

Disclaimer: I own nothing related to or part of Star Trek. This fan fiction was written purely for fun.

Author's Note:

While it isn't a true necessity, I would recommend that my readers go to the streaming service of your choice, or your Blu-ray/DVD, or laserdisc, or even VHS tapes in an old cardboard box, and watch or re-watch TNG's Season 1, Episode 21, "The Arsenal of Freedom." It's going to give you the background to better appreciate the chapter. :-)

The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Chapter 11 –

Augment Gothic 5

Cargo Bay. *The Flighty Temptress*. Deep Space.

6 Months Since Risa

Raising both my hands slowly, palms up, close to my chest, fingers almost touching, I breathed in deeply through my nose, like I was bringing the air into my lungs by the movement of my hands alone. I then held my breath for several moments, then slowly pushed my hands down, like I was forcing the air in my lungs completely out, down through my hands, all the while clenching my muscles, while paying close attention to my breathing. An Augment's lung capacity was a fearsome thing.

Bringing both my clenched fists to my hips, legs shoulder width apart, I ever so slowly punched forward while breathing out semi-loudly, all the muscles in my upper body trembling with the exertion, reached full extension, opened my fingers, rotated my hand up, then pulled back slowly, all the while tightening and coiling my muscles throughout. Then I did the same with the other hand, repeating the steps by punching with the other hand, rinse and repeat.

With my hands fisted at my sides, I slowly brought my knee up and put my left leg over my right knee, held for 3 seconds, then slowly bent closer to the ground and pushed my leg out into a horse stance. Then slowly back in and out again, over and over. These were the first of several increasingly more elaborate and intense internal muscle exercises invented by Shaolin monks millennia ago on Earth, to be used in conjunction with their martial arts.

The pace was slow, but the fine sheen of sweat on the uncovered skin of my chest told a different story; this was an intense internal exercise, it was also useful for stretching, though that wasn't strictly necessary for me. My Augment physiology meant I had a much greater muscular density and elasticity, which meant stretching wasn't really needed, but practice was perfect.

My body was always running hotter than normal these days, perfectly comfortable in extremely cold and hot temperatures, but the ship's environmental controls meant my cargo bay was set to a pleasant 60-degree Fahrenheit for these sessions. It was the only truly open space on the ship with the required room for my daily practice, especially since I wasn't carrying any overt cargo at the moment.

The floor was a little cold, but slightly springy and with a coating that made it almost feel soft on the soles of my bare feet. This was meant to protect cargo from impact force or vibrational damage from the ship's engines or flight maneuvers that exceeded the ship's inertial dampers. Frankly, I didn't really care all that much about the technical details, at the moment I just knew it felt good on my feet.

"Computer, slowly adjust gravity in cargo bay to five times standard," I called aloud. An answering beep indicated the computer acknowledged my order. I could already feel the power increasing to the gravity plating built into the deck of the cargo bay. A standard human would be in a world of hurt, even falling unconscious with prolonged exposure to this amount of gravity.

When I felt I had done enough of the Shaolin internal exercises, my body moved with a slow grace into the steps of a Tai Chi kata, kind of, one movement slowly and sinuously flowing into the next, making big circular movements with my hands. Of course, nothing here was pure to the originating martial art, as the many kicks and punches I mixed in attested to, some slow, some so fast that they literally displaced the air enough to cause a small crack, like a whip. Thrust kicks, front kicks, knife hands, backfists, wheel kicks, leg sweeps, arm bars, etc., I did them all.

Then came the more acrobatic maneuvers, like brake falls, and other combat rolls for evasion, coupled with something you'd see a professional gymnast do, like aerial cart wheels, front and back flips, handstands and handsprings that became two- and then one-handed pushups, kip ups, leaps of all types six or more feet into the air. Some of it was more akin to parkour in some respects, which I felt could be useful on a combat mission. Any similarities to the maneuvers you'd see in Assassin's Creed, one of my favorite games from my old universe, were purely accidental.

A martial arts master from Earth would recognize the pieces and parts I'd shamelessly stolen from Tae Kwon Do, Judo, Silat, Wing Chun, and Krav Maga and many others to make up this hybrid, this scrappy mutt of a fighting style, but they'd only be partially right. I was in the 24th century Star Trek, part of a larger interstellar community of races, the vast majority of which were humanoid and thus something a human was capable of performing, so why the fuck would I ever limit myself to just human martial arts?

In my mind's eye I was fighting a battle against multiple enemies' intent on killing me. Enemies intent on ending my life and ending this great adventure I was on. We had no fancy energy weapons with which to kill each other this time, no remotely piloted weaponized drones, no missiles or bullets or even blades. No, we were limited to the first weapons virtually all humanoid species started their evolution with, our hands, and our feet, and our fingers, and our teeth, and our sheer will to survive even if we needed to *bite* and *tear* the throat out of our enemy

with our bare teeth! Indeed, that was a technique practiced in Klingon martial arts. I always did feel a bit silly practicing that particular move during my sessions, though.

As an Augment I had many, many physical advantages over the normal examples of my race, a default, foundational strength, speed, and flexibility that I had not otherwise earned through hard work and practice. Of course, the levels I had were also impossible for a human to achieve normally. As I was few could match me, but god given talent---in this case rather literal---could only take you so far, *and I knew that*. That was why I spent so much of my time in this dimension expanding my skill set, learning everything I could, and practicing like if I didn't, this grand adventure I was on was going to end in some bloody, horrific, and ignominious way.

In some ways, yes, fear was driving me, but the arrogance of my fellow Augments had led to their downfall and that was not the way I was going to meet my end. Some things were inevitable; *you could do everything right and still lose*. I knew that. So be it. That was life! But a lot was still in my control and my arrogance was one of them.

These few hours I spent on practicing my hand-to-hand combat skills was useful for other things too. I once heard it said that martial arts was almost like a moving meditation and that's how I tried to use it. The mind and body needed to be in synch to be the most effective, so while my body went through the deadly motions of crushing throats, stopping hearts, and breaking bones, my mind was going over the many events of the past, examining them closely, rotating them around, tasting the essence of them in a sense.

It sounded almost silly, but I was essentially doing what the Ancients of the Stargate universe did on their path to ascension, and what the magicals of the Harry Potter universe did when practicing their occlumency. Both were mental disciplines, of a sort. The Vulcans had their own advanced mental disciplines which had given me the idea and the starting point for this. If the Star Trek universe was real, and not fictional, who's to say those other universes weren't real too. Maybe there was something to learn and take away from them too.

So far, I had made limited progress with either, but being an Augment meant I was far more in tune with my body, far more capable of recognizing when progress was actually being made. And that could make all the difference, as blind faith was not actually required. Indeed, my thoughts felt slightly more efficient, my recall slightly faster, and the way my mind correlated and connected disparate ideas felt slightly more robust. I was happy, several 'slightly's could add up to something amazing in time.

It was during one of my earliest sessions like this, in a far better and well-appointed gym/meditation space on Risa, that I recognized I had been unconsciously avoiding certain ideas out of fear. I was an outsider to this universe, ignorant of many things when I arrived, but I also possessed a lot of *extremely* valuable knowledge from the shows and movies. Knowledge that many would kill for.

In my past life I has seen every episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation, Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, Star Trek: Voyager, and Star Trek: Enterprise. I had knowledge of this universe's past, present, and future. That meant a lot of valuable foreknowledge, like the location of hidden

and advanced societies, knowledge of the existence and location of a Dyson's sphere, even the location of two working Iconian Gateways. That technology was basically a sophisticated transporter, but one that would allow instantaneous travel over vast distances, reaching as far as 70,000 light years some thought. That was a technology well beyond Federation science, indeed beyond most of the known alpha quadrant races.

It was so tempting to just go out and grab all these choice prizes, prizes just waiting for a guy like me to come around and seize them when no one else knew about them yet. The two Iconian Gateways, for example, would both be destroyed in a struggle with other races. The problem with was that I wasn't the only one who would want such a thing. Every great power in this quadrant would want these things too. If they learned I had them, they'd stop at nothing to take it from me. Even Section 31, who I was useful to at the moment, would gleefully kill me for these choice prizes. And what could I do to stop them at this point? I had my ship, of course, my scrappy little ship, and I had myself and my wits. But that was about it. I had no planet full of people to rely upon for protection, no super powerful allies, no truly supernatural cosmic powers like the Q. I would be easy pickings.

The urge to loot like a greedy mother fucker in an RPG was strong, but my survival instincts had been stronger, thank my patron.

Then I realized that I didn't have to go for the top prize (at least not yet), that I could go for a softer target, one perhaps not so sought after or well known, from one of the many one-off, throwaway episodes from TNG. Fans of the show had practically pulled their hair out at some of these episodes, seeing so many wasted opportunities in the events of an episode that never got mentioned again, like it had never happened, like it had not influenced the characters or their futures in any way.

During that deep dive in my mind on Risa, my body flowing through a deadly dance of death with an imaginary enemy, I remembered an early episode of TNG named the "Arsenal of Freedom."

It represented a prize no one knew about, and hopefully never would if I was paranoid enough, so therefore no one would want to kill me for it.

At least that was the hope...

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Planet Minos. The Lorenze Cluster.

With my realization that a juicy and semi-unprotected prize was left in ruins and ripe for looting, my time on Risa, as enjoyable and debauched as it had been, was over. After some extremely discreet inquiries and careful tracking of what was publicly known about the whereabouts of both the *Enterprise* and the *Drake*, I learned that the *Drake* was perfectly fine and thus the events of the episode hadn't yet occurred for whatever reason. The Federation really didn't make much of an effort to hide either ship's movements, though specific missions could be classified.

So, I immediately checked out of my palatial hotel resort and set course for the planet Minos in the Lorenze Cluster. Thankfully, the timing of my first training mission with Section 31 was at my discretion.

In the original TNG episode, Federation long-range probes had indicated that all intelligent life on the planet Minos had disappeared. The U.S.S. *Drake* had then been dispatched to investigate and had subsequently gone missing. The Minosians were famous for being the makers of highly advanced weaponry that they sold to anyone who would pay.

In the episode, the *Drake* had been destroyed during their investigation, not that anyone knew that yet, and the *Enterprise* dispatched to find out what had happened to it when it failed to report in. The ultimate conclusion of the episode, what the *Enterprise* eventually learned, was that the Minosians latest and most advanced adaptive weapon's system, had wiped out the inhabitants of the planet. How the fuck that had happened was never explained, but I had a feeling it was something stupid, an accident or oversight in some test of the weapon that got out of control, though the possibility of a disgruntled customer was high.

Arriving at Minos, after months of travel at warp 6, I was greeted with the sight of the planet. It was beautiful, yet alien compared to Earth, with alternating horizontal bands of white and a verdant green.

Immediately upon making orbit I was hailed, just as I expected. Opening the channel, I was greeted by what fans of the show had come to call 'the Peddler,' an automated salesman that greeted new ships arriving over Minos to hock their weapons for sale. It was the same dude from the shows, with the same two white puffs of hair on either side of his head.

"Whoever you are, wherever you're from, welcome to Minos, the arsenal of freedom! If you need a little something special, be it for one target or multiple targets, we got it. You'll see it here on Minos – where we live by the motto 'Peace through superior firepower,'" the fake salesman said, a huge smile on his face that I hadn't seen the like of since the last time I had gone shopping for a used car back in my old dimension.

For such a technologically advanced race, their marketing was pretty shitty and the interactivity of their salesman was rather lacking, but I figured part of that was justified. Upon arrival in orbit the planet's systems had scanned my ship's language databanks. It was likely still processing our language and syntax and tailoring, in real time, a sales message that would appeal to human culture, which my ship's databanks had information on.

So, on further thought, maybe it was actually pretty fucking sophisticated to accomplish all this in a matter of seconds. Of course, as a big fan of this episode, it had never made sense to me that the planet Minos hadn't encountered the Federation or humans before. Data certainly had a lot of information on the planet and their role in the 'Ersalrope Wars', a conflict which I had never even seen mention of in my historical studies. It was likely some limited war in the distant past that hadn't affected the Federation and only historians with bits of esoteric knowledge knew anything about it.

“To be totally armed is to be totally secure. Remember, the early bird that hesitates, gets wormed. Minos, the arsenal of freedom. Perfection in highly advanced weaponry. Versatility, flexibility, adaptability. And everything 100% guaranteed! So, lock onto my signal and land your ship nearby, because we don’t just provide weapons, we provide complete weapon systems!”

How interesting. That bit about the “early bird” was from an ancient Earth proverb. The chances that the Minosians had a similar saying too was ludicrous. It had obviously taken the saying from Earth’s cultural database, as found in my ship’s memory banks, and adapted it in its custom sales pitch to me. That was actually pretty damn impressive, even if slightly misused in the end. Color me even more impressed, that was some damn fine programming.

Part of this message hadn’t actually been heard in the TNG episode because Picard was talking during the sales pitch and had then ended it prematurely, but I patiently listened to each and every word. It had even detected that my ship lacked transporter capability, I noticed.

“You do not have to take my word for it, we stand by all our weapons 100%, and can provide a complete demonstration of all our weapons’ capabilities in live-fire testing on any offered disposable targets of your choice, condemned prisoners or captured enemies are in fashion this year,” the Peddler joked, an empty smile on his face. “Just send them down and we’ll take care of the rest.”

Well now, that was both chilling and interesting, and something that Picard hadn’t ever heard in the episode because of his impatience and sense of superiority over any race that both sold deadly weapons and overtly gloried the acquisition of wealth.

It made a kind of cold and ruthless sense, if you were an alien weapons buyer looking to test the adaptability and deadliness of an automated drone weapon system, why not send some disposable enemies down with some weapons, ones that you would have executed anyway. That way you could see for real how smart the system was against live enemies/prey fighting desperately for their lives. I could totally see a race like the Klingons, Romulans, or Cardassians doing exactly that in this situation.

It was entirely possible, even likely now that I had heard more of the Peddler’s sales pitch, that when the *Enterprise* away team had beamed down, when the weapon was still active or in demonstration mode, after not actually speaking with the virtual salesman, it had interpreted them beaming down as Picard providing live targets to test the weapon’s capabilities and ability to adapt.

Picard and the crew had complained about how it was a recording, but they had come to that conclusion prematurely. Of course, I was working with foreknowledge, but several verbal cues had been given during the salesman’s pitch, if only you took the time to recognize it, providing signs that it was adapting its language and methods to suit a human from the Federation.

I had a very strong suspicion, that just like with a universal translator sampling an unknown language, that if Picard had tried to speak with the salesman, the virtual salesman would have gotten more and more interactive and helpful the longer they talked. It was time to bullshit.

“I am Gothic, a human from the planet Earth, captain of my ship, *The Flighty Temptress*. I have heard tales of the wonders of Minos, the Arsenal of Freedom, and the sophistication and perfection of the weapons your people design and sell. I too believe in the motto ‘Peace through superior firepower.’ I live according to that philosophy and seek the firepower that Minos alone can provide. I come to finalize the purchase of a complete weapon system, one versatile, flexible, and adaptable for my own protection, to survive the many dangers of this cold and uncaring galaxy,” I semi-bullshitted, but with a good dose of truth, that was why I was here after all, though instead of shopping I was doing some old-fashioned looting and hoping not to get killed by this thing. Where Picard and the away team had gotten through this by sheer luck, I hoped my foreknowledge would carry me through.

Since the Peddler had stopped and appeared to be listening when I started talking, enough time had likely gone by that its systems better understood my language and meaning. I had purposefully slowed my speech and used a simple, but effective, sales technique that I’d once heard about called ‘playback’, where the salesperson would purposefully use the same words and terms their prospective customer used to indicate they understand and empathized with their needs.

“You have come to the right place, captain Gothic. Minos can provide you with the all the firepower you will ever need to protect yourself. Would you like a live demonstration of our weapons? We can provide demonstrations for everything from anti-personnel weapons all the way up to anti-capital ship weapons.”

Best to nip this in the bud right now, before I lost my ship to this thing. Now what were the words from the episode?? Damn these memories made when I was so much less than I am now.

“That is not necessary, I have already purchased and paid for the Echo Papa 607, the ultimate in weapons systems technology. I was very impressed, I even purchased the premium package, which includes the designs and working examples of all the system’s individual modules,” I answered.

This was the most dangerous aspect of the bullshit I was spinning. Presumably the Minosians had been dead for quite a while, killed by their own weapons, but salespeople from my time often traveled all over the world to sell their goods. A Minosian salesperson having traveled off world to sell me the Echo Papa 607 was extremely likely, but not exactly something I could be certain of. Fundamentally, I was banking on this system’s ultimate purpose, *to sell*, and further relying on the implications underpinning how Picard had resolved this episode in canon. I was betting my life on it, as a matter of fact, since I obviously didn’t have anywhere near the firepower of a galaxy-class starship at my command.

At this point, after having made a statement like that, it’s programming likely indicated a Minosian would take over the rest of the sale or dispute my statement. That was the only thing that made sense, otherwise how would Picard have simply said he was going to buy the system and then the thing shut off. The reality was that there was no one left to say otherwise!

After a brief, noticeable, and rather *harrowing* pause where the Peddler froze in place, it spoke again, a smile on its face.

“A wonderful decision. You have excellent taste! You won’t regret your decision to buy. The Echo Papa 607 is our finest achievement, versatile, powerful, and easy to use. The 607 does it all. Its various modules can gather information, neutralize ground personnel, even destroy enemy space vessels. The 607 represents the state of the art in dynamic adaptive design.”

“Yes, your sales team said as much, that it learns from each encounter and improves itself.”

“Exactly!” it pretended to be excited. My hope was that parroting information I could have only learned in its literature or from a salesperson, information I was essentially repeating from the episode, would sell my story a little more. “Once unleashed the unit is invincible. The perfect killing machine.”

That, there, was the crux of it. For some reason the Minosians had lost control of their weapon somehow and it had wiped them all out. Whether it was an accident, some crazy fuck intent on wiping out everyone, or a final fuck you from their enemies, I suspected I would never know.

This had always been one of my favorite episodes. This weapon system analyzed each enemy encounter, adapted a new design from that analysis, and dynamically created, entirely autonomously, likely via replication, a better weapon. There was something *beautiful* about that and I couldn’t wait to get into its guts and learn from the programming that had created such a dynamic weapon. That it had wiped out a species was irrelevant for my purposes.

The technology on Minos had been beyond Federation science, they had even said that outright at one point, but for some reason, like so many other episodes, it was never mentioned again. The Federation would have benefitted greatly from such technology, but nope, not a single word was even uttered suggesting they had any intent to grab and study the technology for themselves. Was it because of the macabre circumstances? Because they’d be looting from the ruins of a dead civilization? I had no such scruples; they were dead and I was alive and hoping to stay that way for a long, long time to come.

The Dominion War was coming in the next several years. if the canon timeline was still somewhat on track. One of the greatest advantages the Founders had over the alpha quadrant races were their easily created genetically engineered soldiers, the Jem’Hadar, who could fight on the ground or in space as part of a warship’s crew. The Echo Papa 607 could have bridged that numbers gap, could have been an incredible force multiplier that allowed the Federation to fight back with thousands of easily created and disposable drones. Had Section 31 in the canon Star Trek universe come to this planet afterward and grabbed everything in sight? I know I would have, but there had never been a single indication in TNG or any of the subsequent series to suggest that.

“I intend to land near the central control unit. Would you answer questions about the weapon system and assist me in picking up the unit, the modules, and copies of the relevant programming?” I asked.

“Of course! I am programmed to answer any and all questions about the unit. I can talk terms, arrange for delivery, whatever you need.”

“Very good,” I said, pleased that this crazy plan of mine looked like it might actually succeed and I wouldn’t end up dead. “I will begin landing procedures centered around your signal’s coordinates.”

“I will be waiting,” it replied, before the comm signal ended.

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Landing a ship on the surface of a planet, from orbit, was a delicate business and required a lot of finesse at the best of times. I had, of course, completed many simulated landings during my pilot training, but never with a ship of this design, or size, and never for real; I’d be breaking my cherry on this one.

On a whim, I donned the neural control helmet and immersed myself in the ship’s systems, venting drive plasma from the warp nacelles, increasing structural integrity, adjusting shield geometry for atmospheric entry, and finally, checking the status of the ship’s landing struts and readying them for deployment. All of this was done at the speed of thought, amongst a slew of other little actions.

Starting my descent, my shields flared with energy, the atmosphere of Minos creating incredible friction against my shields. In less than a minute I was approaching the landing coordinates, a section of the forest looking like it had already been cleared away and made ready for me specifically. The Peddler did good work.

Approaching the ground, my reaction control thrusters stabilized my descent, from thousands of miles per hour, to hundreds, to barely a crawl, my landing struts deploying before lightly touching down exactly where I planned to.

Shutting down my systems, I took the cockpit lift down into the cargo bay and opened the bay doors, walking out into the same humid jungle-like environment I’d seen in the episode once upon a time.

One of those orangish colored autonomous weapon drones floated into view from out of the trees, scaring me half to death as I prepared to dodge and return fire, before an orangish colored beam of energy shot out and formed the image of the Peddler.

What the fuck was Picard and Riker thinking? This little drone weapon had the ability to project a hologram that fooled the eyes, if not sensors, no sophisticated grid of all-encompassing precisely calibrated holo-emitters was required, like in a holodeck or a holosuite. All indications were that it wasn’t a fully tactile hologram, capable of physical interaction with the environment, but the technology was there and had the potential to evolve into a mobile holographic emitter in time. And keep in mind the mobile emitter of Voyager fame was a piece of 29th century

technology. That was a sign of just how advanced this little thing was over current Federation science.

Oh, and the little fucking thing could cloak. Yes, please!

The Peddler had noticed my close attention of the drone weapon, that huge smile on his face like always, “It’s a beauty, isn’t it? A fully autonomous drone weapon platform capable of both anti-personnel operations and intelligence gathering. It is equipped with an energy weapon, a personal cloaking field, holographic emitter, and a stasis field generator.”

“It is very impressive,” I responded, taking several scans with my modified Starfleet tricorder. And it really was. The ability to trap an enemy in a stasis field for later retrieval sounded incredibly useful. In the episode itself, a drone weapon had put Riker in stasis and then been destroyed. Amazingly, the drone’s subsequent destruction had *not* affected the active stasis field, which suggested that it was either self-sustaining to a degree, perhaps dissipating when the energy was fully expended, or was regenerative on some level. What were these Starfleet fools smoking? Couldn’t they see how useful this technology was? “Can you lead me to the central control unit for the Echo Papa 607?”

“Of course,” the Peddler answered. “Please follow the drone.”

With that the Peddler hologram disappeared, and the drone began leading me deeper into the jungle.

After several minutes of walking, I encountered a familiar sight, in this case a vine and moss-covered energy canon, probably meant to be used for demonstrations. I even found the melted piece of tritanium armor plating that likely been used to demonstrate the destructive capabilities of this particular weapon. As Riker or Tasha Yar had pointed out in the episode, the capability to do that was beyond Federation science. ‘I’ll take a half dozen of those, please!’ I shouted in the privacy of my thoughts.

Taking several additional in-depth scans, I continued following the drone to a well concealed entrance set half a mile away from the landing zone. My tricorder had not indicated anything was there at all, so the Minosians obviously possessed some rather advanced sensor dispersion/masking technology. I guess I wasn’t going to need to fall into the cavern like Picard and Crusher had in canon.

Walking down a debris covered staircase, lights began activating at my approach, the drone weapon continuing to lead me into a very familiar cavern. The drone shot an energy beam well away from me, and the Peddler appeared.

“Sorry for the mess. If you’ll step back I can tidy up,” it said. After I stepped back and away, the drone fired a wide beam across the room precisely targeting moss and vines and other plants that had infiltrated this room over the course of many years of disuse. It begged the question as to why the Peddler hadn’t done this before, but I guessed that it had seen no need to do so and a waste of energy. There were no more customers or Minosians left to cater to and no matter how

sophisticated, like all machines, the Peddler was a slave to his ultimate purpose and programming.

“This is the central command and control unit for the Echo Papa 607 weapon system. It comes with a built-in independent computer core and processing unit, independent power core, and a full suite of tactical sensors, analysis, and targeting software. From here you can direct the mini drones in anti-personnel operations on the surface, or even direct the grand drone in combat against enemy vessels in orbit. It is a perfect killing machine.”

Memorizing the control interface, I continued to scan everything in the room. It looked incredibly intuitive and easy to use, which made sense, the Minosians likely sold weapons to many species who couldn't otherwise create this advanced technology for themselves. By sheer necessity, it needed to be idiot proof. I was just fine with that, I had no need to prove that I was the smartest in the room at any given time. KISS or 'keep it simple stupid' was a design philosophy I had often found myself wishing the Federation believed in.

“I'm assuming analysis of past enemy encounters that leads to design changes for the drones happens here, the processing done by this unit?” I asked.

“That's right! All done here, from this one unit, for ease of use and to better protect the central command and control unit from being captured or destroyed,” the Peddler answered, eager to fulfill its purpose by giving information about the product.

“Where does the drone manufacturing take place? I can't detect anything from this room that would accomplish that,” I asked, studying my tricorder readings intently.

“The replication and fabrication modules are off site, at the moment. It was deemed imprudent to keep the replication and fabrication module with the command-and-control module, together in one location.”

“Smart. How many replication and fabrication modules can be connected to the central command and control unit?”

These names really needed to be shortened for ease of use.

“In its current configuration, up to 100 can be connected. However, the system is scalable and can be upgraded as needed, including adding tertiary command and control units to act as backups for each other or to network together for more efficient processing. The system is entirely modular.”

A hundred??? Damn. And the system was scalable too. These Minosians didn't miss a trick. Imagine a hundred off site replication and fabricator units pumping out these mini weapon drones, maybe dispersed throughout a planet and hidden in all manner of ways. Try stopping an enemy that had no central base location for drone deployment. And each encounter made the weapon system smarter as they learned each and every one of your tactics, devising counters for each, the unit analyzing and adjusting the drones' entire design on the fly. It was *efficient*, and in

combat efficiency was deadly. Why build in an expensive personal shield device into the drone design if your enemy's weapons didn't require it, for example. Or have a shield that worked decently against all energy weapon, when you could make it excellent against your specific enemy's disrupter weapons.

"Thank you for your help, but please deactivate for now. I'd like some time to play with my newest acquisition," I ordered.

"Of course, Captain, just call aloud if you need anything," it said, before it disappeared.

Stepping close to the main display, I noticed that the command interface had been adjusted to Federation standard for my convenience, something the Peddler had obviously picked up from my ship's systems. That was nice of him.

My fingers flew over the controls now, bringing up every iota of information on the design schematics and programming for the Echo Papa 607 weapons system. By far, one of the most interesting aspects of its design was how each component was replicable.

The time to study it in depth would be later, right now I simply wanted a copy of everything. Establishing a data link to my ship, I began the transfer of a truly massive amount of data into a segregated and firewalled segment of my systems. Being greedy was ok, but that greed needed to be tempered with a good helping of caution.

While the transfer slowly ticked by, I felt something I hadn't experienced in this new life. I felt overwhelmed with choice.

Being here, at this moment, was an opportunity of ridiculous proportions, no, *it was a veritable fucking smorgasbord of opportunities!* I felt almost paralyzed by it, by indecision. What was the right move?! I literally had the remnants of an entire advanced civilization at my fingertips, with no one here to stop me, and a VI, in the form of the Peddler, that was eager to satisfy my every whim.

It was only luck, or my patron's meddling, that the *Enterprise* hadn't already visited this planet and learned the truth. That episode had happened in freaking season 1 of TNG, after all. It was possible Starfleet or the *Enterprise* wouldn't actually come to Minos in this dimension, but was my luck that good? And even if they didn't come, what were the chances that no other race might stumble upon the left behind treasures of Minos and do exactly what I was doing right now? The chances of that were high. But what could I do to prevent anyone from checking?

The answer was literally right in front of my nose and luckily this command-and-control system seemed to be connected to other systems on Minos. With a quick bit of research, I confirmed something I had long suspected, that Minos was a planet governed by a giant corporation, funnily enough named the "Arsenal of Freedom." Every nation on the Earth of my time had doomsday contingencies in place, the question was, did Minos have any that I could take advantage of?

An hour of searching in the rather easy to navigate central database and I found it. In the event of an alien attack or wide scale disaster which resulted in the deaths of the governing body of executive officers, AKA government leaders, procedures were in place to 'elect or appoint' a new leader. Since no one was around to accept or deny my application for Minosian citizenship, I essentially defaulted into approval once I had filed an application. And as I was the last surviving Minosian citizen on the planet now, I nominated and elected myself Arcon, essentially the Chief Executive officer of the planet of Minos and thus was given full authority over all the remaining systems left on the planet.

You've got to love the automated and advanced mechanisms of bureaucracy in the 24th century sometimes. With no one to stop me, I quickly became a citizen of Minos, then its leader, and by commonly accepted galactic law, I now kind of owned both the planet and the star system it resided in. Of course, no one was going to recognize my claim when it came about like this, but might makes right and what no one knew, wouldn't hurt them.

"I require assistance," I said aloud. A moment later a beam of light shot out of the central command and control system and the Peddler hologram appeared.

"How may I be of assistance, Arcon?" the Peddler asked, thus confirming its recognition of my new position.

"Your name will now be Carl," I said, thinking back to that used car salesman I had dealt with centuries ago. "Confirm my level of access and authority over the remaining systems on Minos."

"As Arcon, in a state of emergency, you have full authority over all systems on the planet, including the Echo Papa Series 607."

Yep, a state of emergency you caused. With that confirmation a positively wicked smile grew on my face. Now I had to see about securing my prize here from anybody else who might want to pick its bones clean like I was.

"Carl, are there any existing orbital defense platforms or weapons satellites in orbit of Minos," I asked.

"No, with the exception of a single anti-ship weapon drone, part of the Echo Papa 607, no other planetary defense systems are present around Minos," Carl answered, almost looking sad at having disappointed me. This was a VI that wanted to please. "However, with the manufacturing of additional replication and fabrication units for the Echo Papa 607, a variant of the weapons drone intended to serve in an orbital defense role, can be created and deployed around Minos."

"That is perfect, Carl. Consider the order given. I want full coverage of the whole planet by these new orbital defense drones. Once the defense grid is up, activate a sensor dispersion field to prevent scans of the planet by any probes or ships nearby. Build two more anti-ship weapons drones and deploy to orbit as well. By my order, Minos and its star system is closed to anyone not bearing my personal authorization. Any ship entering the system should be hailed by you and politely warned away from the planet lest they be destroyed or their ship impounded and crew

killed, whichever is the most expedient should they ignore your warnings. Give them multiple opportunities to flee.”

Carl looked almost solemn, “Orders entered and accepted. Manufacturing order has been accepted and begun, time to completion is 32.24 days.”

Now that was impressive. It would only take 32 days to build and deploy an orbital defense grid from scratch. From what I’d read, the Minosians had a rather interesting design philosophy when it came to their weapons and technology. They practically bent over backwards to do everything they could to only design weapons that required no special or exotic materials that couldn’t be replicated, and no designs that required elaborate or specialized manufacturing. They wanted something that could be quickly made and/or changed. The ability to analyze, alter existing designs, and quickly manufacture a new drone weapon every 12 minutes, was very much in line with that philosophy. Their weapons technology, and their replication and fabrication technology was beyond Federation science in that regard, but their transporters and propulsion systems were only so so, maybe even a little behind the Federation.

They also didn’t have anything in the way of torpedo technology, which was strange to me, but probably in line with their design philosophy. Torpedoes tended to be finite resources and needed to be manufactured with many non-replicable materials, and thus was very expensive with a low profit margin. An energy weapon, however, could be fired for basically as long as you had power. It was essentially infinite.

“Let’s walk back to my ship, Carl,” I said before leaving the command center, the data transfer still ongoing. The VI continued to be projected by the drone floating above our heads.

Looking around at the dense jungle, I had a strange thought. I kind of owned a planet now. In the span of a year I had gone from ignorant 20th century barbarian, to getting my own ship, to owning a planet of my own, though one I couldn’t exactly acknowledge or tell anyone about.

Taking a leisurely pace, I considered what else I could loot and pillage while here. I was incredibly limited by the relatively small size of my ship and I couldn’t spend all that long on the planet. It had taken two months to get here and it would take another two months to get back to Federation space. I could delay my Section 31 training a bit, but not that much before questions were asked that I didn’t want to answer.

“Carl, is it within your capabilities to upgrade my ship’s weapons?” I asked. I was on a planet of weapons dealer, that made a certain amount of sense.

“Of course, I can, Arcon,” Carl answered. “Shipboard weapon upgrades, installation and testing were very popular services offered to our many customers.”

Well, now that was interesting. It was also interesting how much better Carl’s speech was getting the longer and longer we talked. He sounded almost conversational now.

“I saw an energy canon on the way here, it looked to be a demonstrator model and a piece of melted tritanium armor. Scan my ship’s currently installed disrupter canons and power systems, is it compatible with these canons?” I ordered.

At my order, Carl went still for nearly 10 seconds, glancing in the direction of my ship, like a flesh and blood being might in the same situation. Like I said, it was getting better and better; the Minosians’ programming was top notch. I stopped and waited patiently for the scans he was obviously doing to be finished.

Before he answered, Carl opened both hands and turned them up, holographic images of my ship’s frame and the hidden sensor shielded compartments the disrupter canons were stored in were displayed above his left hand, and in his right was the ship-sized version of that same canon I’d seen earlier, this one scaled up quite a bit larger for installation on a ship.

“Scans indicate a 94% likelihood of compatibility with your power systems. However, supplemental onboard power cores and capacitors would be required to fire the weapon at full rated power in continuous beam mode. Design modifications would also be required to fit within the existing space frame compartments.”

“Run simulations, what kind of improvements can I expect if I make the change?”

“Simulations indicate a 500% increase in destructive potential against unshielded targets and a 300% increase in shield penetration against shielded targets.”

“Wow,” I said aloud, that was quite an improvement and all without a major design change of the ship itself. My little ship could maybe go head-to-head with an Intrepid-class. I’d have to look into getting some torpedoes, though.

“Can your drones make the modifications and complete the installation?” I asked, unsure if I could make the change myself under these conditions and with little in the way of proper equipment. I had no idea what was still lying around, after all. I’d still make sure I learned how it was done and inspect the work afterward. If my ship suffered combat damage in the future, it’d be vital that I know how to repair the weapons myself.

“Yes. Construction drones would need to be replicated, however project completion would be greatly expedited if the existing disrupter canons could be recycled for raw materials.”

Hmm...that might actually work out better. My initial thought had been to simply strip them and leave them here somewhere. It was a much better idea to recycle them, especially if it sped up the completion timeline.

“Include a working example of one of these construction drones in the deliveries to my ship, and send all technical data on their design and programming. I’d also like my industrial replicator and shielding improved with Minosian technology, run simulations on compatibility,” I ordered. As expected, Carl went quiet for nearly 20 seconds.

“Data transfer initiated. Scans indicate a 91% chance of compatibility,” he answered.

“What about the cloaking systems the drones possess, could that be installed on my ship?” I asked excitedly. This time Carl responded nearly immediately.

“The drone cloaking technology is compatible with the ship’s systems, but would be lethal to all organic occupants inside the cloaking energy envelope,” Carl answered.

“Explain.”

“The probe cloaking technology was designed for an unmanned drone, as such it emits a form of radiation required for the cloaking field to successfully function. That radiation, while not harmful to a drone’s electronic systems, would be lethal to most organic beings contained within the energy envelope used to hide from active sensors or visuals.”

Well, that fucking sucked. I guess a cloaked ship wasn’t in the cards today, but this had been a very, very profitable adventure so far.

“Begin the weapon, replicator, and shield upgrades to my ship. Send all design schematics and corresponding maintenance schedules. Estimated time to completion?”

“Estimated time to completion is 3.24 days. Orders sent.”

I guess I had a little over 3 days to get shit done. My first order of business was to put in some ‘super crazy paranoid bastard’ level of safeguards to prevent this perfect killing machine from ever turning on me, like it had the people who made it. My second order of business was to start looking around Minos to see if there was anything else worth taking, surely the death of this civilization meant some money was lying around. Thank my patron that I had my hovercruiser onboard, which prompted an idle thought.

“Carl, can you add some badass weapons to my hoverbike too?” I asked excitedly.

Carl’s answering grin was so evil looking I almost shuddered, but only *almost*.

XXXXX

Dining Area. Bedroom. *The Flighty Temptress*. At High Warp. Deep Space.

While I looked relaxed, I was in fact carefully contemplating the three-dimensional chessboard in front of me. I had one arm casually draped over the back of my chair and with the other I stroked my chin, considering the many possible moves and countermoves I could make to beat the agent that Section 31 had sent to give me training in everything I’d needed to know as a freelance agent/operative/mercenary/badass that worked with them. I had never been a fan of chess in my old life, had never been all that good at it then either, and I suspected that wasn’t going to change, at least for a while.

This was actually the third training mission I had been assigned since I had returned from Minos. The first two were simple courier missions. The first could be summed up basically as ‘bring this unidentified and super-secret/important package to this planet,’ and the second was much the same, though that mission involved picking someone up and dropping them off elsewhere. I guess having my own stealthy little ship meant I was likely to go on quite a few of these courier types missions. I wasn’t complaining, it was actually really good money. They hadn’t even balked when I said I wanted 250 bars of gold pressed latinum per mission that didn’t involve combat or extreme danger. It seems that disdain for money had partially infected even Section 31, but that worked out just fine for me.

My training officer was named T'Maz, a beautiful Vulcan female who wore a skintight black body suit that covered everything while hiding next to nothing. She had proven to be quite the formidable opponent. She sat across from me on the other side of the dining table/conference table in the Captain’s cabin, back ramrod straight with perfect posture, chest out, and sporting a completely neutral expression on her face, which meant I had no idea if she was confident of her victory or concerned about possible defeat.

Her beauty was a tad distracting, having this beautiful reddish-brown hair, dainty pointed ears, a rocking set of perky and large tits, all resting on a figure a super model from my time would have been jealous of. How could a woman have tits that large and perky, yet have a waist that narrow? She was one fine looking alien woman, but that wasn’t even the most distracting part of things.

"It is your move, Agent Gothic," T'Maz said, totally straight faced. “You seem very distracted and are paying an inordinate amount of attention to my face and breasts, rather than the game.”

Thank goodness I hadn’t been taking a drink. Despite the pointy ears and raised eyebrows she currently had lifted in a very Spock-like fashion, the Vulcan woman in front of me was very human looking, at least until you looked closer and noticed the slight greenish tinge under her skin. But, to be fair, as an Augment I was likely seeing color gradations humans normally wouldn’t have been able to pick up.

Well, if she thought she was going to shock me with a statement that direct, she had another thing coming. I had spent weeks on Risa so any potential embarrassment was pretty much driven out of me by this point.

“I am distracted by you. You have very nice curves and an ample bosom. I find you very attractive,” I answered honestly and bluntly. “However, that isn’t what is driving me to distraction.”

“May I inquire as to what is, then?” T'Maz responded, unaffected by my equally blunt response.

I leaned back in my seat, taking in her appearance again.

“When I was awoken in this time and dimension I did everything I could to learn about the history of Earth and the Federation, as my file likely indicates. Since I was found by the

Enterprise, I was very curious about the many ships that had borne that name, especially the first such ship, the NX-01.”

“I do not see the relevance of this to our current topic of conversation,” T’Maz said, looking perplexed.

“There are quite a few historical holoprograms available about the early Federation, especially the people and ship that practically brought about its founding, and Archer’s *Enterprise* has a very good one based on their many missions,” I explained. I guess I should just stop beating around the bush. “Did you know that you look remarkably similar to Subcommander T’Pol, the Vulcan officer who was originally assigned to the ship as an observer when the ship first launched? It’s frankly uncanny how alike you look. Like a twin sister or something! It’s been distracting me for a while.”

And it had been. I had always thought Jolene Blalock who played T’Pol on *Star Trek: Enterprise* was a total smoke show of a woman. *Like stupidly hot*. *Star Trek* fans had fantasied about being with such an exotic and beautiful woman like her. Imagine my utter shock when her fucking lookalike turned up as my Section 31 training officer. If this was my patron at work, thank you!

“I see. Our resemblance is not by random chance; we are of the same clan on Vulcan. In human familial terms she would be considered my great, great aunt on my father’s side,” T’Maz explained. “Our close resemblance was noted often during my childhood as she is considered a hero and role model to many on Vulcan.”

The time of the NX-01 was like 150-200 years ago, but the Vulcans were a long-lived race compared to most humans and they could still have children far later in life than human women could.

“Did she play any role in your joining Section 31?” I asked.

T’Pol was pretty famous on Earth, maybe almost as famous as Captain and later Admiral Archer still was. Humans had such a strong fascination with the Vulcan race, that was pretty clear in the various shows. My experience on 24th century Earth had proven that out. It might not be to the same degree as it was when humanity was taking its first steps into the galactic community, but it was still there to some extent. I guess our first introduction to alien life was always going to leave a lasting mark.

“She was a role model to me, one who’s actions led to the founding of the Federation itself. I felt it my calling to protect that which she had fought so hard to create.”

“Yet you didn’t join Starfleet, like she did,” I pointed out.

“I felt that there was a better way to serve, to honor her life and achievements. Section 31 exists to protect the Federation largely from existential threats, in that manner I believe I honor her,” T’Maz answered.

I had never seen this side of her during our prior two missions. It was rather attractive in its own right.

“You’re right, there are many ways to serve. You may never Captain a Starfleet ship, but you’ll likely do much more to protect the Federation. Even if no one ever learns of your achievements, you will know, and maybe I will know,” I said, my words causing her to almost smile if the slight upturn of the corner of her lips was any indication.

Section 31, at least as far as I knew, had no formal ranks or strict command hierarchy. We were all agents in the service of the Federation, but in no way part of Starfleet, and in no way bound by its rules and protocols. However, some agents were superior to others, so T'Maz was in charge of this operation even if she had no real authority over me. Even less than normal perhaps, considering I was officially a free-lance operative who was paid per mission.

"I had thought that an infamous *Augmented* human would provide me with a suitable challenge," remarked the Vulcan, obviously desiring a change of topic. "It appears that I was mistaken. Perhaps your exercises in the cargo bay have rendered you too tired to think clearly."

It seems that even Vulcans *could* engage in trash talk, or some version of it, color me surprised.

“I wasn’t aware that I had an audience, but not surprising really, my exercises, as you call them, are meant for the mind as much as the body. I delve very deeply into my thoughts to organize memories and reexamine my thoughts, correlating ideas, designing new inventions, thinking through various scenarios, and many other things,” I explained, while still contemplating my next move.

“That sounds remarkably similar to what masters of the Vulcan mental disciplines describe of their meditations, but that is only after nearly a century of intense study. I was unaware humans could achieve such a feat,” she said, sounding impressed.

“I have been blessed with many advantages over the rest of my race,” I answered simply.

“Blessed? What a curious choice of word,” she responded. “I was also unaware you were a practitioner of the Vulcan martial arts; you are quite skilled at it. I, myself, am only an adept of *suus mahna*.”

“Not just *suus mahna*, but *kareel-ifla* as well. Your ancient and more brutal ancestors were very skilled in hand-to-hand combat. It was very useful for me to learn, as Vulcans, while weaker than me, have a much greater baseline strength than humans so their fighting techniques make better use of that raw strength.”

“I did not recognize many of your martial techniques, are they from human martial arts?” she asked.

“Yes, many of them, but I did not feel any need to restrict myself to those martial arts developed on Earth. Why would I when we are part of a rich community of races?” I said grinning. “I also

study and practice mok'bara and the calisthenics of the Klingons, ryadam of Angosia, the combat arts of Andoria, among others."

"You encountered one of Angosia's 'super soldiers', as you called them in your report, on the *Enterprise*, if I recall correctly," she said.

"I did, and given how she knocked me out, I was quite impressed with her," I answered honestly, not seeing the need to hide what I had already reported officially.

I raised my hand tentatively and let it hover over the chessboard, as I tried to figure what would happen if I moved my remaining bishop up a level. Everything looked good, so I moved my bishop up onto the third level.

"Check!" I declared, feeling quite proud of myself.

Before I could take another moment to appreciate my *genius*, the Vulcan instantly leaned forward and took my bishop with one of her knights. Meaning she was no longer in check. I stared for a split second in utter disbelief, before I realized my mistake. I should have seen an attack from a lower level coming. If this had been a proper chess board, meaning flat with only one god forsaken level, I was sure that I would have. This multi-level, 3-dimensional bullshit was throwing me off.

"Your move was logical," said T'Maz, "but also *highly* predictable."

Her words caught me by surprise as much as her move had.

"I don't think I've ever been called predictable before," I commented. "At least not for a long while."

Several hundred years at least.

"I find you very predictable," T'Maz replied. "At least when we are playing chess. You focus almost entirely on offense and neglect defense. Only your king is well protected. Were that piece not so well defended this game would have ended three moves ago."

After thinking about it more, I found that I couldn't help but agree with her. Had I spent more time planning to protect myself, rather than on just attacking, I would have had a piece in place ready to avenge my bishop and take her queen. Maybe that was a lesson for life in this time and dimension? Kind of ironic I was being told I should be protecting myself more in this game considering I was spending so much time, energy, and resources designing an advanced personal armor system for myself.

Now I had no pieces for a renewed offensive, which meant that soon enough I would be totally focused on defense and that would certainly cost me the game. I could prevent her from winning for a little while, however victory was now beyond me, I saw that now. It was better to concede

defeat now, graciously, rather than let the game pointlessly drag on. With that in mind I tipped my king on its side.

"You are improving," T'Maz then said, "quite rapidly in fact, perhaps even illogically so. Perhaps if we played again you will be able to adapt your tactics."

Three-dimensional chess really wasn't my game. I was too used to thinking of a game battlefield as being flat. When I played chess, I saw two medieval armies. In this century, in a time where battles were fought in space between starships, you had to understand that an attack could come from above as well as below and every which way. The many combat training simulations I'd completed had pounded that point into my skull over and over again, but I suppose I hadn't applied that lesson to this far less dangerous situation. I had better get my act together and start changing the way I thought.

"This isn't what I imagined I'd be doing as a super spy," I told the Vulcan, with a sardonic grin, gesturing to the chess board. "I certainly didn't appreciate just how boring weeks at warp could be when I got my own ship. I guess all those James Bond films I watched while growing up colored my opinion of the profession."

T'Maz gave me a look that on a human I would have called one of curiosity. While Vulcans did have feelings, they went to great efforts not to express them, so I couldn't assume that she was actually curious or that I was even reading her right. Reading her was an ongoing work in progress.

"Who is this James Bond?" she asked, looking rather adorable expressing ignorance.

While I didn't know if the movies had ever existed in this reality, or survived the wars of that time (due to so much being lost or purposefully destroyed because of Khan and his kin), the writer Ian Flemming had still been published in this dimension. I knew this from my time in the library in San Francisco. If we were on a Starfleet ship, I could have simply told her to look him up, but I didn't have many works of fiction taking up computer memory. The data I'd taken from Minos had filled up a lot of my computer storage, but that was no excuse. I also didn't want to establish a subspace link with the Federation database, lest my movements be tracked.

I really should add some more fiction to the database when next near a Federation world, though, now that I thought about it; on long trips at warp in the future it might be a good idea to have reading material available just to pass the time. Of course, I spent most of my time on my various projects, including studying the Echo Papa 607 and its programming, and the weapons, shield, and replicator upgrades I'd gotten from Minos, amongst other things.

"He was a fictional character in a series of books and later movies from my time. James Bond was a secret agent and spy who worked for an organization called MI6, an intelligence outfit of the United Kingdom, a prominent Earth nation state, during the second half of the 20th century," I explained. "His missions often involved preventing outlandish schemes for world domination, or stopping terrorists from causing massive amounts of death and destruction. He was always paired with a beautiful woman (or two) that he ended up having an intense sexual relationship

with by the end of the film; they came to be known as 'Bond girls.' He would also often have sex with enemy agents or women from the various criminal syndicates that he knew were actively trying to kill him or setting him up to be killed, but he did it anyway because he was so badass and a man's man who never turned down a beautiful woman."

T'Maz didn't reply right away, so I assumed that she was thinking about what I had just spoken about. She was probably even making a note to look up the source material to read later on, likely as a way to get further into my head. She was quite thorough in that regard.

"Unfortunately, I think you will experience disappointment during our time together and on your missions with Section 31," she told me. "As a Section 31 agent I have never prevented any world from being dominated, nor have I ever had to stop anyone from causing massive amounts of death and destruction."

Somehow, I was not surprised. As a former member of the military, I could tell you those exciting recruitment commercials were far from the norm, or at least far, far more rare. Sigh, no, a great deal of the time it was a job like any other, with a whole hell of a lot of hurry up and wait, punctuated by brief and intense moments of frenetic activity and extreme emotion in combat.

Our current mission was to go and check up on a civilian run research outpost that was part of the Vulcan Science Institute (not to be confused with the Vulcan Science Academy, which was a completely separate institution). The geeks at the outpost were studying a binary star system. A Section 31 agent was part of the research staff and he had stopped reporting in recently, as had the entire outpost. This could just be an equipment failure or interference from some kind of astronomical phenomenon, but it was also possible that the agent had died somehow, or that the outpost had been taken over by hostile beings. For some reason Section 31 seemed to think the latter was possible, which suggested that they knew a lot more than they were telling me. Whatever, just like when I was in the military, I had a combat and hazard pay multiplier should I see any on what was supposed to be a standard mission of limited danger/risk.

T'Maz was officially a member of the Vulcan Science Institute, as well as an agent, so it wouldn't be seen as overly odd if she turned up unexpectedly to find out why the outpost had stopped transmitting data. My role was to be the owner and Captain of a private ship who T'Maz had hired to transport her to the outpost. That happened to be 100% true. I even had the appropriate license on file to take paying passengers.

For this mission, I had chosen to be paid the equivalent of 250 bars of gold pressed latinum, my standard rate, in Federation Credits, which had no material value per se, but they could be used to get things from the Federation that required large amounts of energy. This could come in handy if I ever wanted something that couldn't be replicated by a normal replicator, or that would require a great deal of time and energy to produce, like say a mounted photon torpedo launcher for my ship, which was something that I couldn't get on Minos.

Getting that from the Federation, rather than some third-party seller, meant that I'd be getting brand new goods, exactly as specified, and it also meant expert installation by a team of qualified engineers. Sure, I could buy this equipment elsewhere with latinum, but there was value in

knowing your weapons were going to work when you needed them to, or that they wouldn't blow up your power grid by suddenly drawing too much power. In a case like this, I would pay for a few launchers, a small inventory of photon torpedoes, and its installation with Federation credits.

If we bumped into any Starfleet ships on our journey we shouldn't have any trouble as we weren't doing anything illegal. My ship was registered with the Federation, my Class-1 pilot's license was in good order and on file, and I had all the permits required to travel anywhere within Federation Space with third party cargo or paying passengers onboard. I could even venture to neutral systems if I wished to, but that could be risky. Outside the Federation and away from their protection and influence, my ship could be a tempting target. It was rather small and under-armed, at least when compared to true capital ships. My upgraded weapons meant I was capable of fighting well above my weight class, but there were limits to what I could safely or prudently take on.

T'Maz looked like she had finished mulling over whatever it was she was thinking about. What were we talking about again? Ah, James Bond and how her tenure with Section 31 had little in common with that fictional spy.

"If it would improve your morale, I would be willing to be your 'Bond Girl,'" T'Maz offered. Seeing my look of confusion, she elaborated. "I am willing to engage in sexual intercourse with you. I believe it will increase your morale and mission performance."

Well, that was out of the blue. The rationale also seemed rather flimsy.

"What?" I asked before formulating a better question. "I thought Vulcans only had sex during their Pon farr?"

Surprisingly, T'Maz didn't seem at all bothered discussing her people's mating practices, unlike what I had expected and seen in multiple shows, but Vulcans didn't normally lie either, or break the law, and she probably had to all the time in order to be an agent for Section 31. So, I suppose it made perfect sense that she was a bit of an outlier when it came to her species. It rather reminded me of her ancestor and role model, T'Pol, another Vulcan who didn't exactly conform.

"It is a common misconception that Vulcans only have sex once every seven years during their Pon Farr," my training officer and boss for this mission informed me. "During the Pon Farr adult Vulcans undergo a neurochemical imbalance, which causes a form of madness as our normal emotional suppression systems are overwhelmed. A Vulcan can even die within a matter of days if the Pon Farr is not satiated to completion. While intercourse is part of the normal satiation, a successful Pon Farr also requires the creation of an empathic bond with our partner or mate. However, if we were to only engage in sex once every seven years, we would have very few children and a much smaller population, even with our long life spans. Indeed, it would put into danger our sustainability as a species altogether as there is no greater chance of conception during the Pon Farr than at any other fertile period. Also, we do sometimes marry outside our species and those races would not be willing to only have sex once every seven years. Another

fact that you should be aware of is that we cannot reproduce with humans without rather elaborate genetic modifications.”

She was right, seven years without sex was something few humans would/could put up with. I wasn't even sure if I could go *seven days* without sex, especially since spending time on Risa and honing my sexual game to a fine point. That was another reason this journey was so hard for me. Plus, it was kind of weird to think that Sarek, who'd I'd recently met, must have long ago gone to a fertility clinic in order to father Spock, but since Spock existed Sarek must have.

“That’s not strictly true for me, Dr. Crusher believes that my enhanced physiology means I can naturally impregnate virtually any humanoid species,” I boasted, throwing her a silly wink, which was wasted on her.

“Yes, I do recall reading that in your medical file. It was a matter of some interest in the medical division,” she responded. “The long-term strategy planning group also wondered what the implications were for their models.”

Why was I not fucking surprised that Section 31 had my medical file? Again, I was reminded that my paranoia was well founded.

“I don’t understand,” I said. “Why would my universal fertility affect their long-term models?”

“As I understand it, in many ways, your physiology represents an ideal for the human form, a possible evolutionary path, no matter how distant, regardless of the artificiality of its inception,” T’Maz explained. “As the humanoid form of thousands of races in the Alpha quadrant share many genetic similarities, your physiology might represent a possible evolutionary path for those races as well. If such a thing were to come to pass, natural conception between even disparate humanoid races would be possible and likely. This would have an effect on their relations.”

“So, in simple terms, you’re saying that being able to naturally and easily make a baby between two very different races would bring them closer together? Less likely to make war? Maybe more likely to get along?” I asked.

“While grossly simplified, yes, that is essentially correct. New long-term models have taken these potential changed circumstances into account. There is a great deal of excitement in that research group at the implications, as I understand it,” she answered.

That was a doozy of a thought. Who knew my ability to make babies was the object of so much excitement?

"Getting back to Vulcans and their sex lives in general and the Pon Farr specifically, in other words, every seven years you *have* to mate, the rest of the time it's just optional," I said. "And if you don't mate traditionally during the Pon Farr you can engage in the ritual combat instead and that would also satisfy the urges.”

T'Maz nodded, looking a bit surprised at my knowledge.

"Yes, the ritual combat is also an option, though extremely rare in this age as it is almost invariably a fight to the death," she elaborated. "Most Vulcans will simply mate with their husband or wife, so the ritual is rarely performed anymore. Even for those without a mate, there are highly trained volunteers of both sexes, masters of the Vulcan mental disciplines, who can assist in satiating the Pon Farr if needed or called upon. They can create a temporary bond that can then slowly be severed afterward."

Well, *fucking* was usually a better option than fighting to the death, though I had to wonder if T'Maz had a mate somewhere. What did she do during her Pon Farris? Did they have an open relationship? Or did Vulcan relationships work differently than human ones? Perhaps she had made use of one of these temporary Pon Farr partners? Or maybe she hadn't undergone her first yet? It was unclear at what age that happened to adult Vulcans. I probably shouldn't ask...

"I personally do not engage in sexual intercourse very often, as I do not feel the need like humans do," she explained. "But, as I mentioned before, I believe that your disappointment in our mission would be lessened by the activity and that in turn should increase your morale and mission performance. I am eager to see what an Augment of your level of genetic enhancement can do while working at peak performance."

That was logical, maybe a little cold, but hey, she was offering to bang me to improve my mood...and my 'mission performance.'

"Shall we begin now?" T'Maz asked as she stood up. "It will require you to increase the air temperature."

This was a dream, a fantasy come to fucking life right here. I'd already banged the smoking hot 7 of 9 of Star Trek: Voyager fame, now I was getting the opportunity to bang a T'Pol lookalike, one of her descendants even?

I must be in Star Trek nerd heaven!

Had I not been to Risa so recently before embarking on this mission I probably would have found this very strange, maybe even off-putting enough to stop it before it happened. After that hedonistic paradise, though, this situation was actually relatively tame in comparison. Even when she began to shamelessly undress right in front of me I found that it didn't make me feel awkward at all.

Undressing might not even be the right word, *unpeeling* was probably more accurate. That bodysuit of hers was skin *fucking* tight and its resemblance to the outfits T'Pol routinely wore on the show was really turning me on.

The sight in front of me was fulfilling some old fantasies, ones I never thought would become reality, but I had enough presence of mind to adjust the environmental controls to make it more comfortable for her, by the time I was done I was looking/staring/ogling a very naked Vulcan female, one who could put most human pinup models to shame. T'Maz was soft and hard in all

the right places, fit and sexy, and a perfect size for me. It was something I could definitely get used to.

When I stood up she was standing with her back to me, so that she could place her clothes on her chair. I took a minute to enjoy the sight of her shapely bottom and that lovely pink slit. Thank the Preservers we were sexually compatible.

"Please stay where you are and disrobe," she instructed me calmly.

She was now neatly and meticulously folding her clothes. I took the time to begin to strip, which was not something I could do all that quickly. While I wore 20th century clothing, which was fairly easy to take off compared to this century's fashions, I was also wearing my new body armor under my clothes perfectly molded to fit skin tight to my torso. The Minosians' specialty was weaponry, but they had a number of highly advanced materials in their databanks meant for advanced personal protection. They also had the records, scans, and working examples of many of their former customers' body armor *and* their customers' enemies' body armor, as not everyone thought like the Federation in eschewing body armor. They needed to test their weapons' effectiveness against it, after all. In the end, the technical data had advanced my own designs forward months, if not years, of work.

It wasn't even that heavy, since it relied on advanced materials technology that wasn't truly metal, but taking it off involved undoing quite a number of fasteners, another thing I'd had to semi-invent. My armor's fasteners were akin to if nanotechnology and Velcro had a baby. It was meant to stay on during even the most rigorous and chaotic movements of combat; it was not designed to come off easily or quickly. And I had had a persistent feeling since this mission was offered to me that it would be needed.

"Done," I reported.

At that moment T'Maz turned around and I didn't even try to hide the fact that I was shamelessly checking her out, luckily I could tell that she was doing the same and was pleased with what she saw. I had lost most of my remaining shame and hang-ups about nudity back on Risa.

"I take it that you view my decision to remove my pubic hair positively?" she asked, gesturing to her completely bald pussy. I guess she had noticed my lingering glance.

With some effort I was able to translate that to: 'does being hairless down there turn you on?'

"Yes," I answered honestly. "But I'll be honest, I wouldn't give two shits what it looked like down there, as long as it was you. You are magnificent."

I walked up to her and without much preamble, kissed her deeply, one hand gripping the back of her head as I pulled her close to me, the other taking a handful of that firm ass. She didn't react at first, but she soon became much more active and responsive, letting out little moans and gasps. Despite her seeming to want to continue to make out, she broke the kiss.

"Gothic, I am well versed in human mating techniques, and not just intercourse. I am familiar with both foreplay and oral sex through my research," she informed me. "Until now I have never had the chance to engage in oral sex with a partner. Please sit down, I wish to give you a 'blow job.'"

Oddly, I found myself questioning her actions, rather than just going along with things.

"If you wanted to just give me a blowjob then why did we get fully naked?" I wondered.

A person didn't need to get fully naked in order to perform oral. I didn't mind being nude, though, as after Risa I knew I had nothing to hide in terms of my body; it had just struck me as rather odd.

"Human males are aroused by unclothed females," T'Maz answered as she gracefully sank to her knees. "Also, so we do not stain our clothes. I have never performed this act before and while I will endeavor to swallow your semen I did not wish to have to change my clothing should I fail to contain the increased volume of your ejaculate."

Increased volume? How?!? Nevermind... Again, it seemed this was all very logical. Even the overly clinical language she was using wasn't diminishing how into this I was.

"Vulcan penises are smaller than human ones, on average," she lectured as she gently touched my cock. "I may require time to get used to the size of an Augment human. Historical writings from the time of the Eugenics Wars on Earth contained numerous colorful tales of jealous baseline human men with regard to an Augment's enhanced genitalia. It was unknown whether these tales were apocryphal, possibly perpetuated by the Augment tyrants themselves, or had any scientific basis. It appears that they may have been accurate."

How much research had she done?? And...hahaha! There were surviving writings of jealousy about an Augment's bigger junks?? That was pretty hilarious, have to admit.

Playing it cool probably meant I shouldn't admit that I had been rather taken aback by it myself when I first woke to this new life.

She then looked down at my cock rather intently, at a specimen of human manhood that very successful porn stars would have been lucky to have back in my dimension, opened her mouth and put the head of my penis in her mouth with a feeling of determination about her.

Her mouth and tongue were wonderful.

It was warm and her saliva lubricated my dick well. Her hands moved so that one was at the base of my dick, and the other was cupping my balls. Her tongue was lashing the head powerfully and she had a suction that was almost inhuman. Of course, that was quite literal in this case.

Clearly, she *had* read up on human sexual practices. I really should do the same for my alien lovers, but I certainly had been having fun learning on the fly, cataloguing every big and little

reaction, and more than happy to take suggestions when they were graciously offered. I had had no ego in that regard and had been given no complaints about my performance.

She took her mouth off my dick and began slowly licking down my cock, lashing it like a snake. When she reached my balls, she took them gently in her mouth before she started to lick back up my cock, until she was back at the top. It felt good, great even, and I couldn't help noticing that her every movement was steady. She didn't seem aroused, but neither was she reluctant, almost like she was just performing a research task. Somehow that didn't interfere with my enjoyment of the situation. I'd had a feeling I'd get a chance to break that famous Vulcan stoicism, but it wasn't going to happen while she was giving me a blowjob.

She began to suck on my dick's head again. Then slowly she moved her head lower and lower so that soon enough my dick was in the back of her throat. She began to gag at that point, so she stopped, pulling up quickly but without causing me harm in her haste.

"This 'deep throating' is quite uncomfortable," she stated. "However, it is illogical to stop; we must continue."

Her next attempt to orally please me was far more productive, and there was no gagging this time so I just closed my eyes and let her get on with her task, though the urge to grab her by the back of her head and exert my dominance was strong. That wasn't exactly fair to her during our first time.

It may have been her first time, but she was a quick study and before long I was close to a climax.

"I'm... gonna..... cum!" I moaned loudly. It was generally polite, after all, to give your lover a polite warning.

I felt my large load shoot deep into T'Maz's mouth and throat, and her swallowing of my cum was very well done. In fact, she didn't spill a drop. The curious thing, though, was the full body shiver that went through her upon swallowing.

'Oh fuck.' This was exactly what I feared.

"How curious," she said after a moment, a pensive expression on her face.

I continued to remain silent.

"Your semen's volume is far greater than average for a human. And the taste is extremely agreeable. There was also something else, however I cannot quite articulate the sensation," she tried to explain. "It is of no immediate consequence. This session seems to have served its purpose," she said after several silent moments, once I allowed my dick to go soft in her mouth. "Your work should now be more efficient and mission performance rise to optimal."

I found myself rather disappointed at this, as it didn't sound like an encore was in the cards. So, I got dressed. Thankfully, my hopes weren't dashed for long.

"In order to keep efficiency levels high, I believe we should have these sessions at least once a day," she suggested, "perhaps twice if we are not busy with other tasks."

"I agree, I can feel my morale, efficiency, and performance will be improved by this plan," I answered, with a totally straight face. "I would be happy to enhance your morale as well, if you'll allow me."

This was just fine with me. One fantasy had been fulfilled today, but crossing Vulcans off my list of species to sleep with in this new life, would be another.

The fact that she was a T'Pol lookalike was icing on this already amazing cake.

XXXXX

The Flighty Temptress. Deep Space.

I had to admit, my ship was *pretty damn cool*. I'd named it *The Flighty Temptress* after a particularly poignant passage I remembered from one of the Harry Potter books, sadly only one of which had been published in this universe for whatever reason.

Dumbledore had said it and it just fit in my mind. I couldn't even remember what the circumstances were exactly, probably getting the fake locket horcrux from the underwater cave, but right before they left Dumbledore turned to Harry and said, 'Let us step into the night and pursue that *flighty temptress*, adventure.'

Personally, I thought it was a fabulous name for the ship of an adventurer, captained by a badass warrior Augment like me who sought adventure in his new life. For some reason the idea of naming my ship based on a line from a famous book that had never actually existed in this dimension, well, it felt like an homage, like I was connecting with and honoring my former life, even while living this one to the fullest, without regrets. A life in another time and dimension.

For the tenth time this hour I checked the navigational computer for our ETA and found that we still wouldn't reach the binary star system for more than a day and a half. My ship was fast for its size, but it was pretty much a super Runabout, albeit a decent bit bigger, with more power, and now more powerful weapons.

My ship, though, did have a higher top warp speed than the Danube-class Runabout of DS9 fame, which had a top speed of Warp 5. My ship had the power and speed for long trips, but it wasn't exactly built for incredible comfort or to entertain its passengers. I was getting bored, so I started thinking up ways to further improve the ship overall and especially in ways to make these long trips at warp more comfortable and tolerable! Having knowledge of various runabouts in both TNG and DS9 actually helped those ideas along.

When even this failed to keep boredom away for long, I decided to go back to my studies of Minosian technology and science and to start tinkering with tech. I could have talked to T'Maz more, but she was very distracting at the moment, since she had decided to remain naked until we reached the binary star system.

She pointed out that there was no logical reason for her to get dressed at all, now that I had made the inside of the ship so much warmer. While hot, beautiful, naked women were nice to look at, she was making me horny virtually all the fucking time. Boredom and horniness was a bad combination. Unless sex was back on the table, it was better not to look since I didn't want to be pushy about sex; so, I had to keep my mind off her. Had she been human I could safely assume that she was trying to purposely arouse me and that she was pretty blatantly signaling her willingness to have sex several times a day with me, but she was Vulcan. Those kinds of assumptions didn't always track.

"What is that device?" T'Maz questioned, as she re-entered the cockpit and sat down in one of the four available chairs arrayed around the control consoles. "Is it a weapon?"

"This device uses holograms and force fields to make any kind of melee weapon or simple tool that I want," I explained.

I pressed a button and verbally asked for a broadsword. A holographic blade appeared in the requested style, but that didn't mean it wasn't dangerous. When building this device, I had originally set out to make a lightsaber, during one of my mad inventor periods to keep myself occupied. Being in this technologically advanced future, could you really blame me?

The hurdle I hadn't managed to overcome was that even though a modified force field *could* contain the plasma energy emitted, the force field itself was what would first actually interact with anything solid and material. The force field, unfortunately, trapped both the high energy plasma *and* kept matter from passing through it from the outside. In other words, I had ended up with a high-tech stick/club as the plasma energy was trapped inside the field and couldn't actually interact with the target to cut, like a Star Wars lightsaber was supposed to. I might as well have just replicated a freaking baseball bat, it'd certainly be more efficient energy-wise. The Star Wars universe must use some kind of permeable magnetic containment field technology that hadn't been invented here, something that kept the high intensity plasma energy contained and shaped, but still allowed matter to pass through the force field to cut their targets. I was still looking into my options.

The Federation and many other powers did actually already possess somewhat similar technology. They often used a permeable magnetic containment field in their shuttle bays to separate the vacuum of space from the atmosphere of the bay itself, which eliminated the need for an airlock. This allowed onboard shuttles to simply pass through the field without venting the atmosphere from the room. The Star Wars universe had the same thing, I believed, but had obviously found a way for it to contain the deadly plasma energy, while still allowing matter to pass through the energy shell from the outside, allowing the contained plasma to do the cutting. *And* they'd managed to miniaturize the technology to an incredible degree, to the point that it fit into the relatively small hilt of a lightsaber.

So, yeah, a working lightsaber had ending up being a bust, *for now*, but what did work well, however, was shaping the force field so that it worked like any edged weapon, only better, as the field could be angled in such a way that it was preternaturally sharp. And unlike a true metal blade, it would also never dull or chip or break. That was only one shape that it could take, however. It was far more useful as a kind of swiss army knife-esque holo-tool, but as far as primitive early prototypes went, it was mostly a success.

"The hilt contains the small emitter for the hologram," I explained. "Normally this would be harmless, the emitter being very similar to the one you'd see in a holo-portrait. The difference is that my device also emits the requisite shaped force fields to make the blade itself solid, operating on the same principles as a full function holodeck, just much, much smaller, and much less sophisticated, which it doesn't need to be."

In essence, it was somewhat like the Doctor in Star Trek Voyager's mobile emitter, only much, much less complex. Actually, I was drawing inspiration from multiple Star Trek shows, including Voyager, TNG and Enterprise. A TNG episode featuring sentient machines, named an exocomp, had had a holo-tool equivalent built into its design. A Star Trek: Enterprise episode had an entire repair facility which used advanced holography/replicators to repair the ship in record time and with incredibly exacting engineering standards. Of course, it was found to be stealing people to add to its overall processing power, but the idea was sound.

"Works for a knife too, or a hammer, or a wrench, or any simple tool really," I was now saying. "Wouldn't work for a gun, of course, because the fired bullet would vanish once it's out of the limited range of the holo-emitter. This is a very early prototype, though, I'm hoping to include simple, but modern engineering tools in future versions, like a hyperspanner, or a phase compensator."

Sadly, the design had a flaw.

"It doesn't work for very long, though," I continued, as I switched the device off. "The power cell drains pretty quickly."

And the device was pretty heavy too, only that wasn't really an issue for me considering my strength was so much greater than normal. I had a few ideas to shave some weight in future designs, though.

"I'm also working on a device that will fit on the forearm, which will be a combination of a tricorder, a comm device, and a personal computer, it'll be coupled with a holo-emitter for the display. If it works you could--"

That was when she stopped me. This kind of thing was pretty exciting for me to talk about and I often got carried away. Annika had been very patient listening to me, often with a look of fond amusement on her face. I wonder what she was up to. Had she missed me all this time? Was she angry with me? Should I comm her?

"Actually, I was asking about this device in particular," she corrected, while holding up a blue studded cylinder that would fit comfortably in a humanoid hand, complete with actuator. "Is it a weapon? You seem to have a fascination with weapons. Or perhaps it is a fetish?" she said with what I could swear was a twinkle in her eye.

Fascination? Fetish?! Well, that was a bit of a low blow. That made me sound like a weirdo or something. Fetish was hyperbole, but I couldn't exactly blame her entirely. After Minos I had gotten a little weapon happy. Could you really blame me, though? I had no idea what Section 31 was going to throw at me and the idea of being unprepared, without the right weapon at hand in a life and death battle, well that freaked me right out and made me feel naked. Of course, she and I were both literally butt naked at the moment and had been for quite a while, thus unarmed, so take that how you will. A hot naked woman who had just blown you trumped a lot.

I was certainly interested in staying alive and having the right tools at hand to do that was absolutely crucial. After Minos I was armed at all times with my 23rd century modified type-2 phaser on my right hip with a quick draw magnetic holster attached to my lower thigh, an 8-inch blackened combat knife I'd personally designed, again with its own custom sheathe, and a 3-foot sword, though I didn't actually wear that all the time, and certainly not when just in my ship. Sitting in a modern chair with a sword on your back was really uncomfortable, who knew? You spend years in the military, in Iraq and Afghanistan, then try to go about unarmed.

It was probably the sword that gave her this fetish bullshit idea. I was very likely the only human she'd ever met who carried one and it was rather phallic-like, like all blades were... No! I really liked my sword, damnit! My sword and my knife were both made from metals that no one on my world had ever even heard about, which was true even for this Earth as some advanced Minosian metallurgy had gone into its creation. Thankfully, like most things the Minosians had created, it was a material that could be replicated. The industrial replicator in my engine room, upgraded with Minosian technology, had been a godsend. Once I perfected my holo-tool design, though, I'd have to decide whether or not carrying around a real sword was necessary anymore.

To make it more useful I'd even fashioned a sheath for my sword that had a small rotating circular plate about a quarter of the way down that used the same nano-fastener technology my armor did, so that it would stick to my back unless I purposely tried to peel it off. I usually kept my sword along the length of my spine with the handle upright for a quick draw. The plate the sheathe was connected to locked in three positions, straight upright, and 45 degrees angle to the right or left. I'd kept it simple with a leaf shaped blade, double edged, with four bevels, and a minimalist guard with a very simple handle. It was built for speed.

I'd chosen the leaf shaped blade because of its blade geometry which made it an excellent slashing and hacking tool. The leaf shape increased the overall weight of the blade, because of the extra mass required, but I was 5x stronger than a normal human. The sword was designed to be wielded one handed most of the time. Like it or not, we were in the 24th century and energy weapons were king, so having a hand free for a hand phaser was a good idea, but that didn't mean a sword had no place in modern combat. There were situations where it was still useful.

My combat knife was equally simple. An 8-inch double edged straight blade, blackened, four bevels, with a decent palm swell and a non-slip grip material. I had considered adding some tech to it, but sometimes it was better to just keep it simple.

I gave her a look of long suffering, "It's the sword, isn't it?" I asked pitifully.

"Yes, it is the sword," she answered, not even bothering to hide her Vulcan amusement now. Was that the barest hint of humor in her eyes or a trick of the light?

"That is a flash bang grenade," I finally informed the naked alien. "It's a small incendiary device that when triggered emits an extremely bright flash of light and a very loud bang that temporarily blinds and deafens people, hence the name. You throw this into a room, prior to a breach, and a couple of seconds later no one will be able to fight back as they'll be too disoriented. It uses different chemicals and compounds than the flash-bangs that they had back in my day and is calibrated to temporarily disorient a wide variety of species without doing any long-term harm."

T'Maz looked interested.

"Why not simply use a phaser set on wide beam?" she asked.

Typical Federation thinking. I had an answer ready.

"Because to do that you have to be in the room, or temporarily exposed to the room with hostiles in it. With a grenade, of any type, you can stay out of the line of fire entirely; your enemies never potentially even seeing you," I explained. "You see the canister is designed to be very sturdy and to resist premature detonation. Typically, you'd roll throw it into a room and roll it along the ground. The hexagon shape to the top and bottom keeps it from rolling too far. It's a non-lethal variant."

"I'm assuming you have lethal variants as well?" she asked.

"I do. I have anti-personnel grenades ready, which are more egg shaped. So, if you're strong and good at judging the angles, like I am, like Vulcans are too as I understand it, you can throw them into a room by bouncing it off a wall or two, or around a corner. Not something Starfleet would ever use, but we spies have to be cleverer than most. Unconventional thinking is the key to survival, and probably something that defines Section 31's overall mission."

T'Maz nodded her head in what I guessed was approval, looking thoughtful, as if I had said something profound, something that made her wonder why it had never occurred to her. Annika had had the same look in her eyes when I'd explained why Starfleet didn't provide personal shield units to their personnel.

"Starfleet personnel do seem to lack common sense," she commented. "They often devise overly complex and unique solutions to problems and then, rather than reuse or improve upon those solutions in similar situations in the future, they invent new methods. There is a reason why people such as you and I are the real defenders of the Federation."

Starfleet types could be a bunch of smug cunts at times, but they, like anyone, were the products of their time and culture. True, they could do things in needlessly complex ways, but they always came up with solutions when it mattered, and they were willing to die to protect the Federation. That was to be admired. T'Maz might be judging them a bit too harshly, and that was coming *from me*, and I was frequently a critic of Starfleet and its methods.

"As for the other device you mentioned, I believe that I have a solution to your power problem," the Vulcan told me. "I assume you are using a power cell common to civilian applications, if so then replacing it with a power cell designed for a standard hand phaser should provide plentiful energy for your needs. It will simply require a few modifications."

I handed over the machine I was currently calling a 'holotool', as I sucked at naming things, and then watched T'Maz walk away.

"That *ass*..." I muttered, eyes locked onto her swaying hips.

T'Maz had obviously heard me because she turned around. Yep, totally forgot that a Vulcan's hearing was much better than a baseline human.

"Does my nudity bother you?" she asked, looking like she genuinely wanted to know. "If so, I can redress."

That would be a bad thing.

"No, I like you being naked," I told her. "It's just that I don't want to bother you with my sexual urges. And, to be honest, I'm just not sure what you're signaling to me. A human woman walking around naked like this would basically be sending a clear message that she was willing and open to sex with me. I'm trying to avoid making that assumption with you, since you're not human and there are obvious and fundamental differences in our respective cultures."

She understood what I meant.

"I see. If you desire more sex then simply make a request," she responded, rather matter of factly. "I have no important or pressing tasks to complete after modifying your device and I do wish to learn more about human sexual practices. Reading written material on the subject is useful for such research, but it does not compare to gaining real experience, empirically."

She was so logical about it and yet still so sexy at the same time. How did that even work?!

"All right," I said, before getting up and following her to the storeroom where I kept my tools and spare parts. "You modify while I fuck you."

It was a win-win situation for me.

XXXXX

The Flighty Temptress. Binary Star System.

"A fucking anomaly. This just keeps getting better," I moaned. "We need to avoid anomalies!"

We had just dropped out of warp in the binary star system which held the Vulcan outpost which had gone silent, and the first thing we'd detected was the laws of physics being ass raped. I'd watched enough Star Trek to know that an anomaly was just another word for extreme danger that was almost certainly going to fuck you in the ass when you least expected it. We could end up trapped in a time loop, or be sucked into some kind of black hole to suffer for eternity, or even become the play things of a god. All of which would be very, very bad.

T'Maz wearing clothes in the ship again was another thing that was bad, or at least not as nice as before. Now that we had actual work to do she didn't want me distracted, and that was perfectly understandable and reasonable so I didn't grumble about it...much.

"It is highly unusual," the superior agent commented while studying my ship's sensors. "I believe it's some kind of tear in the fabric of space time. The sensors are detecting a different region of space beyond the tear, which does not correspond to the surrounding space in this system."

Now I was starting to get an idea of what this anomaly was.

"Like a wormhole?" I asked.

T'Maz shook her head.

"Not in the sense that it is a shortcut through space between two disparate points," she explained. "It is more akin to a wound in reality. The space beyond the tear is not of our universe, of that I am sure."

Oh my, that didn't sound good at all.

"Where does it lead?" I wondered.

Knowing my sci-fi I knew it wouldn't be anywhere good. It could be an entry way to something like Thirdspace, or the Warp of Warhammer 40k, or wherever it was that the Event Horizon went on its maiden voyage.

"There is no way to know for sure," T'Maz replied, while continuing to study the sensor readings. "But it does lead somewhere else and if this ship's basic sensors are correct, there is an ion trail which leads directly to it; meaning a ship has already entered the tear from our universe."

This was not a Starfleet ship, so I didn't have top of the line, state of the art sensors. The standard sensors on this ship actually had pretty decent range, but not a lot of detail was provided. I could upgrade them, even with restricted military-grade stuff from the Federation because of my deal with Section 31, but that would require a minor refit, which would take time and money, and

there was a chance I'd then have those stupid exploding consoles like on the *Enterprise*. I was pretty happy with my ship altogether, it was both exotic and decently powerful, but the similarity to a 'starter ship' just given to you at the start of a game campaign was pretty striking. It felt like my patron was giving me a good start, but I was on my own for upgrades, which I'd already begun doing on Minos. It was a challenge that I was excited to take on.

"I am detecting a Klingon Bird of Prey re-entering our reality," T'Maz reported dutifully. She may be my training officer, but I was still the captain of this ship. "There are faint life sign readings, the same for the planet below. The outpost also has an active power signature; we should attempt making contact."

Since she didn't say who I should specifically contact I just put out a general hail on all frequencies.

"No reply," I informed the Section 31 agent, "and in case you were wondering I'm picking up no other ships in the area and no distress signals. Which begs the questions: why are the Klingons here at all? This is not their space."

Apparently Vulcans didn't care much for speculation either, as T'Maz focused on what we did know, rather than make wild guesses.

"My scans indicate that the rift is slowly contracting," the spy told me calmly as her fingers raced across the control panels that were very much like those on the runabouts I saw on the show. "At the current rate of contraction, it will fully close in less than 12 hours."

Well, that was news, maybe not *good* news, though, as a hell of a lot could happen in 12 hours.

"Good," I muttered. "The fewer 'anomalies' we have to deal with, the better."

In my view, space should be almost empty with just some stars and things orbiting around those stars. There should not be 'holes' in the fabric of the universe leading to places no human should go to.

What was making me rather afraid was the absence of anything on subspace. The comms from the planet and the Bird of Prey were silent, all channels and all frequencies, which in the modern age was pretty unusual.

Despite my well-founded misgivings from four different Star Trek series, I knew that we had no choice but to personally investigate. That was the mission and why we were ultimately here. Perhaps part of me had always suspected it would go down like this. It was obvious something had gone very wrong here. The Vulcans down on the planet would need our help, not that I particularly cared about them, but I did care about successfully completing this mission.

"So, do we check out the Bird of Prey?" I asked the superior agent and my training officer for this mission. She was in charge of this mission, so she'd decide our next step. "Or do we go straight to the planet?"

She answered right away.

"If the Klingons recover their ship and find *any* evidence that a human and a Vulcan were onboard, they may blame the Federation for any damage," T'Maz replied. "And our primary mission is to find out why our agent at the outpost is no longer sending us information, not to investigate that ship. We can only determine our agent's status by entering the outpost."

That made sense to me.

"If we're going down to the outpost, then I need to land the ship," I reminded her. "Now put your seatbelt on."

When you didn't have a transporter on your ship, you had to do it the old-fashioned way. The Minosians had had transporter technology, but it had been incompatible with my ship and not as advanced as the Federation's from all indications. Their primary focus was on weapons.

The seat belts on my ship were my attempt to avoid the constant and downright silly flailing and tumbling around that happened in the show whenever the ship was attacked or hit some anomaly, etc. They always ended up dying or getting hurt that way and I sure as hell wasn't going to do the same, not when the advanced technology of the Star Trek dimension made that all *super fucking silly*.

T'Maz took a few moments to figure out how to deploy her seat belt, her face scrunched up cutely, like the idea of a seat belt was a kind of contagious crazy talk, because her face was downright hilarious, eventually ending up on what I'd figured out meant thoughtful, like she was wondering why she had never thought of such a thing when the logic of it was unassailable. I'd seen that face multiple times since we had started working together, though her long and scrutinizing glance at me now was new and practically *pornographic*. It seemed my challenging her worldview over and over and opening her eyes to new and better ways of doing things she'd, for some reason, never considered, was like an aphrodisiac for her. I had a feeling if we weren't in the middle of a mission she'd have fished my cock out and ridden me like she was trying to break my pelvis.

"Let me help you, my dear," I joked, a wicked smile on my face as I tapped a button on her console which auto-deployed a five-point harness-style seatbelt, the kind that even snakes up between your legs, like you might see in a baby's car seat from my time. It was segmented and thickly padded for quick auto-deployment and to prevent serious injury if the seat belt ended up being needed. It also had a manual locking mechanism unaffected by power surges or a loss of ship's power in the event of combat or an emergency. I'd even programmed the computer to detect dangerous situations in which the cockpit occupants could be harmed and given it the authority to auto-deploy the harness to protect us.

A small shield unit with inertial damper, like on my hoverbike, to protect each individual seat, was also installed under the chairs in the cockpit. The protective equipment I'd installed was powered by a completely independent power cell that wasn't connected to the ship's power distribution network at all, so it would work even if the whole ship lost power in an emergency.

There was also an emergency escape bag with a comm device, tricorder, rations, a standard type-2 phaser, knife, and emergency rations in a backpack style bag efficiently tucked away, not that she knew that. When I perfected the holo-tool I planned on adding it to the 'quick getaway bag' or 'go bag' as I'd come to call it.

I'd seen a lot of fucking Star Trek and I wasn't going to be caught with my pants down in the event of an emergency or crash situation. The ship was almost never fully functional in those situations, so don't count on it to be!

"Exceedingly logical, Gothic," T'Maz said after the harness had deployed and comfortably held her in place. "I believe I will write and submit a recommendation to Section 31 operations for this modification to be made to all our assets. It is alarming to me that this safety measure is not standard throughout the Federation."

Wow, now that was interesting. Usually when I showed these outside-the-box ways of thinking that flew in the face of Star Trek bullshit, most just looked at me like I was crazy and never mentioned it again, or refused to recognize the utility of it beyond that single moment and tried to use it again. Had her exposure to me over these past few months affected her somehow? Had it allowed her to see beyond or overcome the blinders that seemed hard coded to this dimension? The real test would be if Section 31 actually listened to her; I suspected her recommendation would fall on deaf ears.

"Had we access to a transporter we could simply transport down to the planet," the Vulcan pointed out. "Then the ship would be in orbit ready for us should we have need to escape quickly."

She was as logical as ever, but this time I did not agree.

"Leaving the ship in orbit would be unwise, especially with all the unknowns in this situation," I argued. "That Bird of Prey likely isn't lifeless; someone onboard could easily steal my ship, or some aliens from the other side of the rift could destroy it or drag it into their universe. If any of those things happened then we'd be stranded here. I consider that a far more serious situation to avoid than our escape taking longer."

T'Maz took a moment to consider my words.

"Your reasoning does have merit," she allowed, after a moment's thought, "and it is your ship ultimately, though equipping *The Flighty Temptress* with a transporter would add greatly to your capabilities."

No shit. It wasn't like I was opposed to it. Transporters don't grow on trees.

I landed the ship quickly thanks to using the ship's neural interface. Through that interface I could feel everything it did through its sensors and control the vessel with my mind alone, thousands of minor course changes on the flight down being literally made at the speed of thought. The flight down and landing was also made easier as my ship was designed to enter a

planet's atmosphere. Its 'wings' were both functional and cool at the moment. My landing on Minos had given me some valuable real experience on that front.

"Excellent landing, Gothic. You are an exceedingly skilled pilot," T'Maz complimented me.

Once we were safely on the surface I headed to the rear of my ship and removed two wall panels.

To both my left and my right were racks of deadly looking advanced weapons, from multiple races, in order to better blend in with whatever mission I was on, all of which Section 31 had supplied to me for these missions. If I needed to blend in on a planet with a significant Klingon presence or trade relationship, for instance, then Klingon weapons were the better option for that mission to blend in. Thankfully, Section 31 had also included a device that hid these many weapons from even the most intense scans and a recharging station for all the various power cells specific to each weapon, otherwise I might have some uncomfortable questions to answer if my ship was ever inspected.

I, of course, was already wearing my standard load out, which included my underclothes armor, a personal shield unit, my 23rd century improved type-2 phaser for a personal side arm, my combat knife and sword. However, I had a suspicion that I might need even more firepower, bringing along a phaser rifle too was a better option for sustained combat, but mobility was even more important and going light increased my looting ability. But bringing along a phaser rifle would not exactly be in line with my cover and wasn't exactly something I could conceal. Fuck it, guess I'd have to do without.

While I couldn't bring a phaser rifle along, I did grab an extra of my personal side arm, placing it in a quick release holster on my left lower thigh, while moving my combat knife to the small of my back, and grabbing a grenade bandolier. It held two flash grenades and 4 anti-personnel grenade prototypes that I could thankfully hide under a jacket.

T'Maz was looking at me rather skeptically now, "Do you believe such an arsenal is truly necessary, Gothic? This level of armament could be a detriment to successfully completing our mission if combat is not required. You appear to be a bloodthirsty mercenary, rather than a ship owner I hired to merely transport me here."

"T'Maz, I have no Godly idea what will be necessary, but I'm going into this unknown situation preparing for the worst. If everything is fine, I'll ditch the weapons outside the outpost for pickup later, but my instincts are telling me to be prepared."

T'Maz looked like she was about to protest, or call my instincts illogical, but instead backed down.

"It is ultimately your decision, Gothic."

"Thank you, T'Maz," I said, glad that she wasn't pulling rank and insisting on something that could get me potentially killed. "What would you like for protection? I've got standard issue Starfleet phasers, including a few variants, both hand held and rifle, Klingon disruptor pistols,

which are quite good, Ferengi weapons, and Romulan disrupter pistols. I recommend carrying at least two," I told T'Maz while showing her my many guns.

"A single Starfleet issue handheld phaser will do, Agent Gothic," the Vulcan said.

I handed her the requested weapon and held my tongue.

"What about body armor, T'Maz? I have an undershirt variant that would fit you," I offered, glancing dubiously down at her skintight bodysuit, "though maybe you could wear it over your bodysuit and hide it with a jacket?"

I always make it a point to have backups of vital equipment. Shit happened, as my time in the military had proven over and over and over again. Unfortunately, I didn't have another personal shield unit to offer her. That piece of technology was ridiculously expensive and rare, so I didn't have another one.

"Thank you, but no, I do not believe that will be necessary," she demurred.

"Ok, are you ready to go?" I asked.

T'Maz nodded her head, and I opened and lowered the ramp, a veritable wave of jungle heat flowing into the cargo bay.

"Ladies first," I offered gallantly, ready to begin a new adventure.

Thankfully, I wasn't wearing a red shirt today or I'd be really worried.

Author's Note:

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