissected me with their powers of observation alone, ferreting out secrets about my origins and feelings solely from my casual demeanor and a few clipped responses.

After reviewing the encounter in my mind, it still boggled the mind how much they'd learned about me from so little information, but that was the power of a genetically engineered mind. Each one of them had undergone an illegal procedure called accelerated critical neural pathway formation, which boosted their intelligence beyond genius level, and boy did they do little to hide that fact. Unfortunately, while their intelligence had been boosted as the procedure was meant to, unforeseen side effects had affected them each in various negative and obvious ways that had outed them and prevented them from living an otherwise normal life. Mostly. Dr. Bashir had won the genetic lottery in that regard as there were no obvious negative and unforeseen side effects that had outed him as a child.

Lauren, arguably, could not have lived a normal life as a 6-year-old with a hyper advanced libido and none of the corresponding ability to restrain herself, at least not on

Earth or many of the other worlds in the Federation. As I'd once thought, though, if the Federation wasn't so blinded by their prejudice against the genetically enhanced, a prejudice that ensured their first response was institutionalization and isolation, they could have relocated her to Risa for treatment and social integration. On Risa, in that far, *far* more sexually permissive culture and society, she likely could have had a normal childhood and life, or at least what passed for a normal childhood and life for a native Risian. And Risa was a Federation member world. As much as the Federation preached respect for all cultures, there were many examples like this where that respect seemingly only extended so far.

While I was happy to see my fellow genetically engineered, I had a purpose for today's visit.

'Jarvis, take control of any security or surveillance in that room,' I ordered.

'By your command,' Jarvis replied as I felt him reach out into the local computer network and take control, aided by the vast computing power of my quantum network.

Knocking on the door, I heard a quiet "come in" and opened the door. Dr. Loews smiled warmly at me and invited me silently into the room with a gesture.

Surprisingly, the group of enhanced misfits were closely

arrayed around an extremely large display screen on the wall showing a repeat of the awards ceremony, well, at least Patrick and Jack were standing close to the screen. Lauren was reclining on her lounge and Sarina was sitting near the screen, but facing somewhat away. Of course they weren't watching it in any way that could be described as *normal* and my entrance had seemingly gone unnoticed.

As I waited quietly at the back of the room, I saw that they were watching and rewatching the President explaining why I was being presented the Medal of Honor, but instead of keeping the view normal, on the president himself, they had changed the camera view and had zoomed in on me, standing at military attention, waiting for the president's introduction to conclude.

“Posture common to many humanoid militaries for such an occasion, but indicative of 20th to 21st century military parade rest attention, hmm, hmm,” Jack explained excitedly. “Human military, likely United States Army. See, see! Left foot ten inches to left of right foot, resting weight of the body equally on the heels and balls of the feet. I bet, I bet you, I bet I know what his hands are doing! Patrick, change to aerial view!”

Patrick giggled and tapped a control in his hand, the view changing to another Federation News Service video

drone, this one high and above and mostly intended to capture crowd reactions, but could also be used to see what my hands were doing behind my back.

“Ah ha! See, see! Hands at small of back at center of belt, hands extended and joined, interlocking thumbs so that the palm of the right hand is outward. Classic parade rest, U.S. military training doctrine, circa 20th and 21st century,” Jack preened at being right. “Time travel, extradimensional origins, hmm, hmm! Inconsistent with Bajoran military training, hmm, hmm.”

I rolled my eyes at that observation. The Bajoran military had only come back into existence recently and before that there had been a 50-year gap where it hadn’t existed at all. And the Resistance really didn’t count. Prior to the Occupation, the Bajorans were an extremely peaceful and pacifistic race, their military was more akin to a civilian police force in temperament and training.

“So what?” Lauren mocked in a bored drawl, rolling to her back sensually, and rubbing her hands up and down her sides slowly, her thighs rubbing together subtly. “That isn’t some great realization, Jack. He admitted his temporal and extradimensional origins the last time we met.”

“Confirmation!” Jack shouted, looking affronted at being challenged. “Confirmation is vital!”

“As always, you can’t see the forest for the trees, Jack. You should be far more concerned with acquiring new information, rather than confirming old information. A far, far more interesting conversation took place before the award ceremony, when Gothic was talking to Picard,” Lauren pointed out with a mocking grin at getting one over on her fellow augment. Jack looked mighty offended. “Patrick, access Lauren video integration and go to first bookmarked time index, during the pre-awards ceremony!”

“Ok, ok, Lauren, no need to yell at me,” Patrick whined like a little boy.

“Sorry, Patrick,” Lauren spoke gently.

The video went back to the pre-awards’ coverage. Somehow she had synthesized numerous camera feeds together to create a video of my conversation with Picard.

“Where is the audio, hmm, hmm?” Jack asked in that fast-talking tone of his.

“It was available and clear right until Gothic started talking about his ship,” Lauren pointed out with a smile. “He’s so deliciously cautious and paranoid.”

“Interference signal. He did not touch his omnitool,” Patrick pointed out in his child-like voice. “No body language or eye movement apparent to activate. Neural interface?”

Sigh...yet another secret divined by these meddling kids.

“Highly probable,” Jack admitted, sounding reluctant, like he didn’t want to admit or say what he was about to say.

“Gothic is an inventor, with numerous design and replicator patents registered under his name, hmm, hmm. According to Federation tax records he is also making an incredible amount of revenue per year in commerce. He had the skill and resources necessary. Both would be required to create such an advanced piece of technology safe for human use.”

It seems like someone was still carrying a torch for Lauren and was unhappy with the attention Lauren was paying me.

“Smart and rich. I think I’ll call him daddy in bed and let him spank me,” Lauren breathily stated. “Play the video, Patrick, and watch how it’s done, Jack.”

With no audio how did she intend to... Oh. And with that realization I sighed. It was a rather obvious oversight in hindsight.

“Thank you, Captain. Your recognition means more than I can say,” Lauren read my lips from the video file and spoke them aloud. The breathy sultry voice she was repeating my words in was a strange juxtaposition. “Note the sincerity. Gothic is highly critical of the Federation and the way it does things, often comparing them to the world he knew in the 20th and 21st century, but he sincerely respects Picard and is moved by Picard’s words.”

“So what?! Hmm, hmm,” Jack scoffed. “Most people in the Federation know and venerate Picard.”

“He didn’t grow up in the Federation, hadn’t been indoctrinated by it since childhood, as such didn’t grow up hearing of Picard’s successes and adventures,” Lauren rightly pointed out. Without my background knowledge on all things Star Trek and 7 years of TNG, I likely wouldn’t feel the way I did about Picard. She was right, it was an incongruity and came uncomfortably close to my most closely kept secret, more secret than even my extradimensional origins. “It doesn’t fit available data. So many hidden layers to that hunk.”

I thought about shutting down this uncomfortable conversation by announcing my presence, before some real secrets came out, assuming Lauren didn’t already know, but I had a feeling, a credible suspicion even, that

she was well aware that I was here and was putting on a show for my benefit. An interview, if you will, just in case. She needn't have bothered considering I had come here specifically with the intent to recruit her. However, I did appreciate the effort and the not-so-subtle reminder of her capabilities and worth. Jack, for all his great, genetically enhanced intelligence, had a very narrow focus when excited and that focus could blind him to just about everything else. I could definitely believe that *he* had no idea I was here.

“Advance to the next bookmarked time index,” Lauren requested. “*Despite my best efforts at the helm, the ship suffered a direct ramming attack from a Collector craft. The damage from that ramming attack weakened the shield grid in that area, which then allowed a Collector boarding torpedo to penetrate the hull allowing several hundred Collector warriors to board the ship via an active transporter relay,*” Lauren recited as she read my lips in real time.

“Pause playback. Hard to believe his ship wasn't destroyed or overwhelmed by those numbers, hmm, hmm,” Jack stated quietly. “Shield strength does not correspond to ship size, inconsistent with known Federation technology even for modern Starfleet vessels.

Technology is far, far beyond known Bajoran technical capabilities.”

“Access to unique technology not available to the Federation or peer civilizations, either self-created or alien,” Patrick speculated in that high voice of his, looking around to his peers for a pat on the head, like the child he was at heart.

“Good analysis, Patrick. Likely a combination of both, with no way to confirm with available data,” Lauren speculated indolently. “Picard’s reaction is much more interesting. Play. *Several hundred?! I had no idea. I’m so sorry for your losses, Admiral. The Enterprise was infiltrated by approximately 45 Collector warriors during a shield failure, a standard boarding team complement I’m told. We lost over 150 security personnel and crew while repelling their boarding. If not for the boarding simulations Starfleet Intelligence released and the heavier weapons and armor they provided for ship security personnel, the number would have likely been even higher. I am still drafting condolence letters to the families.*”

“Hmm, hmm, Picard’s personnel losses are consistent with publicly released casualty reports released after other Starfleet vessels have been boarded by the Collectors,” Jack pointed out as the video continued to play.

“But watch Gothic’s reaction, he is angry and surprised at this information. He fully expected Picard and his security forces to have done better,” Lauren pointed out, gesturing to my visible reaction on the video screen. “He has a personal stake in this.”

They let the video play with Lauren continuing to read my lips and repeat aloud what I had said.

“Oh, no, no, I didn’t lose any of my crew, thank the Prophets. I run a very, very lean skeleton crew of 4, including myself, so I’d be in deep shit if we lost anyone,” Lauren repeated.

“So much to unpack, hmm, hmm. A crew count of four for a starship of that size should be impossible. Advanced automation, perhaps?” Jack began, before he was distracted by another realization. “Picard faced a standard Collector boarding team of 45 and lost over 150 crew. Gothic faced several hundred Collectors and lost no crew at all,” Jack pointed out. “Better training perhaps?”

“It’s more impressive than you think. Gothic’s anti-boarding measures were entirely automated,” Lauren pointed out, to Jack and Patrick’s shocked surprise. *“It does, my advanced, automated, anti-boarding security measures repelled the Collectors, no live personnel were*

needed until the end, and even that was because I had some frustration to work out.”

“More signs of automation, hmm, hmm. Computer technology likely more advanced than Federation standard to allow for such advanced and pervasive automation,” Jack said, looking thoughtful. And he was right, without the alien technologies I had acquired, including the more advanced Husnock computer architecture, the level of automation I had on my ship would be extremely difficult or impossible, given its size. “Superior ship design. A certainty. High-level of paranoia and distrust, reluctance to hire crew who may betray him, hmm, hmm.”

He wasn’t wrong there. Any crew I hired would near instantly realize I had access to unique and advanced technologies that the other galactic powers would happily chase me to the ends of the galaxy for.

“Can you blame him, Jack? He is an Augment, like us, and will always face prejudice,” Lauren pointed out, a hint of rare seriousness slipping through her seductress persona. “If the powers that be found anything that they could hang him with, they would.”

“They fear us,” Patrick whined, crying a bit now.

“Lethal and automated counter-boarding measures were far more common onboard Starfleet ships during the Federation/Klingon war of the 23rd century,” Jack pointed out, completely ignoring the emotional atmosphere in the room. “They are considered barbaric and illegal now.”

“He confirms that in a moment and that’s where Picard fucks up, calling those measures barbaric, which Gothic *really* didn’t like,” Lauren editorialized, confirming she had parsed my conversation with Picard ahead of time, perhaps multiple times already and she was putting on a show for her fellow augments and myself. “*Lethal force fields and physical barriers at set intervals, the ability to vent decks to space, weapon turrets, vaporization and variable gravity attacks, holographic security, etc. I designed my ship from the ground up.*”

“Many of those countermeasures are illegal in the Federation for starships, no exception even in wartime without changes to existing law and regulations, hmm, hmm. Explains why his countermeasures were so effective,” Jack pointed out. “Are we so enlightened as a people that we throw our lives away unnecessarily to preserve our moral superiority? ‘Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the realm of the dead, for evil finds lodging among them.’ Psalm 55:15.”

“Yes, yes, many organized religions allow you to kill your enemies. The question really comes down to, is the method of killing them the real issue? Or is it that you have to be at risk of dying yourself to feel ok with killing your enemy?” Lauren pointed out.

“Conduct in war is often restricted by galactic treaty, hmm, hmm,” Jack pointed out. “The Hur’q or the Collectors, or whatever you want to call them, have never signed any of those treaties. Reports say that they eat captured enemies! No, there should be no restrictions on how we fight them, how we kill them, as they seemingly have none.”

“Everyone, perhaps we should move off this topic,” came the gently voice of Dr. Loews who was looking decidedly uncomfortable now.

“Did you hear, Jack, Lauren, Gothic *designed* his ship!” Patrick exclaimed, looking proud and happy.

“Superior ability breeds superior ambition, hmm, hmm!” Jack crowed and I cringed at that old chestnut from Khan. “Admittedly, it is an impressive achievement.”

Jack had struggled to get those words out of his mouth.

“He designed his ship and as we’ve already realized, has access to unique and/or advanced alien technology,”

Lauren pointed out. “Raise your hand if you believe that experimental warp drive story?”

Nobody raised their hands.

Fuck. Was her genetically enhanced intelligence able to pierce Q’s notice me not magic/reality manipulation?

What other realizations from my unguarded conversation with Picard was she going to trot out next to this room of misfits, a room that Section 31 could easily have bugged, and Jarvis may have been unable to circumvent? It’s exactly what I would have done. Nope, it was time to shut this shit down before anything really damaging came out.

“Thanks for that, Lauren,” I said aloud, making everyone but Lauren and Dr. Loews jump in fright and turn around to find who had spoken. “It’s a lovely feeling to have your life dissected and analyzed.”

Lauren decadently turned and sat up, crossing and uncrossing her legs slowly as she smiled lustily at me. My eyes were drawn to her creamy white thighs and the fact that she was showing me she wasn’t wearing any underwear under that sundress. How had she known that I was a sucker for a beautiful woman in a sundress? More psychoanalyzing at work or just a lucky guess?

“Gothic! Mr. Gothic! Admiral! Hello,” were the various greetings I received.

Jack unexpectedly came up to quickly shake my hand. I took his hand to shake only to find myself being flipped over. Rather than being flipped to my back, I tucked and landed on my feet gracefully. With Jack's hand still in mine, I reversed the hold and instead flipped Jack to the ground, face down, pinning his arm behind his back. In the same motion, I reflexively drew my sidearm and with my knee digging into his back, put my antiproton weapon at the back of his head. The deadly humming of the weapon on the verge of discharging was the only sound in the room.

The room went utterly silent at the sudden violence, Dr. Loews covering her mouth in shock at Jack's attack on me and the possibility of his dying for it, looking aghast. Patrick looked like he thought the martial display was cool. Sarina gave us a brief glance, then turned right back to staring at the wall. Lauren, well, she looked amused and aroused, which seemed to be her default setting, likely concluding that Jack was probably not going to die today.

"This plan may have been...ill advised...given your recent combat, hmm, hmm," Jack admitted quietly.

I deactivated my sidearm and holstered it, helping Jack to his feet.

“Yeah, let’s go with ‘ill advised’, Jack, and forget how quickly you came to losing your head due to antiproton annihilation,” I joked, a smile on my face, hoping to defuse the tension. “So how are you guys, it’s been a while.”

“Congratulations on your award, Gothic,” Patrick smile, with no guile whatsoever, like an innocent little boy.

“Yes, thank you, Admiral,” Dr. Loews added. “You saved a lot of lives, and we can never thank you enough.”

“You’re welcome, Patrick, Dr. Loews. Thank you for that, I appreciate it,” I said.

“You’ve always been my hero, *Admiral*,” Lauren purred sexily. “It’s the rest of the galaxy that only just realized.”

I nodded, staring unerringly into her eyes, sending her my desire.

“Lauren’s right, Admiral,” Dr. Loews chimed in. “News of your successes on Bajor, on Kessik IV, and recently around and on Earth have gradually begun a marked improvement in the way the genetically enhanced are viewed. There has even been talk of reviewing and revising the various laws restricting them, especially for those modified as children by their parents. Those children had no say in the changes made to them, so why should they be punished for a lifetime.”

Now that was a surprise to me, though I had been making many behind the scenes efforts to improve the perception of augments, mostly as a way to keep my businesses successful. However, as much as I liked to keep tabs on things, it was a big galaxy and there had been a lot going on on Bajor and around the galaxy after the Collectors had invaded. I could only hope that my actions and contributions could improve the lives of other genetically enhanced individuals around the Federation.

“I did not know that, doctor,” I admitted. “I quite agree with the sentiment. If my recent award helps that movement, even better. In fact, if there is anything I can do in that regard, please contact me.”

The friendly doctor practically beamed in happiness as she nodded.

“You’ve already done so much,” she said, while gesturing around at the room and the computers, viewscreens, and omnitools.

My fellow augments nodded excitedly at the reminder that was I responsible for their access to the outside world via all this technology.

The last time I had visited my fellow enhanced in person, a few years ago now, they had been isolated to this small room, not allowed to socialize with the other patients,

only each other, with no access to any technology, not even able to watch the news and learn what was happening in the outside world. For people who had been modified to have beyond genius-level intellect, that, I felt was akin to torture. The head of the Institute, Dr. Loews' boss, had claimed that these restrictions were for their benefit, claiming that he didn't want to overstimulate them. I called bullshit. So after I left them, I set in motion plans to improve their situation.

Earth might be a utopia, the Federation a government to be lauded and emulated, largely free of outright corruption, but it was still a government with a giant bureaucracy and thus was susceptible to parties with the right connections, influence, and requisite amount of money to hire the best lawyers available. If you wanted something, like to improve the lives of your fellow enhanced, there were levers to pull, even in the 24th century. A well-funded lawsuit and a couple of reporters being persuaded to write a story on the neglect/borderline torture of Federation citizens by the very doctors that were supposed to care for them and suddenly the policy was changed. Funny how that worked, right? Now they, mostly, had access to the same resources as any Federation citizen, though I suspected they were quite

heavily monitored, and some restrictions were still in place.

“You guys deserved to have access to news about the outside world,” I said, looking at each of them. “Do you like the omnitools I sent?”

“Oh, I love my omnitool,” Patrick said happily, stroking his omnitool like a beloved pet. “I have so much fun playing the games!”

In fact, I did already know that. Patrick was a ‘super user’ of my omnitool games, especially those intended for the younger demographic. In the beginning, we had used his intense gameplay to identify bugs and improve the gameplay altogether. Later on, we’d given him developer access and tools for him to create his own games; I even made a few suggestions and now Mario Kart could be played in the 24th century. Using just the tech in this room he had created a series of new games that he himself enjoyed playing. There was an entire genre of ‘Games by Patrick’ that was incredibly popular with kids aged 4-12 across the alpha quadrant. His permanent child-like mentality meant that he really knew what would be popular among a younger audience and what wouldn’t. Parents loved the games too because they were fun for their children to play but also extremely educational, sometimes in very subtle ways. Patrick might have a

child-like mentality, but he still possessed a beyond-genius level intellect and that could be seen in his game design if you knew where to look.

Of course, we didn't hide the fact that the popular game creator, Patrick, was an augment, just like me. He had quite the following actually and was doing his part (mostly unknowingly) to rid the Federation of its prejudice against the enhanced. It also didn't hurt that the games division was incredibly profitable for me. For my omnitool games I had taken the model from my own universe where the games were mostly free, but there were in-game purchases that could be made to enhance gameplay. Especially in the Federation, where people didn't quite understand the value of money or view it in the same way, I was making serious bank. I gave a few percentage points to Patrick as well, not that he could really spend the money in the Institute.

"I know you do. And we love you playing them, Patrick," I replied. "If you need anything, just let Hermione know, ok?"

Patrick's face lit up in happiness.

"Miss Hermione is amazing! I love talking to her," Patrick gushed.

"She likes talking to you too, Patrick," I said.

While the Institute had dug their heels in on allowing the augments unrestricted communications access, I had similarly fought to ensure that they could communicate with my people, like Hermione, Natasha, and Jarvis. I had argued, successfully, that they deserved the right to be able to communicate with others outside the facility to be able to at least tell others their rights were being violated or they were being mistreated.

“Actually, I have a few new games for all of you that I recently acquired that I’d like for you guys to beta test,” I said, before swiping my omnitool in a gesture meant to initiate a file transfer to all the nearby omnitools. “Just let me know what you guys think.”

Their omnitools lit up and pinged aloud indicating that they had received a download via near field communication. These were actually the first of the games I’d adapted from the dimensions I’d visited. The *Flight of the Navigator* universe games, being set in the 80s, would be considered ultra-retro, but frankly even the *I, Robot* games would be considered retro in the 24th century. Jack, in particular, would write a several hundred-page report on the games, largely intended to annoy me with a liberal sprinkling of subtle insults and mocking here and there, but his reports were genuinely useful and insightful. My digital children and Carl were

excellent at using his suggestions and implementing the appropriate changes.

“I’ve got a few romantic comedies and *other* movies for you, Lauren,” I said with a wink. Her face lit up with delight, eagerly nodding as her omnitool beeped again, signaling the files were downloaded.

Lauren was genuinely a fan of romantic comedies and had loved the few that I had had in my apartment when I had been transported here. I was adding to her collection with movies like *When Harry Met Sally*, *Love Actually*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, and *Notting Hill*, amongst others. As for the *other* movies she enjoyed, she’d be getting *Basic Instinct*, the *Fifty Shades* movies, and others. She had also been a fan of the pornos from my time that I had had stored on my computer, finding the 24th century pornography she had access to (and yes it did exist) extremely vanilla and uninspired. She’d be very happy with the sheer amount of pornography I had obtained from the dimensions I’d visited. It was anyone’s guess if she’d be a fan of the robot/human themed porn I’d found in the *I, Robot* dimension, which I was definitely not a fan of.

“Thank you, Gothic,” Lauren replied. “I’m looking forward to rewarding you.”

I merely smiled back at her as everyone in the room capable of being embarrassed by our flirting, was.

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For the next two hours I underwent a debrief, or probably more accurately, an interrogation, so detailed, pervasive, and invasive, on anything and everything that had happened to me since I last met with them, that Section 31 would be impressed. And yet again they managed to ferret out many uncomfortable secrets. At the two hour mark I called it quits.

“I’ve got to go guys,” I said to their groans and protests, even Jack surprisingly. “I promise to keep in more frequent contact over subspace.”

“Please do. We miss you, Gothic,” Patrick said before he gave me a hug. Jack then came and awkwardly shook my hand slowly, probably not eager to get a gun to his head again. Even Sarina gave me a glance and a small nod which I thought was a hell of a big step for her. Lauren just looked sad and thoughtful.

“Can I speak to you alone outside, Lauren?” I asked and she perked up considerably.

Predictably, Patrick just giggled, like I had done something salacious, and Jack just looked pissed off and annoyed, like always.

“Of course, Gothic,” Lauren replied, and then proceeded to sinuously get up, like a lioness preparing to stalk prey. Once outside she leaned against the wall, and somehow even made that look sexy, so I began my pitch.

“Do you remember what I offered you a few years ago?” I asked seriously. She nodded. “Jack, Patrick, Sarina, Dr. Loews, they’re great, but I don’t think you belong here anymore. I’m not sure you ever did. It’s only because of Federation prejudice that you didn’t grow up on Risa, leading a life of your choosing.”

She remained silent. We had exchanged letters and other communications over the years where I’d shared my thoughts that she could likely have had a normal life on that world, rather than being thrown into the Institute and forced to remain there even past her majority. Assuming she didn’t sexually impose herself on the unwilling, or on children, she had every right to be a hypersexual adult woman in the Federation.

“Whatever you’re looking for, whether that’s excitement, adventure, new challenges, money, sex, I promise you that you’ll get it out there, and hopefully by my side,” I offered, still not sure, even after all this time, what truly motivated Lauren. She was still largely a mystery to me. “You won’t find that here, at the Institute.”

“This is all I’ve ever known, Gothic,” Lauren replied quietly, serious for once. “I’ve spent practically my whole life with the people in that room. How can I abandon them?”

“They love you and I’m sure they want you to be happy. You would not be abandoning them, you’d be *living your life* and could still keep in contact,” I answered. “When I was brought to this time and dimension I felt lost, adrift, every connection I had ever made had been severed irrevocably. But I found a new purpose, new adventures, and new people I cared about enough to share the journey with. And right now I’m asking you to join me. That could be on my crew, in the Bajoran military, in any of my companies in any capacity that interests you, whatever you want. If you just want to be my sex pet, chained to my bed, you can do that too.”

My last offer there had been a joke, but she smiled, and a far-off look entered her eyes before she shook herself back to reality.

“All the official documentation is ready to go, you just have to say the word.”

“Tell me you need me,” Lauren commanded.

“I *need* you!”

“Tell me you want me.”

“I *want* you!”

“Tell me how you want me.”

“I want you by my side, Lauren. I want you on my ship. I want your intelligence and your creativity, your passion and your fierceness, your unpredictability and your mystery,” I answered. “I want your sexy fucking body too. I want to ravage your pussy with my mouth. I want to bounce you on my cock until I fill you up with my cum and your voice breaks from screaming in pleasure. I want to fuck your face until it’s a sloppy mess. And I want my other beautiful and sexy girls to make you cum too as I break you on my cock.”

“*Fuck me against this wall right now. Give me the best sex of my life and I’m yours, Gothic,*” Lauren growled.

“Really, right here?” I questioned uncertainly. “I mean, I’m game, but I thought I’d make it special for our first time, a nice night out, dinner and dancing, beautiful sights, a nice big bed at a minimum, you know.”

“Fuck all that. Right here, right now, and show me who the boss is,” she commanded. “I refuse to be with a man that I can dominate.”

If that’s what my lady wanted, then who was I to deny her? So I flipped the switch, and my more dominant side came out, my hand lashing out to wrap tightly around her

throat, squeezing it hard enough to make it difficult for her to breathe.

“Oh, I’m not sure you understand what you’re asking for little girl, but I’ll show you,” I growled, before I attacked her mouth, our tongues fighting for dominance. Her breath came in pants as the mild asphyxiation was making her lightheaded and thus enhancing her pleasure, my lips going down to her throat, and then to her breasts as I carefully pulled the loose-fitting sundress down to free her braless breasts. Her breasts, like the rest of her, were perfect, two d-cup tear dropped shaped tits that begged for my lips. Activating a low intensity bliss field around my lips, her breast tissue lit up in a soft blue as the bliss energy suffused her breasts.

“What are you doing to me?!” Lauren gasped and moaned, throwing her head back against the wall, eyes closed tightly as the pleasure overwhelmed her and she came softly.

‘Jarvis, can-’ I mentally called.

‘Sir, all local security feeds have already been looped. Security doors into your vicinity will show an error, even when given the proper clearance and codes,’ Jarvis explained. ‘Sound dampening field centered on your position has also been activated. However, I do

recommend a briefer liaison with your partner given the location.’

‘Understood. Good work, Jarvis,’ I thought, happy that he was anticipating my needs without me even asking.

Taking Jarvis’ recommendation to heart, I put my hands on either of her thighs and lifted her effortlessly along the wall, her thighs now on either side of my ears. She squeaked in surprise before I ducked my head under her flouncy sundress and ran my nose up and down her soaked slit, her lips engorged with blood, teasing her by not immediately feasting on her.

“Eat my pussy, Gothic! Make it yours! Stop teasing me!” Lauren whisper screamed.

By her command I started to devour her pussy, her juices sweet on my tongue, using all the skill I had acquired over the last few years to drive her insane with pleasure. Then I cheated even more, and the bliss energy ramped up, emitting from my lips and now my tongue too. Even now detailed medical scans were showing how her body was reacting to the energy and custom programs were being created and recommended to me on how to maximize her pleasure. She came over and over again on my tongue.

Wanting to get to the main event, I slowly lowered her to her shaky feet. When she could stand I turned her around and firmly, but gently, pushed her against the wall.

“I’m going to fuck you now, Lauren, and then you’ll be my little slut. Whenever I want my dick wet, I’ll bend you over and stick it right into this hot, clutching cunt,” I dirty talked.

“Fuck this little slut, daddy. She needs it!” Lauren growled.

Kicking her legs open wide, I pressed her harshly against the wall as I thrust my rock-hard cock into her sopping wet pussy. Her insides were tight and wet, a velvet glove that she rhythmically clutched inside her with some advanced kegel exercises. I stayed like that for a few moments, just enjoying the way she used this advanced technique before I started fucking her in earnest, my thighs clapping against her firm ass.

I waited for perhaps a minute before I emitted the bliss energy directly from my penis into her pussy and its thousands of nerves. She came wildly and I held on for dear life, continuing to fuck her through two then three orgasms before I backed off on the intensity, letting her recover for a few moments.

“Are you mine, Lauren?” I asked seriously, pumping my cock into her slowly, pulsing the bliss energy on a low level, but continuously. “Will you join me on my adventures, even if there is a potential for violence, for danger? Even if you have to share me with other women?”

“I am and I will, Gothic,” Lauren answered softly. “Now finish the job your started.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I replied, then picked up the speed of my thrusting while mauling her breasts, blue energy spreading from my hands gripping her breasts and twisting her nipples, and from her pelvis as my cock rearranged her insides.

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Earth Weather Control Substation 2-D6. Brazil, South America. Earth. United Federation of Planets.

Having accomplished the two major items on my Earth to-do list, specifically recruiting Annika and Lauren, and several of the minor items, I was in a rather great mood when Sloan requested a meeting since we were both on Earth apparently. There was little chance I’d deny Section 31’s request, which was a dangerous thing to do without a good reason, but my good mood certainly helped when I accepted it immediately.

My ship's extensive repairs were coming along wonderfully. I had purchased all the spare parts, tools, and equipment that B'Elanna had requested so that we could replenish those things we had lost, used up, or were destroyed during our dimensional journey or recent combat. A lot of the counter boarding technology that had been destroyed by the Collectors, for instance, required things we didn't have on hand or couldn't reproduce even with our onboard industrial replicator. I'd suggested to B'Elanna that we prepare for that possibility in the future and stock up more. We'd also picked up items that could assist us in building a new shuttle, which had long been on my long-term to-do list.

Beaming into the coordinates provided, at the exact time that I was instructed to, very important that, I remained still as I was instantly scanned by multiple powerful scanning beams before being allowed to proceed. Of course there was nothing like a green light showing up or a door opening, I knew that I had been allowed to proceed because nothing had tried to kill me. My armor was fully deployed so it wouldn't be easy for them. I had no worry that Sloan would be offended by my caution either; he'd likely view it as imminently prudent.

The building in front of me was in the middle of the rainforest, nestled between towering and ancient trees, the

building the only gap in the thick canopy overhead. The Earth government (as well as the Federation) was always concerned with leaving as minimal an environmental footprint as they could, but a hundred of these small weather control substations were scattered strategically around the planet, these many facilities necessary to make the minute adjustments planetwide that kept Earth's weather systems predictable, sustainable, and controllable. This facility was probably 150 plus years old and thus had multiple offices, a cafeteria, an infirmary, and other living facilities as part of its original design, the facility having been built in an era where transporters were unavailable or not trusted enough for daily use.

Of course, the facility and its technology had been updated many, many times over the years as the relevant technology evolved, and as such most of these substations were unmanned in the modern day, their living facilities unused most of the time or perhaps only sparingly used by other scientific branches of the Earth or Federation government, should they be conducting experiments or other such expeditions in the nearby rainforest, or the Earth military or Starfleet for various survival training exercises in this type of planetary environment. Only the major 'hub' weather control facilities had permanent staff these days.

It was eerily reminiscent of the way lighthouses were once operated in the United States so long ago. For hundreds of years in the US, lighthouses dotted the coastline manned by men with families. These men and families worked and lived at the lighthouse in the homes provided by the United States Lighthouse Service. When the technology evolved and electricity became available to power the powerful light at the top of these lighthouses, meaning fuel like kerosene was no longer required to *light* the lighthouses and be constantly replenished, these lighthouses no longer needed to be manned permanently like they had been.

That Section 31 would secretly commandeer facilities like these made perfect sense to me. As technology evolved, many such places existed throughout Federation space, on hundreds of worlds. Out of the way, but still connected to the modern information net, large, but unmanned facilities allowing personnel to work and live there. Places like these were all but abandoned and forgotten about unless there was a problem, in which case someone would beam in, fix the problem or perform the required maintenance, and then promptly leave again, another soul never coming to the place again for months or even years at a time. The use of temporary bases like these, when they were even needed, was what made an organization like Section 31 so

incredibly dangerous. There was no 'Section 31 Headquarters' to infiltrate like Starfleet Intelligence had. No HQ to target and destroy. That was the hardest kind of enemy to destroy.

Walking up the paved path I saw two black leather clad Section 31 operatives waiting for me at the open doors to the facility, its environmental systems blowing cool air into the humid air that was currently at 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Not that I noticed all that much as both my internal nanites and armor kept my body temperature perfectly regulated and comfortable.

The two Gestapo looking operatives, human by the look of them, merely nodded at me as they led me to Sloan's office. On the way there I saw no one else, nor any indication that more of the facility was being used, but that meant nothing ultimately. Even if I was a trusted freelance agent for Section 31, there was no reason to give me more information than I needed. If I were in Sloan's position, I would hide the true extent of my use of the facility by ensuring no one and nothing was visible during my visit.

I was led to what looked like the facility's administrator office, if the old plans I had pulled from Earth's historical archives could be believed. The office, just like I expected, appeared vacant, even as Sloan sat in it. There

was a desk, a chair behind the desk, and a modern computer terminal with two guest chairs. There were no pictures or personal effects at all, but there was a large window with a view of the nearby rainforest.

Sloan stood up and came from behind his temporary desk to shake my hand, that polite grin plastered on his face, as always, the one that gave away nothing.

“Gothic, hello, thank you for agreeing to meet with me so quickly,” Sloan greeted, shaking my hand politely.

“Of course, unless impossible to accommodate, I’m always happy to make myself available for Section 31,” I returned with a similarly polite smile.

I truly admired and respected Sloan, but you could admire and respect an incredibly dangerous creature and yet still be wary of it.

“And we greatly appreciate it,” Sloan pleasantly replied.

“In fact we greatly appreciate what you did during the Battle of Earth. You saved a lot of lives in the short and long term. We ran simulations in which you had not stopped that cargo ship, where Paris was destroyed, suffice to say that decades of war would have likely ensued. Our simulations and projections were ultimately inconclusive on whether or not the Federation would survive such a prolonged conflict.”

“Interesting,” I said, and I was. “I imagine many would seek to take advantage of the chaos and instability in the Federation government, predicting weakness for years to come.”

“The Romulans, the Tholians, the Cardassians, the Breen, all would have been emboldened, assuming the Hur’q, or as you like to call them, the Collectors, were no longer a matter of concern,” Sloan admitted.

“Not the Klingons?” I asked, now curious.

“Interestingly, no,” Sloan admitted, sounding like he was genuinely surprised for a moment. “As the Hur’q conquered the Klingons so long ago, our victory against their millennia-old enemy would have likely strengthened our alliance significantly. That alliance is the only reason defeat was staved off for decades in the various simulations.”

“Wonders will never cease,” I said aloud, now thoughtful.

“Your Medal of Honor was well deserved, but Section 31 would like to offer our own unique thanks,” Sloan said, before he tapped a few buttons on his computer. “Five hundred thousand bars of gold-pressed latinum have just been transferred into your personal accounts as a small thank you.”

Jarvis informed that my accounts with the Bank of Bolias had just received a deposit of 500k bars of gold pressed latinum.

“Generous, thank you, but I did expend quite a bit of ordinance during the battle and my ship was severely damaged, both externally and internally, by the Collector boarding parties,” I pointed out. “I’ve also exposed much of my ship’s capabilities in a very public manner which will increase the chances of my enemies developing countermeasures.”

“You’re right. How does a million bars sound?” he asked with little hesitation. After I nodded he tapped the computer console again and Jarvis informed me that another half million bars had just been transferred.”

This was another reason why I liked working with Sloan and Section 31. Another organization might have taken the position that since no one had asked me to help in the battle, that I had voluntarily chosen to do so, then therefore they had no obligation to pay or reward me for it. Sloan, though, knew I wanted to be rewarded monetarily and that by paying me afterwards, even though not obligated to, I would continue to act for the betterment of the Federation should another situation like this come up in the future. It was just good business. If you wanted to encourage behavior that benefitted the

Federation and its interests, then ensuring that I was rewarded afterwards each time would fundamentally alter the risk/benefit analysis I always conducted when deciding to act or not.

“Thank you, Sloan,” I said with a small nod.

“You’re very welcome,” Sloan in return. “There was another matter I wanted to discuss.”

I nodded, happy to let him continue considering the giant payday that I had just received.

“We have received word that President Moss of Kessik IV will be contacting you shortly, hoping to arrange a demonstration of the GODS platforms,” Sloan informed me. “Her government has given her the authority to conduct the test and further authority to make the purchase if all goes well.”

The fact that Section 31 was spying on a Federation member would surprised me not one tiny little bit.

“The timing is quite interesting, isn’t it?” I pointed out with a laugh. “President Brodt’s new initiative means the Federation government will be picking up much of the bill. Funny how suddenly all their objections have mysteriously been resolved and they’re now all for it.”

“That is interesting, isn’t it?” Sloan affirmed with a small, amused smile. “The President’s initiative has also put a bit of urgency in Kessik IV’s government as they are now worried that you will sell to another Federation member world before them if they delay too much, one that will make a quicker decision and thus potentially delaying their getting the net for months or years depending on your production rate.”

“Government FOMO,” I laughed. “20th or 24th century, it makes no difference.”

“Quite,” Sloan agreed. “Assuming Kessik IV accepts the deal after a successful test, many other Federation member worlds will be contacting you. If you are amenable, we’d like to send you a priority list of worlds that we hope you’ll sell to first, in the order listed, assuming they contact you. You are not required to agree, but if you select your next customers from this list, we’ll happily provide you with a bonus of 100k bars of latinum per world. If you select them in the order listed, we’ll give you 200k bars of latinum per world. We’ll also do what we can to grease the rails, as it were, both on the planetary and Federation level.”

Now that was some serious incentivizing.

While speaking, Sloan had sent the full list to me and Jarvis was already closely analyzing the list, trying to understand why Section 31 has assigned these particular worlds such high strategic value that he was prioritizing their receiving a powerful defensive system before others. The strategic importance of some of the worlds on the list was immediately evident, being worlds close to the borders the Federation shared with an unfriendly power or were worlds that other polities had some kind of historical claim on and thus had a higher likelihood of attack.

Others had strategic resources or industrial capabilities that the Federation desperately needed to maintain and protect if they wanted to weather a protracted conflict, like a world with multiple large shipyards and repair facilities. Some worlds were so strategically located that holding them would allow a hostile power to control a half dozen different adjacent sectors or would serve as the perfect forward operating base for an invasion force, if captured. Preventing these strategically important, but far-flung worlds from falling required significant Starfleet commitments in the sector, commitments that could be reduced if the planet had powerful defenses that would grant Starfleet more time to respond to an incursion.

A handful of worlds, well, Jarvis and I could see no discernible reason for Section 31's interest in them,

though we sure as hell would keep looking for one. If there was some ancient T'Kon or Iconian Empire outpost on those worlds, then I definitely wanted to know. Asking Sloan directly occurred to me, but I didn't bother as I knew he wouldn't tell me. He had couched this request as optional, one with a financial incentive if I went along with it, which I had no reason to deny. If he had required it, then perhaps I could reasonably ask for the rationale behind those choices, but he hadn't.

Sensing our meeting had come to a close, I stood up.

“Given the complexities of an endeavor like this, with so many powerful factions and stakeholders involved, I can make no promises, you understand?” I asked.

“Of course,” Sloan agreed with a small nod.

“However, if circumstances allow, I have no issue, in principle, with using this list,” I concluded, reaching out my hand for Sloan to shake.

“That's all we ask,” Sloan replied simply, shaking my hand.

With that our meeting was concluded.

As I was being escorted out I mentally reached out to Carl, based on Minos.

‘Carl, you’ve got four hours. I want a comprehensive report on the production status of the GODS platforms and the cargo ships. I also want timeline projections and what you need to make it even faster,’ I ordered.

‘I’ll be ready, my Lord,’ Carl responded.

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Captain’s Ready Room. Onboard *The Flighty Temptress*. Earth.

“My lord, you have an incoming subspace communication from Kessik IV,” Jarvis reported as I finished up some paperwork for the Bajoran Defense Forces.

Technically I was still on leave, but the Bajorans, surprise surprise, were not exactly keen on their Admiral being away from the planet for months at a time, even with the accolades my recent actions had earned them. In my absence from this dimension, some critical decisions that needed to be made, that Ro Laren couldn’t make herself, had come up.

“Accept the call, Jarvis,” I ordered.

The smiling face of President Donatella Moss appeared on the screen.

“Madame President, what a pleasant surprise!” I lied as I wasn’t surprised by her call given Section 31’s warning.

“I have some good news, Admiral,” President Moss began.

“Do tell,” I encouraged, my best salesman smile on my face.