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The Adventures of Augment Gothic

“Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return.”

— Leonardo da Vinci

“If you were born without wings, do nothing to prevent them from growing.”

— Coco Chanel

Chapter 8 – James Bond-esque Misadventures, but hey, you get laid.

Gothic's Ship. On Route to the Planet Risa.

“*E'tsis*,” the computer over-pronounced semi-slowly in Vulcan, which translated to ‘city’, meaning town/city/metropolitan area. The computer was providing me the correct pronunciation of the Vulcan word in the accent appropriate for someone born in the capital city, which would hopefully make me sound more cultured when I spoke it. I had already memorized tens of thousands of Vulcan words, their equivalent in English, and the way the Vulcans defined those words. My eidetic memory made that a rather quick process. The bottleneck in the process was in learning the correct pronunciation of those words and getting my mouth to cooperate at times.

“*E'tsis*,” I repeated. If I mispronounced the word, the computer would let me know by offering a correction. If it moved on to the next word in the sequence, I had obviously said it correctly. Being an Augment meant I had perfect control of my body, including my vocal cords, tongue, and mouth, key bits for speaking, but some alien words were so foreign or atypical for a human mouth it required a few attempts to get right. Some races’ languages, in whole or in part, could *not* be pronounced by a human, meaning it was impossible. Thankfully, Vulcan and the other languages I’d learned could all be pronounced by a human. Once I got the pronunciation correct, even once, it was locked in my memory for all time, including the exact movement of my tongue, the way my lips had to move, etc. I had supreme control over my body, but practice was still required at times.

We were on the ‘E’ words right now, well, the equivalent of ‘E’ words, at least phonetically, considering Vulcan had its own alphabet, with unique corresponding sounds, which had only taken me a few minutes to memorize since it was a relatively short list. The computer was quickly running through the most common words in Vulcan, words actually used in conversation by normal people, rather than specialized words or terms used only in various scientific disciplines, words like ‘*el-nala*’ which translated to ‘corpuscle’ in English, meaning either of two types of cells (erythrocytes and leukocytes) and sometimes including platelets; blood cell. I had memorized that word and tens of thousands of other specialized words, memorization was easy for me, but in the very unlikely event I’d need to know how to pronounce such an esoteric word in the future, I’d take the time to deepen my knowledge base. That wasn’t my purpose right now.

I had been inspired by that one episode in DS9 where those genetically enhanced misfits had learned the Dominion language and it had given them a valuable insight into the enemy and their hidden intentions. I could see a hundred different ways it'd be useful in the future. Total reliance on the universal translator was a crutch that too many people used. I had already successfully learned Klingon, Romulan and Cardassian in this manner. I had a lot of time to kill, so why not learn an alien language or four?

My eidetic memory made learning a new language very easy. The first step was to learn the tens or hundreds of thousands of words of its vocabulary, then the computer helped me conjugate verbs, then I learned the various associated grammatical rules and expectations in the way the language constructed sentences. Then the computer and I would have practice conversations in the language, but I was quite a ways away from that at the moment when it came to the Vulcan language.

"*Ek'talsu*," the computer continued, meaning 'scientist', a person having expert knowledge of one or more sciences, especially a natural or physical science.

"*Ek'talsu*," I repeated.

The grind continued.

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"The message should read, '*I was just thinking about you, Annika, and realized I had never released the last hostage from the Harry Potter series. No one should be denied the knowledge-*' The experience, maybe? Forget that, that sounds fucking stupid," I said, trying again to come up with the perfect message.

Was this pathetic? Maybe. But fuck you! You spend two months in a ship, alone at warp, right after you broke up with your pseudo girlfriend and see what embarrassing shit you do when you're feeling intensely lonely and wondering if you made the right decision.

The woman I was dealing with over subspace was smiling indulgently, waiting patiently as I worked out just what to say. She was based on Earth and worked with off-world clients to deliver gifts to people on Earth. In this case, she'd be replicating the things I wanted to send on Earth, from my personal pattern database, and then delivering them to Annika.

"How about this, '*I was thinking about you, Annika, and hoping that you're doing well. I wasn't happy with the way we left things, I probably could have broken the news better-*'". Gah! Why is this so fucking hard?!" I wondered aloud, part of me forgetting I had a witness to this little bit of drama. The stifled giggles coming from my display reminded me quite forcefully I had an audience.

A thousand quotes from greeting cards in grocery stores I'd once seen in my life flashed through my mind. Most of them overstated my feelings, or at least expressed more certainty about them

then I truly felt at the moment. I seriously didn't know how I felt about Annika, or if she wanted any place in my life when it was going to be filled with travel and adventure.

"Strike that, try '*No matter how far apart our paths diverge, I will always treasure the time we spent together. Thinking of you, Gothic,*'" I said aloud. That was short and simple and did what I intended it to do without overstating my feelings. "Have you received the replicator patterns for the alcohol and the book?"

"Yes, sir, it's already been received. If you've settled on your personal message, we can have your items replicated and delivered to the recipient, Miss Annika Hansen, within an hour."

"Good, yes, use the last message and send it all. And do not replace the true alcohol content with synthehol," I instructed. "I own the exclusive replicator pattern rights to the booze and the copyright on the book. I will be *very* unhappy if I learn anyone else gets a hold of either," I warned.

"Rest assured, sir, each item will be replicated only once and then purged from our systems. We pride ourselves on our discretion."

"Very good."

There was a nice bit of symmetry in sending her a bottle of Amaretto and the 7th and final book in the Harry Potter series, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. At the end of our first date I had replicated her an amaretto sour and the first book in the series, and had joked with her then about how I was holding the rest of the series hostages for future dates, or something to that effect. I think that would appeal to her. I had held off on giving her the final book, intending on giving it to her on the 1-year anniversary of our first date. A gifted starship had thrown that plan right out the airlock.

This might all be a horrible idea, possibly giving her hope that something could work between when it probably wouldn't or even worse, tormenting her on some level, which was not my intent at all.

Hopefully she'd continue to think of me and our time together fondly.

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It had been over a week since I had tried on the neural interface helmet during my weapons test in the asteroid field. The urge to put it back on again was disconcerting, but the urge was not physical in nature. It was not addicting in the physical sense, like you'd experience with a narcotic drug, but more in the sense that you felt 'less than' afterwards when back in your normal body, limited by the flesh, even mine. For someone like me, an Augment with seemingly unending ability and ambition, it may as well have been a physical addiction.

The increased capabilities the neural interface provided was not something I could set aside and never use again. The weapons test had been an eye opener in terms of just how much a force

multiplier the ability to mentally control my little ship was. While everyone else was essentially using the equivalent of analog, I'd be using digital. That was an advantage that could save my life one day.

This past week I had meditated on the experience, fully immersing myself in it. Tasting it and touching it and reliving it in the way only an Augment with an eidetic memory could. The memory was not truly dynamic, I couldn't change my past actions, so that protected me from some of the temptation.

Yes, the feeling of flying through space was intoxicating, the ultimate form of freedom, the shields and weapons, the ultimate form of protection, but there were things a ship could never experience, the pleasures of the flesh for one. My thoughts turned to the nights of passion I'd experienced with Annika, the overwhelming bliss of our lovemaking, even the cuddling afterward, the feelings I'd experienced recently. Focusing on the pleasure, the feelings involved, helped put the experience with the neural interface helmet in perspective. These were not things I could have as a starship, drowning in the sensation of flight through the endless inky black of space. The physical body still had much to offer. Perspective was what I needed. An anchor to call me back to the flesh. An anchor that would remind me of the limitations the neural interface would demand.

This new found perspective gave me the strength to resist the siren call the neural interface offered. Of course, there were practical demands or concerns as well. The fact that I would die without proper nourishment or that the ship would require maintenance to stay operational that could only be performed by hand, seemed secondary when in the digital/mental world. After a week of deep meditation, spending several hours a day in that state, I felt I had reached a good place, an equilibrium that would keep me grounded and from losing myself in the interface.

My plan was to put on the helmet while at warp, but not otherwise do anything else. There would be no intense maneuvers around asteroids or firing the weapons at everything within range this time. I merely wanted to immerse myself in the interface and passively feel the ship traveling at warp.

Putting on the helmet, I closed my eyes, and yet I saw so much more. The stars flashing by in the relativistic warped space time I was flying in was more than just streaks of white light, it was the galaxy itself. Even now incredible amounts of data was available to me coming from the ship's sensors, everything from the particle density of nearby space, to the amount of time a nearby star had left before it went supernova, to the power conversion statistics of my ship.

I took it all in, and yet let it pass through me. I remained myself, a limited organic being, but temporarily granted sight beyond sight, strength beyond strength, speed beyond speed. Perspective was what I needed to stay grounded and thankfully I kept my sense of identity. I could enjoy this experience but also recognize that it was temporary and transitory.

Now, how could I use this interface to assist with my ongoing projects? The answer came to me, almost as if I was given a gentle suggestion by a friend, like a small nudge to a potential answer. I was entirely alone on the ship, but in this digital/mental space, I was accompanied by the ship's

computer, an intelligence of sorts by some definitions. It wasn't sentient, but it could almost appear intuitive by the sheer computational power and tremendous amount of information it held. Of course, I was tied into the ship, separate, but one temporarily, and thus the ship knew what I knew. Just as its sensors and memory banks were available to me at the speed of thought, my memories and ongoing projects were available to it.

Now that was an intriguing idea.

With the speed of a mental command, I wirelessly interfaced with my personal database and accessed the holoprogram I had created way back when, when I had been on the *Enterprise*, a program I had sold online and had intermittently worked on since, adding new levels, new grids, new light cycles as expansion packs for my fans to purchase and enjoy. The Tron program had actually been a nice source of income for me and I had a small, but dedicated fan-base.

These expansions had taken a good bit of time to program, but thankfully, most writing for a holo-program did not actually require an author to be *in* a holodeck to do. That made sense, not everyone had access to dedicated holodecks for the sheer amount of time needed to author a complex holo-novel environment. Of course, doing this on a holodeck was easier in some ways, you could see your changes in real-time in a 3-dimensional environment, and experience the environment/characters/interaction like your end user would.

No, a great deal of a holo-author's 'writing' took place sitting at a desk, manually adjusting a character's narrative parameter file or making small adjustments to the environment on a 2-dimensional screen. That, like so many other things I'd experienced in the 24th century Federation, struck me as stupid. The neural interface helmet my ship came with meant I could design virtually, all in my head. I would no longer need to 'open the narrative parameter files' or 'character personality subroutines.' I could simply will something into existence. And that's just what I did.

With a thought, a Tron battle grid appeared before me, a glossy black floor separated by endless bright white lines in a grid pattern. The grid stretched endlessly into the distance, but I wasn't really there. There was no depiction of myself, only my consciousness was there. In moments, I started designing and building a holographic Light Jet, an aerial combat vehicle, for inclusion into my Tron program.

I wasn't giving any individual commands, though, like I would sitting in front of my computer. I was imagining what this light jet could look like, and with the speed of thought, the computer took my imaginings and designed them virtually. They say a picture was worth a thousand words, in this case it was a thousand separate commands.

Since my Hovercruiser 924M was fresh on my mind, a strikingly similar vehicle began to take shape, the computer instantly accessing the schematics for my hovercruiser and creating them virtually on the battle grid. With more thoughts, the color scheme was changed to better fit the Tron aesthetic, the wings shortened, and weapons were added. 'Looking' around I expanded the battle grid to allow for flight combat, a ceiling 1,000 feet in the air being created.

For fun, I added floating asteroids to up the difficulty level by reaching into the ship's sensor records and modeling the placement and movements of the asteroids in my program after the real-life asteroids I'd just spent hours destroying during my ship's weapons test.

With another thought there were two light jets, both manned by pilot users, who saluted me before taking off into the inky black of the battle grid, trying to destroy each other because I had commanded it, colorful ribbons of red and blue light lingering behind them as they flew.

The ribbons expanded when I saw the demands of aerial combat required a few adjustments. A light cycle traveling on the ground had far fewer options when it came to avoiding the ribbons of their enemy, but in the air, it was all too easy to avoid. With another thought, each light cycle had the equivalent of phasers, a ribbon beam shooting forward at good speed, but completely straight, till it hit the boundary wall of the aerial battle grid and ricocheting off till it hit another wall, creating a deadly prison of light obstacles to avoid. I added a melodic 'ding' sound upon the ricochet to add more drama to the battle.

One of the user pilots blew up rather spectacularly after only a few shots, so that wouldn't do. Perhaps limiting the number of ricochets? Instantly the users' phasers were limited to only two ricochets off the walls before they dissipated into nothingness. If a phaser light beam struck a floating asteroid, it would destroy it, spraying deadly shrapnel and disrupting the movements of the other asteroids.

I watched for nearly thirty minutes of gameplay, each user pilot 'dying' many times over. In reality only a few seconds in the real world had passed before I decided another weapon was needed. The asteroids added some difficulty to the gameplay, but they were rather predictable in their movements. What if each user's light jet had a gravitational pull of its own that could disrupt the movements of the asteroids as well? And what if each user could use what was essentially a tractor beam to disrupt the movements of the asteroids? A skilled user could throw asteroids or purposely place them to limit the evasive maneuvers of their enemies.

Implementing the change was instantaneous, my mind and the computer instantly making probably hundreds of decisions in order to add functionality and tweak the governing physics of the game world. In the real world the computer probably would have required me to have defined each asteroid's mass, the gravitational force of each user's light jet, and a thousand other things.

I was pleased. A half hour had passed by in the real world, the ship's chronometer instantly available to me, and I had already designed a new battle grid, a new light jet for my Tron holo-program, and a completely different mode of play. This would have literally taken me, an Augment of great ability, upwards of a day or more of concentrated effort to duplicate without the direct neural interface.

You know, I had often lamented how my Tron holo-program would have benefitted from the Tron: Legacy soundtrack. That music by Daft Punk was amazing for the program, but unfortunately, I had never purchased it back in my old dimension, always streaming it when I wanted to listen to it. That meant I didn't have a digital copy in my database.

I had considered reproducing the music somehow, from memory, but that would be an involved process I had learned. I'd have to learn various instruments, reproduce the mixing, the sound effects, so many different things. What I would have loved to do, was simply take my memory of the soundtrack, something I had listened to dozens of times and put it into the computer directly. The memory from my old life was fuzzy, but with great effort it could be retrieved. Before now, before the neural interface helmet, I couldn't simply transfer my memory of the music into the computer.

Reaching back into my memory, I let the music fill my mind, the complex electronic tones of Flynn Lives, Recognizer, Son of Flynn, Adagio for Tron, and the Tron: Legacy End Titles filling me up. I felt the computer digitizing the music in real time, creating audio files that could be used in my program, and even dynamically matched up to the user's battle in the program. Quite accidentally, even the movie itself was extracted from my memory and digitized, then stored in my personal database.

A thousand other already mapped out minor improvements to the program were implemented over the next minute, improvements I had already fully thought through, but had never found the time to complete the time-consuming process of inputting them. These planned improvements were all in my mind and the execution had been running in the background, as it were. Now that I was aware of it, there was something akin to a completion bar gradually filling up.

Save program, I thought rather unnecessarily, a sense of giddiness nearly overwhelming me. That had been intense.

Could I interface with the Ferengi design computer and take my incomplete weapon and armor designs to the next level? Reaching out to the design computer, I hit a hard wall and felt something akin to a headache develop. This was a virtual world, but my mind was 'in the matrix' as it were. Running headfirst into a hard wall would hurt me in the real world. It was the same in the digital world with a software firewall.

My Ferengi virtual design computer possessed the ability to interface with another more powerful computers and systems, but I had put hard limits on its ability to do so while on Earth, fearing being spied upon by Starfleet Intelligence and Section 31. I guess I'd need to 'log off' and open up that connectivity now that I was on a ship that I owned and now using systems I fully controlled. Once I did that, though, I suspected I'd be making some substantial progress.

Before I did that, though, I uploaded my new and improved Tron holo-program, with awesome music to the GIN. Let's see if the improved program attracted any new customers, or convince the old customers to shell out the credits/gold pressed latinum to buy the expansion pack.

Space Port. Planet Risa.

Given that there were up to a *billion* visiting tourists from all over the quadrant on the planet at any given time, the spaceport was rather busy and just like in my time, you had to go through

customs before you could start your vacation. So, I had ended up waiting for a while in the 24th century version of a line...but in warp capable starships.

As I waited, I had the privilege of listening to a simply *riveting* machine voice talk about the planet, repeating many of the same facts and figures I'd already read about at one point during my roughly three months of travel from Earth to Risa. I listened because I didn't really have a choice in the matter, and it did have interspersed bits of important information like customs requirements and landing procedures. Visitors were required to accept this comm signal and were *supposed* to listen to this introduction, much like airline passengers were once forced to listen to a safety training on each and every flight they took. You were restricted from even lowering the volume! As an Augment with an eidetic memory, I'd be able to perfectly recite these words for the rest of my life. I guess you had to take the good with the bad.

'Visitors to this world, no matter how many times they have already been here, never cease to be awestruck at the pristine beauty, the brilliance, the perfection of the planet,' it droned on and on and on.

All who bothered to learn, though, were fully aware of the all-too synthetic, mechanical nature of its beauty, only possible through the most sophisticated and powerful artificial weather control system in the entire Federation. That system alone kept storm patterns and global temperatures completely predictable and controlled, but as far as the vast majority were concerned, that was more an asset than a liability. I didn't feel it took away from the fun I'd had on the surface; a fake pair of big breasts was still a pair of big breasts.

'It is an expression of triumph, a monument to the vast ingenuity of sentient life, to what we can control, to what we can create when we set our minds to it. Looking out from an arriving shuttle, visitors are rarely able to tear their gaze away from what they see, like the vast resorts, the towering themed hotel complexes looking out to the ocean, the wide variety of amusement parks extending throughout the mainland, to the jungles, the islands, the cruise vessels made to look straight out of a history book, and of course, the long stretch of pristine beaches, wide enough to provide the proper balance between peaceful tranquility and friendly community.'

I figured that the machine was going to talk for a while. I promised myself that at the very first opportunity I'd replicate myself the modern equivalent of noise canceling headphones and something that played music.

Amandari Resort. Planet Risa.

Eventually I'd gotten past customs and had found the place I was to reside in for the next few days, though I planned to stay on the planet for a few weeks at least. Since there were extensive accommodations available for tourists all over the planet my intention was to move around and stay at quite a few places to get the full experience.

The first place I was staying at was a rather nice hotel that was a stone's throw away from the beach and was located right next to an atoll lagoon of great beauty. After unpacking I tossed on a pair of blue vintage board shorts (and nothing else) from my time and went down to the beach, deciding to park myself in a really comfy looking bed-like thing right next to the crystal clear blue waters of the lagoon.

I had literally just spent about three months traveling through the dark of space, *by myself*, and was eager to take in the incredible sunshine of a binary star system. The soothing and warming rays of the sun, or *the suns*, whatever, on my bare skin, was just what I needed to rejuvenate my spirit. My vocabulary really needed to adjust to something less Earth-centric. The view of the water was beautiful and the many beautiful people walking around even better, many in bikinis, some topless, some even entirely nude. I guess this was something that they couldn't show on a network television show, or the various Starfleet officers we followed to the planet, like Picard, chose a much more conservative resort than I did. I quite enjoyed the appreciative looks of the many people around, some of which being decidedly alien in appearance.

I had reserved this bed lounge thing right next to the water's edge. It had a retractable canopy with wicker rattan frame and siding. The canopy obviously could be lowered to varying degrees to protect against the sun, but it looked like it could essentially seal the bed entirely from view. On a planet like Risa, I had a pretty good suspicion what that could be used for. Depending on the resort, whether it was for adults only, like the one I was at, you could easily encounter couples or more having very visible and public sex right out in the open.

Since a suntan was essentially short-term damage to the skin, I was actually curious to see if an Augment like myself could even tan. Somehow that hadn't come up in any of the talks I'd had with Beverly on the *Enterprise*. It was also something that hadn't really come up during my time on Earth, given my insane training regime and spending most of it indoors or on a holodeck.

Once I had set down, eager to show off the rippling and powerful muscles I'd done little to achieve, I reached into my bag and pulled out a thick, pre-Federation, hardcover book that I had replicated, a copy created from a surviving original in the collection of the library I had formerly worked at. The author was actually known to me from my old life, however the story was not, and I was looking forward to reading something that hadn't existed in my universe for one unknown reason or another.

However, I found myself quite distracted by the many pleasant sounds around me, the roar of the waves, the rustle of the leaves of the nearby tropical foliage, the endless happy chatter of people in the hotel, and what I guessed to be the joyous laughter of the beautiful young women who seemed to populate Risa. I don't think I'd seen even a single unattractive Risian male or female yet. My ship, during the long journey here, hadn't been silent per se, the engines made a pleasant ever-present hum while at warp, but it had been perpetually rather quiet. The sounds I was hearing now, though, were the sounds of life. It's funny how spending three months by yourself could put things in a different perspective.

Then I heard a voice say my name, my *actual* name, not the one I had chosen for myself upon arriving in this universe. Seriously, I hadn't heard that name or even thought of it since my time

on the *Enterprise*. That wasn't me anymore. That person's experiences were part of me, but it was no longer who I was. I would have told the person off for using it at all only to be struck silent for a moment.

The woman who had called my name had windswept, flowing red hair and a petite muscular figure, with pretty green eyes. She was wearing a revealing one-piece, beige colored swimsuit. The color wasn't attractive to me, but everything else sure was. Once I finally looked up at her face, I determined that she was likely fully human, though that was just a guess considering the number of humanoid species around that so closely matched humanity. It also likely explained the beige color choice; humans in this century tended to favor sedate colors and had *awful* taste in clothing in my opinion.

"Yes?" I asked, once I had stopped checking her out. "Can I help you?"

Since the people who knew me personally were either on Earth or on the *Enterprise* I had no idea how this woman recognized me, or how she even knew my old name. My finely honed sense for shenanigans was pinging.

"My name is Natalie Romanov," she introduced.

Natalie Romanov? *Seriously*? From the Marvel Cinematic Universe? A super spy former assassin who worked for SHIELD? The most elite and ruthless intelligence agency on the Earth of that universe? If my shenanigans senses were pinging before, there was a gong practically ringing in my head now, telling me to be careful.

Well, let's see, Russian name but she didn't sound Russian, at all, but that didn't mean anything in this time; she might never have set foot on Earth in her life for all I knew. However, I got the impression that that wasn't what she was really called, just like her actress counterpart from another universe and that made me curious. I could speak Russian now, so I could speak to her in that language, but again, that didn't really mean anything in this time.

"Please, call me Gothic," I told her.

The woman's smile became more confident.

"It's Lieutenant Natalie Romanov, actually," she informed me. "I'm a member of Starfleet Intelligence."

Starfleet Intelligence wasn't my primary suspect, but ok, let's go with that just for fun's sake.

I'd wondered quite a few times whether Starfleet Intelligence would have someone keeping an eye on me and my movements. I wasn't the only known augment around, not by any means, however most of my fellow augments only had *minor* genetic enhancements, at least when compared to mine.

The risks of genetic engineering, in terms of unforeseen and possibly debilitating complications, increased *exponentially* the more a person's DNA was messed with, so most augments today were nowhere near as strong, as tough, as smart, or as fast as I was, and certainly not all at the same time. That made me far more dangerous than the rest, the total genetic upgrade package, as it were. You'd have to go back to the era of Khan to find someone like me.

Add in the historical connotations of being an Augment who had grown up and lived during the era of Khan and it wasn't crazy to think that I'd be under surveillance for a while. My actions on Earth probably hadn't helped, even though I'd bent over backwards to ensure everything I did was by the book and 100% legal. In fact, if I hadn't left Earth when I did, my probability analyses suggested that legitimate surveillance could last up to a year before they decided I wasn't going to cause trouble.

"I would show you my identification," Natalie said, sounding sheepish while glancing down at her bathing suit while running her hands over her curves, likely with the intent of encouraging me to take another look at her well-formed body, "but as you can see, I don't have much on me."

People in this dimension seemed to undervalue the incredible utility of pockets, for some reason. It was only in the last few seasons of TNG, for example, that the Starfleet duty uniform moved away from that ridiculous unisuit style. I had a mind to wear cargo pants everywhere, complete with a multi-compartment utility belt in protest! As for the ID, I had no idea what identification an intelligence agent would even carry, nor would I even know how to authenticate it, so using it to prove who she was would have been completely pointless.

"You don't need to show me any ID," I told her. "If you say you're with Starfleet Intelligence, then I'll take your word for it."

I did find it pretty odd, though, that she was here talking to me if she was meant to be spying on me. She'd essentially blown her cover. Unless this introduction was necessary for her *real* mission, to get close to me or con me into something.

"I just didn't want you to get the wrong impression," she said.

Since I didn't have much of an impression about her, I had no idea what she was worrying about. In fact, it was a pretty odd thing to say.

"What an odd thing to say, Natalie. But, please, feel free to sit down," I offered, while gesturing to an empty lounge chair next to mine. "You might as well tell me whatever it is you came over to tell me."

If she wasn't here to keep tabs on me, then she must have had another reason for talking to me and I wanted to know what that was. She might actually want to talk to me in a non-professional capacity, but somehow I doubted that, otherwise she wouldn't have mentioned who she worked for without even being asked. This was all super sketchy.

"Thank you," she said, before gracefully taking the offered seat.

These new eyes didn't miss much, but it'd be hard to miss how she moved with an almost predatory grace. She didn't say anything after that, just looking at me, so I decided to guide the conversation.

"I assume you've heard of me. You did use my birth name, a name I don't use anymore by the way," I probed causally.

The Federation was big, but gossip traveled faster than even Warp 9, so I didn't doubt that talk about the Augment from another time and dimension had already spread far and wide, at least within Starfleet itself. The Federation had actually done a pretty good job of not spreading around my status while on Earth.

"You've aroused quite a lot of interest in some corners of the fleet," she informed me.

I imagined that many people, both in and out of Starfleet, took special notice of everything that took place onboard the *Enterprise*; it being the center of so many important events. That would include noticing the people who stayed onboard the flagship, especially someone like me, an Augment from another time and dimension.

"Particularly in Intelligence, I presume?" I inquired.

She nodded.

"I suppose I should be flattered," I said, my sarcasm clearly heard.

Again, nothing was said for a while after, and I found this incredibly annoying because it meant that this agent might be playing a game with me, testing me, maybe even as some sort of passive interrogation technique, exploiting the power of silence and all that.

"Why don't you tell me about yourself?" I requested.

Somehow, I doubted that she would be forthcoming, but her answer could be useful in figuring out what the game was here.

"What do you want to know?" she asked.

Thus answering a question with a question and giving nothing away, while my words would reveal information about myself.

I pondered that for a moment. Let's send up an easy question and see what happens.

"Did you join Intelligence right after leaving the Academy?" I inquired.

She didn't take long to answer.

"More or less," she said.

Well, *fuck you, bitch*. What kind of game was being played here? Let's throw in some flattery mixed with mild insults.

"Either you're one of the best field agents they have, or you're a novice at this and have no idea what you're doing," I reasoned.

She raised an eyebrow while looking at me.

"How did you know?" she wondered.

Again, with the fucking childish evasions. Was she testing my impulse control? To see what I'd do if she made me angry or annoyed me enough? The Khan-era augments were a volatile bunch, ready to do ridiculous levels of violence at the slightest insult or small annoyance. I noted again that she wasn't telling me *anything*, which meant either she was a cautious newbie, trying to piss me off, or very good at her job. Or she could be carefully eliciting and studying my reactions to build a better psychographic profile of me. She might even have some technology on her or nearby studying my body's reactions with medical sensors.

"I'm genetically enhanced," I said with finality, like that should explain it all, before turning my attention back to my book, unwilling to engage any further. Let her come to her own conclusions as to what that bit of nonsense meant.

She nodded. We sat in silence for probably 10 minutes more. Like hell I was going to break first.

Our silence was actually broken by a young Risian girl, acting as a waitress to the resort guests. She was blonde haired, blue eyed, with a trim figure, modest bust, and had a Norwegian-like beauty about her. She was quite beautiful, like all Risian women I'd seen so far. She was also topless, her perky breasts and rosy nipples tanned by the sun available for everyone to enjoy the sight of.

"Can I get either of you a drink from the bar, or anything else?" she asked, with an inviting smile.

I had a feeling more than just drinks were being offered, which fit the culture from the shows and what I'd learned during my research on the trip here.

An interesting bit of trivia considering how hedonistic the planet was was that prior to joining the Federation, the Risian people had no age of consent, meaning the age at which a person is considered legally competent to consent to sexual acts. In my home country, the United States, the age differed by state, but the age of consent in my native Ohio was 16. The vast majority of US states also had their age of consent set at 16 with only a handful at 17 and a few at 18, like New York and California. Even now, after their admission to the Federation, the Risians had no such laws between themselves, only with aliens, which was set at 16 years of age.

No, the Risians had no age of consent nor did they have any sexual criminal laws amongst themselves. And it was not just a situation where everything was permitted, thus nothing was

criminal, no, it was simply that the underlying actions just didn't happen in their society. Consent and good manners were paramount to them. It was anathema to them, unthinkable, to do anything someone was uncomfortable with, which in Risian society was a very short list and very person specific. They gave so freely amongst themselves as a race that they just didn't understand the sexual mores and taboos of other races. On Risa, even children participated freely in sexual play with other children, routinely, often with their parents' guidance. It was a very alien culture to most species, but incredibly fucking fascinating to me.

When they joined the Federation and opened their planet and culture to visitation by everyone, they had practically been forced to adopt certain Federation beliefs and laws, at least when it came to the various alien races who couldn't be counted on to strictly adhere to consent and good manners. Even then the Risians would likely let the aliens get away with it. The Federation, though, had applied certain laws to alien visitors, which meant everyone except the Risians themselves. The 24th century Federation was nowhere near as prudish as the people of my time, but nor were they as open and free as the ancient cultures of Earth, like Ancient Rome or Greece. The Federation still had a few limits.

This beautiful girl, if she was working on a resort and dealt with alien tourists, was at minimum, 16 years old, and thus free to consent to sexual acts with whatever alien visitor she wanted.

"No, thank you," Natalie answered, barely looking at the Risian girl.

"For you, sir?" she asked, looking me over quite openly, and obviously finding me pleasing to the eye.

"You know what, I *would* like a drink, a Bahama Mama, from Earth," I ordered, knowing the drink had survived to the modern day. Identifying the planet of origin of your drink order was often a necessity given the number of species around. "And I'll also take a *blowjob*, if that's all right," I said, smiling widely, though not entirely sure this was kosher. Reading about it was one thing, doing it was another.

"All that is ours is yours," she said softly, a large smile on her lips, looking quite happy at my request. I got the feeling she was pleasantly surprised at finding a human who asked freely for what he wanted.

She tapped quickly at a PADD, placing the drink order, before crawling sensuously into my lounge bed, her breasts gently swaying, kneeling between my legs as she untied my shorts, and opened the fly to extract my cock. I was about half mast, but her soft and gentle skilled hands quickly brought me to my full 10 inches, a size she looked rather surprised and pleased by. She quickly brought her lips to the head of my cock and began to hungrily swirl her tongue around me, applying an insane amount of suction.

I looked over at Natalie, as nonchalantly as was possible with a platinum blonde head of hair bobbing in my lap, the sounds of hardcore sucking quite loud. My intent in asking for this blowjob was more than the obvious, it was designed to gauge her reaction. Modern humans, even on Risa, did not fully embrace the Risian way of life, requiring artifice in the form of the

Horga'hn statue or some wining and dining in their mating rituals. They really didn't just embrace the culture, or the truth that they only needed to ask and it was theirs. The Risians really fucking meant it when they said 'All that is our is yours.' They were really a fascinating race and culture.

My intent was to thrust this situation in Natalie's face, in order to gain some insight into her background, character, and personality by watching her reaction. I had just brazenly asked a very young looking Risian waitress for a blowjob, and it was being performed right in front of her, right out in the open, with little shame on my part.

Natalie barely reacted, which was rather telling. There was no look of revulsion on her race, no anger that I had asked for such a thing, or embarrassed by how public it was, or at the girl's young age, not even a look that suggested I had confirmed her worst fears of me being a despotic Augment. No, it was just frank appreciation for my size, and mild interest watching the young Risian girl really go to town on my cock. She might have even been evaluating the girl's technique! Even when I threaded my fingers through the girl's hair and roughly forced her to deepthroat me repeatedly, the 'gaghk, gaghk, gaghk' pretty loud, there was no reaction. Natalie was a *woman*, one who'd been around the block, not some wet behind the ears novice.

I let it go on for a few more minutes, looking between Natalie and the girl who was lovingly sucking my cock. It was a bit embarrassing that I hadn't even learned the name of the young girl who was so skillfully pleasuring me.

Finally, I let go of the iron grip I had on my body's reaction, shooting a copious amount of cum down her throat, which she greedily swallowed. When she was done milking me fully, she looked up at me and smiled dreamily, looking almost drunk or high, which made me cringe internally a bit. I really didn't need whoever Natalie worked for looking into the effects my semen or blood or DNA had on others.

"Are all humans as well endowed as you or taste as good?" she asked.

"No, I'd like to think I'm quite unique," I joked. "Thank you so much. You gave me great pleasure. If you'd like a more full night of passion with me, I hope you'll seek me out before I leave the resort."

"I will! All that is ours is yours," she intoned, before shakily walking off, a dreamy expression on her face. I had a feeling she'd be singing my praises to the other women around the resort.

I worked very hard to keep a smile on my face, trying to show nothing was unusual. This little test had been both pleasurable and productive. Natalie's lack of reaction was telling. A young, inexperienced lieutenant in Starfleet Intelligence would have likely reacted more strongly or gotten up and left long ago, rather than just sit there and watch passively with zero reaction.

"Are you busy?" I asked. "Tonight, I mean."

I was curious what her answer would be and wondering if this was going to turn into some sort of James Bond-esque misadventure that she would drag me into. The very idea that she was some file clerk at Starfleet Intelligence who really didn't know how to talk to men, even on a planet where she could have a dozen buff Risian men gangbang her in 20 seconds at the slightest indication, was just silly.

I was leaning more towards James Bond misadventure, but it was pretty annoying that the only reason I suspected that was because I was leaning on my meta knowledge of this universe and others, and an impromptu test I'd come up with on the fly. I really wanted to find out more about her, what her purpose in doing this really was. And didn't that just *stink* of an intelligence outfit having already created a fairly accurate psychographic profile on me. *I fucking hate being played.*

"No," she simply replied.

Well, in for a penny, in for a pound; let's see where this led.

"How about we have dinner together then?" I asked.

She looked at me again, but I couldn't tell if she had been tasked with testing me but not really knowing what the ultimate purpose of her mission was, or if she was a pro who betrayed nothing and was manipulating me with her every word and non-answer towards some unknown purpose. Enhanced brain and cognitive functions aside, I was still a complete neophyte at all this cloak and dagger bullshit. Being an Augment didn't mean you couldn't be manipulated, it just made it harder.

"Tempting," she said.

Again, another non-answer. How utterly un-fucking-surprising.

"1800 then," I stated rather than asked.

She nodded in acceptance.

"Well, there's bound to be a restaurant near here," I reasoned, while glancing around.

One of the natives would be helpful in recommending a suitable option.

"Would you agree to...come to my room instead?" she asked nervously.

That surprised me to hear, and that nervousness was sounding pretty fake now that I'd had more time to analyze her behavior and set benchmarks for comparison. I had been balls deep in a gagging 16-year-old Risian girl mere minutes ago, to which she didn't react, but asking me to come to her room was making her nervous? Pull the other one.

"I have some work I've brought along, which needs finishing," she told me. "I'd prefer to do so as soon as possible."

She was either a terrible spy or very good at pretending to be a bad spy. I really had to find out which it was. Somehow, I just knew I was going to regret this.

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I looked up from my dinner and noticed that my dining companion had barely touched her food. She was looking around at her surroundings, which included a window with a truly spectacular view of the lagoon and for the life of me I couldn't tell what her mood was.

"Is this your first time on Risa?" I asked.

She looked up at me, and her face gave me a look of confusion.

"Hmm?" she muttered in a distracted manner.

For a moment I tensed, was she waiting for something to happen?? Is that why she was distracted?

My eyes subtly darted around the room looking for threats, now wondering if this had been a trap from the start and something was about to go down, however everything continued to remain peaceful. I turned my thoughts inward and brought up the memory of our recent meeting and interaction, looking to see if there was anything suspicious about the people around the pool, the serving staff, anything. Had she had a partner or partners? Had there been signals passed between them I'd missed the first time around? Anybody showing an inordinate amount of interest in us? Nothing. Though I suddenly felt safer having chosen to put on my personal shield device.

"I was asking whether or not you've been to Risa before," I repeated.

She shook her head.

"No, I haven't been to Risa before now," she told me.

Finally, a straight answer, but was it the truth? I replayed the last few seconds in my mind, pausing and moving forward in slow motion looking for any micro expressions that might give away any deception. As best as I could tell, she was telling the truth.

She fit in better than I did in this restaurant. I had chosen to wear a bright red three button blazer over a white shirt, white slacks, and white shoes, with a white tie square. I looked sharp as hell, but on a Risian resort you could wear as little as you liked. All she wore now was a different colored one-piece bathing suit with some transparent fabric wrapped around her waist to act as a skirt. In my time it would have been a cover-up, but as it was transparent, so not much was covered up.

"Let me guess, you're not exactly here on vacation," I said.

Again, she looked confused, though now that I had spent some time with her, I had previous reactions to compare this expression to. This confusion was fake.

"I'm thinking that you're a secret agent who gets sent to exotic places around the galaxy," I told her.

She smiled at me.

"Well, sometimes that is what happens," she admitted.

Truth. But she wasn't actually telling me anything of substance, and I couldn't tell whether she was doing it on purpose to get a rise out of me, or her job meant she routinely gave as little information as possible and it was habit. It was making me a little crazy. So crazy, I was seriously contemplating telling this chick to fuck off and just walking right out of here. This was Risa, I could find a bed partner walking down the hall.

"But not all the time, of course," I said.

She shook her head and sighed.

"Sadly no," she replied.

I leaned back in my seat, my patience beginning to wear thin, and looked over the rim of my sunglasses so that I could study her.

"So, are you here for work or pleasure, Natalie?" I asked. "Because not knowing is going to drive me crazy. I know people come to Risa to have fun, and that includes copious amounts of casual sex, but I get the sense that that isn't what this is about and I have just about had my fill of non-answers and evasions."

She narrowed her eyes as she leaned forward and then she beckoned me closer with her finger.

"You're right," she said, quietly. "I'm here on assignment."

Truth, mostly, but I had a strong suspicion that *I* was the assignment, or at least the primary assignment. Given this elaborate and increasingly ridiculous conversation, I was almost certainly the target of that supposed assignment.

"Doing what?" I inquired.

Before she answered I wondered if maybe I was somehow all wrong about this. Maybe she was just trying to impress me, and she was, in fact, just a file clerk. Knowing how crazy my life was, I wouldn't bet a single credit on it.

"This is highly classified," I was informed. "Intelligence has been receiving reports of Syndicate activity in this area for the past several weeks. We suspect that they have a base of operations here on Risa."

While my knowledge of the extant criminal factions in this galaxy wasn't very detailed, at least when compared to an actual intelligence agent, I did have some idea of what she was talking about. Still, I figured I'd best make sure.

"The Orion Syndicate?" I asked.

Now she looked amused.

"Is there another 'Syndicate' we should be aware of?" she asked back, with a laugh.

Given how 'out of date' I was, I felt that my question had been a legitimate one, for all I knew there were hundreds of criminal 'syndicates' scattered across the quadrant. Of course, the Orion Syndicate was the only one ever talked about in the shows, but I couldn't exactly act like I had all that knowledge. Thankfully the name had come up in some of my previous studies so there was a verifiable source for my knowledge.

"There have been a lot of recent withdrawals, large sums of latinum taken out of certain monitored Syndicate accounts in the Bank of Boliux. The money was transferred across a few sectors and then physically brought here to this area," she informed me. "Aside from that all we know is that in an establishment a few blocks away from here there is a man who has suddenly become very wealthy at the same time, with no discernible explanation or known source of income, and he's been seen with people connected to the Syndicate while gambling at the casinos."

If this man was human, then he was a very odd one, as aside from myself I'd never met any human who would do anything for mere latinum. But, there were oddballs in every race.

"We suspect that the Syndicate is planning something that will happen soon, and that it involves the man I've been investigating," she explained. "And it's something important enough to warrant paying someone so much gold pressed latinum."

Something didn't add up here.

"Why didn't you check in to *that* resort?" I asked.

She'd be able to keep a much better eye on her target if she was staying inside the same hotel after all.

"We didn't want to risk me being spotted by the Syndicate," she told me. "I report regularly to my superiors. We couldn't take the risk of anyone spying on me while in my quarters, or detecting the transmissions when giving updates on my investigation. That was why I chose to

stay here and work; I was analyzing the information we already have and then confirming everything with my contact at Headquarters.”

This answered a lot, but not why she was telling me all of this, or why it still stank so much like a set up.

"I'm obviously not authorized to know this sort of thing," I stated simply.

Which made this all the more confusing.

"Of course not," she agreed.

We stared at each other in silence for a few moments.

"So, I assume you want my help. You wouldn't share this with me otherwise," I stated plainly.

That seemed to be where this was going, in fact almost certainly from the very first word.

"I do," she answered simply.

Despite her supposed need I saw no reason why I should help her or play along with this whole farce. Sure, it made sense, on paper, *maybe*, for her to want my help in particular, given my unique abilities, but to choose me over the probably tens of thousands of Starfleet officers on the planet at this very moment that she could ask? Yeah, not likely. And didn't that just put it all in perspective. Was she banking on my supposed Augment arrogance to justify picking me over the probably thousands of other who were more qualified?

Another issue was that I hadn't come to Risa for that kind of thing. I was far more eager to get to know the natives, *intimately*. However, I also wasn't on any kind of deadline so I could go be a spy and then have my fun, assuming it didn't kill me in the process.

The more I thought about it, though, the more the pieces of the puzzle started to fall into place, including this Intelligence operative who had far too good of a psychographic profile on me and my likely responses. There was a good chance, *a very good chance*, that this was actually a Section 31 operation, meant to test me in some manner, likely to determine if I was a threat to the Federation, possibly even because of my recent actions and the intense training I'd put myself through. Unlike Starfleet Intelligence, that organization was proactive in identifying and dealing with threats, and wasn't above doing things like making people disappear if they saw a threat to the Federation. Which meant not cooperating now, when it would supposedly help the Federation, might be very unwise as I could suddenly be considered a threat or face much, much greater scrutiny. Both were outcomes to avoid if at all possible.

"We'll need a cover, won't we?" I wondered aloud; my decision made.

While I'd read about fictional spies on missions and seen the James Bond films, I really had no idea how undercover operations actually worked. Again, becoming an Augment didn't magically

give me knowledge and experience that I didn't have before. I certainly had advantages and strengths I didn't before, and had spent a great deal of time training to pick up new skills, but I still needed to learn these things like anyone else. Being an Augment meant a much faster learning curve, but it was still a process I couldn't avoid. The neural interface on my ship offered a possible shortcut, but that was not something I'd tested or fully thought out yet.

"We are a newly married couple," Natalie Romanov informed me, "here on Risa for our honeymoon."

Either this had all been planned well in advance, which wouldn't surprise me a bit, or she was making everything up as she went along based on my answers and reactions.

"Well, then you'd best tell me the rest of the plan," I said, resigned to going through with this farce.

Which was exactly what she did once she had taken out a small computer and had switched it on. Soon a map filled the screen, dots indicating where the man, whose name I still hadn't been told, had been meeting with suspected Orion Syndicate operatives. I couldn't help but notice that the locations were all near various weather control substations.

"All the casinos he's been spotted in are near weather control substations, quite a coincidence," I said. "Let me guess, this man used to work in weather control before he suddenly got super rich."

A moment of surprise flashed across her face before it was quickly wiped away. A file was then brought up which gave me the man's name, which was Jason Leeds, and that he'd come from a planet I'd never even heard of. He had, though, worked at a few different weather control stations on the world of his birth.

"They're tapping into the weather control net," Natalie informed me. "With the right technology they could target a specific location with, say, a thousand lightning strikes, or an earthquake, or even a flood, or worse, a tsunami."

Indeed, these Syndicate people could do a lot of damage if they somehow took control of the weather on this planet, even hold this planet and all its many visitors hostage. I think I remembered a TNG episode that played out *exactly* like this, but in that case they were just making a political statement rather than anything truly nefarious. Probably why Section 31 hadn't stopped it before it happened. Those kinds of groups probably never even made their radar, not when there were some hardcore criminal/evil organizations out there, or foreign powers, who wanted to do real damage to the Federation and her allies.

"With residents and tourists unable to escape the planet, due to threats of storms or unstable weather, they could effectively hold the entire planet ransom," Natalie explained, "and it would make a lot of people unhappy, causing civil unrest all over the planet."

Not to mention the effect it would have on trade, and in all the chaos it would be very easy for all sorts of crimes to take place as what law enforcement there was on this planet, assuming there

was any at all, would be too busy trying to keep order to deal with any criminals with control of a weapon of mass destruction. There was probably some overly complex plan at work in the background, one that holding Risa hostage like this played only a small part of, most likely as part of some big distraction to hide their true purpose. Everything from the shows indicated the Orion Syndicate was an incredibly sophisticated organization, subtle and effective in their actions. This whole thing struck me as over the top and out of character for them.

"Our best analysts suspect that it will happen soon," the agent added, "and just as we feared."

If this was real, then someone did need to act to stop it, just not me! Unfortunately, I didn't really have much of a choice. Even if this was all an act, or an elaborate test, not playing the part of a hero willing to protect the Federation had dangers all its own. No, sometimes it was best to not buck expectations.

"So, either we need to find this Leeds and 'ask him' what he's doing," I suggested. "Or we need to break into his hotel room and look for clues. Maybe he's got a computer we can hack into?"

Natalie smiled.

"Funny you should suggest breaking into his room," she said. "That's exactly what I had in mind."

I knew that no matter what happened in the next few days, things were going to be very interesting. Hopefully in a good way.

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Author's Note:

Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter as much as I did, as it was a joy for me to write! If you want to support my writing and get exclusive pre-release access to the next two fully complete chapters of the story, chapters already written and proofed, consider becoming a Patron of this work. :-) You also get access to the pictures, information sources, music, and videos that inspired me during the writing process. A picture is worth a thousand words, so check out what was in my mind's eye while writing.

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i Vulcan Language Dictionary (VLD), Compiled by Selek from Vulcan Language Institute, Marketa Z., Star Trek episodes and Movies. See [https:// www. starbase-10. de/vld/](https://www.starbase-10.de/vld/)