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“The only good bug is a dead bug!” – Starship Troopers

The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Chapter 20

Starfleet Security Headquarters. Earth.

My last night of hedonistic vacation with T'Maz had been interrupted by a call from Starfleet Security. Of course, that had brought up some latent fears that I had been less than thorough in my cleanup of the late Tog's rented beach house. I had vaporized all six bodies before I left and set a Romulan disrupter to overload. Even after six high powered shots, there *should* have been enough left in the power cell to have taken out over half the house and vaporized or distorted any DNA trace evidence that I had left behind or alternately muddied any potential sensor readings that could have indicated that I had been there at all. The transport I'd used to get away from the area was completed by Section 31, so I doubt anyone on Earth could have detected it or traced that.

I had studied many subjects, trained in a myriad number of areas, but I hadn't exactly taken a training course on being a successful assassin, or how to thwart modern forensic investigative techniques. Sue me. Section 31 would likely disappear any evidence that I had left behind, but I had zero desire to give that group any more leverage over me in the future.

Nah, I was sure I was worrying over nothing. If they truly believed I had anything to do with Tog's beach house exploding (and the disappearance of a single Ferengi and five random Nausicaans) they'd have come in person to take me into custody, rather than politely requesting my immediate presence at their headquarters.

Upon arriving at Starfleet Security headquarters I was taken into an office, rather than a holding or interrogation room, thank the Prophets, and was informed by the officer in charge that Kira had been arrested on charges of Assault, Battery, Disturbing the Peace, Leading a Violent Protest, Assaulting a Diplomatic Party, as well as a slew of other minor infractions and violations that didn't really matter as they were only worth giving a verbal warning over and would have normally been handled by the local police. The more serious crimes were being handled by Starfleet because there was so little non-trivial crime on Earth, and because Kira wasn't a Federation citizen, nor a permanent resident of Earth. Starfleet was also dealing with this because it had happened right outside Federation Headquarters and had involved a foreign diplomatic party, thus it was under their jurisdiction.

I really should have known that I couldn't leave Kira to her own devices without someone there to temper her more extreme urges for so long. While this wasn't at all my fault, nor something I could have foreseen, nevertheless I was going to be a good terrorist colleague and pseudo

boyfriend and go 'bail' her out, rather than leave her in lockup overnight, but only because I'd already given T'Maz a proper goodbye fucking before heading to Paris and she was ready to return to work. This was a good thing because I may need her to pull some strings with Section 31 to help smooth things over if Starfleet wasn't willing to play ball. When she'd left our hotel room I thought I had detected a slight limp in her gait, which I was inordinately, *supremely* proud of, but that could have been some ego-induced fever dream. Nevertheless, I was feeling pretty good!

I'd not actually left my apartment in San Francisco immediately after getting the call, instead choosing to let a few hours pass before heading out. After a nice, long, refreshing sonic shower and a relaxing meal I'd arrived at the detention center to bail out Kira. A little extra time to stew would probably do the woman some good, time to reflect on her sins and all that, but that was a pipe dream and I knew it. After what Kira had experienced during the Occupation, a few hours in a Federation holding cell, one that she would probably consider a near palace, would have no effect on her. In fact, she might just thank them for the very comfortable and *free* accommodations and lovely meal!

Hopefully I'd be allowed to immediately take her off planet and head back to Bajor. What was the story anyway? Had she been having withdrawal symptoms from hurting/killing Cardassians that she'd sought some out on Earth? Of course, that was just a plain silly thought. Once we got back to Bajor she could commit all the crimes she wanted, assassinate Cardassian officers, blow up factories, rob military transport convoys, and just be plain rude to everyone she liked. You know, the usual. Good lord, my life was strange...

Sadly, of course, things didn't go as smoothly as I'd wanted, as there was actual video evidence of Kira starting a fight with an official Cardassian diplomatic party, of all things, that took offense to the Bajoran protest and had overreacted in the extreme to some rotten fruit being thrown at them. Like the fruit were plasma grenades or something. Where had the protestors even gotten rotten fruit?? Had they replicated it, then waited for a few days for it to go bad, then had it on hand ready for throwing? Life was stranger than fiction sometimes, but I wouldn't put it past them.

The Cardassians had suffered a few extremely minor injuries in the scuffle with the crowd, of which Kira was considered the ringleader, but the real issue was the discovery that the Cardassian security forces had had weapons in their possession that weren't cleared by Starfleet Security for the protection of their ambassador on Earth. The fuckers, most definitely overreacting to the threat of the crowd, had pulled out honest to God military-grade heavy weapons in their possession. Weapons that were more than sufficient to bring down an armed and shielded shuttlecraft, much less wipe out a crowd of unarmed rowdy protesters to the last man. I had to laugh at that, the Cardassians were always such cliché villains. Thankfully no one had been killed.

So, what should have been a case of a peaceful protest getting slightly out of hand, which could have been resolved with a call, a small favor being called in, and the charges being dropped, was decidedly more complicated due to the fact that the ENTIRE Cardassian diplomatic party,

ambassador and all, was now in a holding cell too! Considering the Federation/Cardassian treaty negotiations were still ongoing (now on pause) and the issue of their diplomatic immunity making it decidedly unclear if they could even be held in the first place, it was a giant galactic-level *fuck up* with a lot of high-level attention on the whole thing and a lot of uncertainty on how to resolve it. I really had my hands full with this one.

As for Kira, she was sharing a cell with another (in)famous Bajoran from TNG, Ro Laren, of all people, a woman who had appeared in a handful of episodes in the later seasons of TNG, and they were getting along like a house on fire.

When I got a chance to actually read through the statements both of the Bajoran women had given to the police, I learned that Ro Laren had only been a spectator at the protest. She hadn't even joined in, at least not at first, because her experience at Starfleet Academy had taught her just how little the rally would help the Bajoran cause. It was possible she might have realized that it could even actually end up hurting them, if, inexplicably, it proved successful. Her head had been filled with all that Prime Directive rubbish, but a wider perspective on galactic politics (read: more cynical), was helping her understand the long-term implications of the Federation stepping in right now, as opposed to anytime in the past 50 years the Cardassians had occupied the planet.

Kira had been taking a little break from pointless yelling and sign waving at the protest, when she had run into Ro Laren and had ended up giving the former Starfleet officer a good talking to about not joining the protest rally in earnest, as it was her duty as a Bajoran, etc. I gathered that a grand argument had then broken out between the two women just as the Cardassians had shown up, insults were exchanged, tempers boiled over, and the rest is history, or in this case a well filled out police report coupled with video evidence. Unlike in my time, when writing reports/paperwork was considered the bane of a police officer's existence, I actually got the distinct impression the officers involved had been having a grand old time reporting on an honest to goodness substantial crime. Again, Earth really had very little crime going on.

The good news about bailing someone out of jail in this time is that it cost nothing. On the other hand, the amount of datapads I was forced to fill out in order to have Kira released into my care made me wish for a corrupt officer or two that I could quickly and simply bribe with a few strips of latinum. Especially when I found out I had to fill out the forms a second time to get Ro Laren released into my custody.

And the only reason I'd even gotten this far, with the police and Starfleet willing to let them go given the political shitstorm that Kira and Ro had managed to kick up, was because I'd called in a favor from Starfleet Intelligence. They'd already paid me a substantial number of credits for helping out their agents, however there was that whole saving the whole of humanity thing. Compared to *that*, letting me take a couple of Bajoran troublemakers off planet wasn't that big a deal, even with the diplomatic/political difficulties involved. Thankfully, even in this hippie paradise called Earth and the Federation, SI still understood how the 'Great Game of Favors' was played and this minor help they provided was understood by all involved to be nowhere near close enough to balance the scales between us, even with the Cardassians throwing a fit. Saving

the lives of tens of billions of humans throughout the galaxy and then keeping quiet about how close humanity had come to being wiped out, practically on a whim, was worth a hell of a lot more than that.

With SI's endorsement Starfleet Security was willing to let them go as long as they didn't come back to Earth any time soon. I certainly understood that, this little fiasco needed to be mostly forgotten about before they could come back, otherwise people might start to wonder why they had been released with no punishment for that sort of behavior. This could encourage other troublemakers, lead to people losing faith in the justice system, or start up some good old fashioned conspiracy theories, and that was just on Earth, the Cardassians would likely be pissed as it was. Kira might need to lay even lower during future operations with the Resistance in the future.

"Okay, ladies," I greeted, while stepping over to the force field covered cell. "I've arranged things so that the charges will be dropped as long I take you both off Earth and you don't come back any time soon. This cost me a favor from people who I really liked having in my debt," now glancing meaningfully at Kira, who had questioned me vigorously when I had agreed to help those Starfleet officers get home from Gaila's. She nodded now, silently acknowledging that I had been right and how useful a favor from them had been in this situation. She stood up and approached the field, "So I hope you're very grateful."

They didn't really need to know that it was still far from being paid back in full.

The two Bajoran women didn't seem at all concerned about being behind a force field, even Ro who had not experienced the horrors that Kira had. I tried to remember when Ro Laren had last been on Bajor; as far as I could remember from the shows she had left as a child to live in a refugee camp off world, or something to that effect.

"Oh, I'm sure we can find a way to express our thanks," Kira said, with a lustful look in her eyes, subtly licking her lips. Damn, had her weeks' long protest and scuffle with the Cardassians, which had resulted in their diplomatic party being imprisoned too, gotten her motor running? Or had she been suffering some Gothic withdrawal? I had long harbored some very real concerns on that front, but I pushed it out of my mind for now. She looked practically giddy right now. Kira was a strange woman to me at times...but a very fun one too.

While the rebel warrior was open to having sex with me pretty much whenever and wherever I wanted, even sometimes at inappropriate times during missions, she rarely gave me looks like that. She was quite practical about our sex life together. I also didn't fail to notice her use of the word 'we' rather than 'I'.

"Maybe we should get out of here first," suggested Ro Laren. "Can't believe I'm saying this, but I'm eager to get back to Bajor and help drive the Cardassians off our world."

I raised an eyebrow in a very Vulcan way. Kira had been doing some recruiting it seemed. I had no desire to help Ro Laren get back to Bajor and join the Resistance only for her to realize she was in over her head and having the place kill her for it.

“Has Kira reawakened your patriotic zeal with her glorious tales of the Resistance’s victories?” I asked seriously. “I can assure you, for every victory she probably told you about, there were many more failures, paid for in blood. I really hope you’ve considered just what you’re risking. War is filled with horrors and the Cardassians can do some truly evil things at the best of times.”

Interestingly, Kira didn’t look offended by my words.

Ro looked thoughtful, “I know it won’t be easy; I know I could die, but I guess Kira made me realize that getting rid of the Cardassians is possible, and that I could be a part of driving them away from Bajor. I’m ready to give up my life to see them driven from the planet, if you’ll have me.”

I nodded at her answer and really hoped she meant it, seriously hoping she had the fortitude to really see it through. Until that first real battle I don’t think we’d know the answer. Kira’s patriotism and willingness to fight for her people was infectious to her fellow Bajorans, which made her a deft hand at recruiting for the Resistance, so I wasn’t overly surprised that she’d made a convert of Ro Laren in a very short period of time. The thought that she might be a plant for Starfleet Intelligence had occurred to me, but frankly, it didn’t really matter, as long as she didn’t undermine my mission.

"Well, as a condition of your release, I did promise Starfleet to take you both off Earth," I said. "Although I didn't say anything about taking anyone other than Kira to Bajor."

It was pretty clear that there was a distinct threesome possibility here, and that was great (I had gotten pretty spoiled on my trip back to Earth with regard to frequent group sex), it was just that I didn't really know Ro Laren outside of her character's handful of appearances on TNG, which was maybe 2 or 3 episodes total where she wasn't just a background officer on the bridge. What I could remember about her didn't exactly sell me on the idea of letting her on my ship, but on the other hand, she was still smoking hot with a very tight body and a Starfleet Academy graduate to boot, which meant she'd be a great asset onboard my ship. I also distinctly remembered her in that slinky get up she had worn in that one episode she banged Riker when their memories were suppressed. My track record in banging hot female characters from the shows was coming along nicely!

"Fine, you can come along," I decided, after thinking it over some more. “But I want it to be clear that on my ship you will follow all my orders. Is that understood?”

To my surprise Ro Laren actually stood up and saluted in response, and not even in a mock fashion. She was 100% serious, this being something that even active Starfleet officers didn't do often. At least not to me anyway. My newly awakened dominant streak was rather tickled.

"Yes, Captain," Ro Laren responded eagerly. "I look forward to serving *under* you."

I was very amused by this, as was Kira apparently, the way Ro had spoken those words gave me lovely mental images of her being both under me and serving me, just not as a crewmember traditionally would. Seems like someone had a submissive streak in her, like Kira did more often than not as I'd led her on more and more successful missions for the Resistance. I also had a

feeling that Kira had been sharing some tales from our bedroom, and I was just fine with that. Kira had proven to be an excellent wing woman lately, which made me love her even more.

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“Kira, the medical supplies go in the port cargo bay!” I yelled up the currently lowered ramp which led into my ship, a space that the original Star Wars designers of my ship had intended to be a shuttle/fighter launch bay, but which served as my main cargo bay these days, though it was more of a multi-use space really. When it wasn’t stuffed to the fucking gills with guns, and replicators, and medical supplies, and other random shit, I sometimes used that space for martial arts practice and exercise.

“Aye, aye, Captain!” Kira responded sarcastically with a smile and a very snarky looking salute. “Should I shine your shoes next too?”

“You know what, yes, I want you to shine my shoes, woman!” I yelled back at her, before she entered the cargo lift to the next level and blew me a kiss before the doors closed and I could no longer see her. She was a spitfire, I thought with a chuckle, but a hell of a lot of fun and like me, someone who was willing to get their hands dirty when needed. Someone who knew the universe owed her nothing and terrible things could happen to you if you weren’t careful.

Looking around at all the cargo containers stacked up in front of my ship, I wondered how on Earth I was going to fit it all inside. Luckily, Sloan had pulled some strings and arranged for my ship to be granted a private docking space. Of course, the weapons and everything were in large, heavy duty sealed containers meant to take a serious beating should we lose gravity in the ship or were forced to engage in evasive maneuvers and the inertial dampers didn’t fully compensate, but there was no need to take a risk and have anyone realize what I was carrying. What I was doing was highly illegal in Federation space after all.

Kira and I had had to empty the ship of all the many weapons we’d acquired from Gaila when we’d first arrived and docked at Space Dock 1 in orbit of Earth, in order for the Starfleet engineers to complete their upgrades to the ship. It was a heck of a lot of work then, even with an anti-grav sled/cart to move things around, but we didn’t have anywhere near the amount of stuff we did now. Sloan had come through and gotten us the twenty slightly used portable emergency replicators that I’d requested, ones that would be perfect for use on Bajor, but they weren’t exactly *small*. He’d also supplied me all the medical supplies and other bits and pieces of technology a terrorist group might need that I’d requested. It had all been beamed from a storage bay on the space dock to the space in front of my ship, ready for loading.

Walking up behind me, Ro pushed an empty anti-grav sled next to me. Deciding to show off a little, I reached down and picked up a large container containing a couple of replicators, something that probably weighed at least 500 pounds. My grunts of exertion as I picked it up and placed it on the sled may have been a bit overdramatic, but I was trying to impress a hottie with my feats of strength.

Rather than look suitably impressed, as I intended, she looked...amused? Kira had already told her that I was an Augment, so my feat of strength probably wasn't totally unexpected, but damn girl, show some appreciation for the muscles!

"What a big strong man you are!" she gushed in a very over-the-top voice, while playfully feeling up my biceps and pretending to swoon, before she turned dead serious and calm before asking a question. "Where should these be stored?"

I sighed, "All the replicators go in the starboard cargo bay. If we fill up both secondary cargo bays, just stack the containers in the corridors, just leave enough room to get by. All the weapons should be kept in the main cargo bay. I don't want them mixed in with the other containers in case there is a problem."

Each weapon had a power cell attached, along with a lot of extras for spares. While very unlikely to happen, it wasn't unheard of for a manufacturing defect or even just damage taken during transport to cause a dangerous leak or for the cell to combust/explode. If necessary, I wanted these weapons well away from the ship's engines and in a place where I could easily jettison them into space en masse. I could recover any non-damaged containers afterwards if I needed to.

She nodded in response before turning away from me, getting ready to take it back into the ship and load it where I had ordered. Before that could happen I reached out, spun her around, and practically devoured her mouth, my left hand on the back of her head and my right squeezing her tight ass in my hand. We kissed like that for a while, our tongues battling as she got more and more into it, grinding her pussy against my erection, before I broke the kiss and turned her back around and gave her a push. In a daze, she robotically began pushing the sled into the cargo lift. The last thing I saw as the doors slid closed was her touching her lips in stunned disbelief.

'How's that for shock and awe, baby!' I thought, before going back to inventorying the cargo containers as they were stored.

My inventory was interrupted by the familiar whine of a transport taking place right in the middle of the docking bay. I immediately pulled my sidearm and aimed at the form taking shape, before lowering and holstering my weapon once the person was fully materialized. Sloan, in his traditional Section 31 garb, had just beamed in.

"Captain, I hope you found everything to be satisfactory?" Sloan asked, glancing around briefly at the many cargo containers we hadn't loaded into the ship yet.

"More than satisfactory. The Resistance's ability to both recruit and sustain their fight with the Cardassians should be greatly aided by these supplies," I answered. "My influence with them should also rise quite a bit."

"Good. We're very pleased with your work on Bajor. Even with the recent trouble with the Cardassians on Earth, they are still willing to meet with the Federation at the negotiation table, which means our efforts helping the Resistance are working."

Letting nothing show on my face, I grimaced internally at this news for multiple reasons. The first, was the not-so-subtle reminder that Kira had caused the Federation some potential trouble,

trouble that could have escalated quickly and jeopardized my ultimate mission, which was to bring the Federation/Cardassian War to a quick close. Section 31 might have felt the need to salvage the situation by throwing Kira to the wolves to be executed, if she hadn't been connected to me. The second, was at the fact that it was the Federation itself that was pushing for peace, like a begging supplicant, and not the Cardassians. I wasn't surprised, of course, but it galled me that the Federation was the one begging for peace from this second-rate power and not the other way around.

“Our best analysts and simulations all indicate that we're entering a critical juncture in our war with the Cardassians, Captain,” Sloan said. “The Resistance needs to keep the pressure on. To distract the Cardassians from their war with the Federation, to deny the Cardassian war machine the resources from the planet, to make the Cardassian people eager for peace and the resource concessions the Federation will offer them to end the war.”

“With the increased capabilities these supplies will make possible it should be possible. I will use my increase influence to argue for some larger operations against the Cardassians, against bigger targets. That should give you plenty of pressure,” I reassured Sloan.

“I'm glad to hear that, Captain,” Sloan responded, looking troubled. “With the increasing instability and threat of civil war in the Klingon Empire, coupled with the threat the Collectors could represent for the alpha quadrant, the Federation just can't afford for this war with the Cardassians to distract us any further.”

With that ominous warning, without even a word goodbye, a transporter beam grabbed Sloan and whisked him off to God knows where.

“Fucking Batman-wannabe,” I whispered to the empty docking bay, chuckling at how silly my life was sometimes.

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The Flighty Temptress. On route back to Bajor.

A few things had changed for my ship since visiting Earth, and letting the Starfleet engineers tinker with my only real female love, that being my ship. Though the various ladies in my life were quickly becoming a close second.

The big visible change on the outside were what the Starfleet engineers had done to the warp nacelles.

A nacelle was an outboard engine housing structure on a spacecraft. The nacelles in warp-capable shuttles and starships, which my ship was sort of in between in terms of overall size, housed the warp coils of the vessel's warp drive. The warp coils in the warp nacelles created a subspace displacement field, which ‘warped’ the space around the vessel allowing it to ‘ride’ on an artificial spatial distortion, and travel faster than the speed of light, which was an absolute necessity in the modern galactic community.

While not always present on starships, warp nacelles were the most common component of warp flight, dating as far back as Zefram Cochrane's original warp ship, the *Phoenix*, launched in 2063. Which anyone who had seen the movie *Star Trek: First Contact* would know all about.

Aboard most warp-capable vessels, warp coils were fed by large plasma conduits from the warp core reactor assembly. Venting the plasma from the nacelles made warp drive impossible until the nacelles could be replenished. So, it was not something you did unless you really had to, like in the case of an imminent overload and the ship was about to explode.

On a Starfleet ship the nacelles were typically separated from the rest of the ship by large pylons, and usually housed a Bussard collector at the fore end, primarily used for collecting interstellar particles from space for fuel replenishment. My nacelles did that as well.

Most vessels typically had two nacelles, as did mine. That was because most vessels like that could operate with one nacelle completely disabled, albeit at reduced warp speeds. Given the randomness of space, interstellar anomalies and combat with hostile species, even reduced warp speed was better than *no* warp speed, lest you be stranded in deep space literally hundreds of years travel away at sublight speeds from the next starbase or habitable planet. It was not unprecedented, though, for vessels to have different nacelle configurations for whatever reason. For example, the Federation's Freedom-class, Saladin-class, Hermes-class, and the Kelvin-type starships had only one nacelle.

Even at sublight speeds serious impacts with the nacelles from weapons or other objects could spell disaster for a starship because of the potential feedback of energy throughout the vessel. Even the mighty *Enterprise-D*, for example, was completely destroyed by such an impact in an alternate timeline when the U.S.S. *Bozeman* collided with one of *Enterprise's* warp nacelles.

While all that was pretty important for a starship captain to know, what was most relevant right now was that not only could the nacelles on my ship be retracted and tucked under my ship during a battle, for better protection of a vital and vulnerable system, the Starfleet engineers had tweaked that system so that the nacelles could now actually be positioned further away from the hull, which allowed for a larger and more complex warp field, which meant a higher top speed at warp.

The ability to move the nacelles like this was the only reason my little ship's potential top speed could be as high as the simulations said. After the Starfleet engineers worked their magic my ship's top speed went from warp 6 to warp 8, a very big jump in warp speeds, and a very respectable top speed for a smallish ship, which really cut down on travel time. A trip of several weeks before at warp 5 would now only take mere days at warp 8.

The engineers had also been able to make a few other improvements while they were in the guts of the ship and virtually the entire power system had been dismantled. They'd left the weapons alone, though, instead focusing on strengthening the shields and adding additional processing power and memory to the computers.

Funnily enough, as I'd later found out, they'd been in awe at the improvements I'd made to the chairs in the cockpit. When they'd seen how I had installed an auto deployed five-point harness-

style seatbelt with a shield unit and inertial damper with independent power supply, it was like I had given them a divine revelation. They instantly seemed to realize that with that design no longer would people be thrown around during space battles or hit their heads on things or exploding consoles kill them. While I refused to allow them to keep any scans or schematics, I encouraged them to take the general idea back to Starfleet and see if they could effect any change. I sincerely doubted anything would change, but I suspect I made a few converts to my way of thinking in them.

If they'd taken money I would have tipped the Starfleet guys for the really great job they had done; the ship even smelt better than it had before! As it was I'd only been able to offer them my heartfelt thanks for their hard work and commending their amazing work to their supervisors.

Not that I'd needed to, as I was told by the engineering team. The team that had performed the upgrades had gushed about how much fun they'd had working on my vessel and its unusual design. Apparently they'd also never had the opportunity to work on a ship that was so damn easy to upgrade. They were certain that whoever had designed the *Temptress* (and whoever they were was a freaking genius according to them and they wanted to buy them drinks and pick their brain), had obviously done it expressly, from the ground up, with the idea of it being later upgraded and personalized to an insane degree. They emphasized that these possible upgrades weren't just in the ship's technology, but that the ship's hull was modular and in theory even the size of the ship itself could be added on to. They were blown away by this and said they'd only seen something like that on generational ships, ships meant to go on centuries long journeys, where adaptability was the key to survival.

While I didn't realize my ship had been designed to be so adaptable, I had certainly made my share of improvements since I'd been given it and realized just how easy it was for totally new technology to be added and actually work right out of the gate. My ship wasn't based on Federation technology, and hadn't been outfitted with a replicator or a two-pad transporter at the start, for example, yet their installation and operation had never caused me any trouble. It was a damn shame, though, that I couldn't just buy a cloaking device, as I had a feeling I'd find it compatible with my systems. Well, perhaps I could, but I lacked the contacts needed for such a deal. Perhaps in the future that would change. My work on the phase cloak was proceeding apace, at least when I had time away from prying eye, though much of the science which made it work was currently beyond me. Ideally I wanted to acquire a conventional cloak first, to explain my cloaking capability, and hide the fact that I could phase cloak.

My ship was also now much better stocked both for longer journeys and for my various combat missions on Bajor. While in space dock I'd made arrangements to acquire a large amount of non-replicable medical supplies for my own use, with stocks of the common medicines for hyposprays, emergency rations, plenty of tricorders (both medical and engineering), transport pattern enhancers, and an inbuilt transport scrambler from 31 with an independent power supply, which would prevent most anyone from successfully beaming onto my ship even when the shields were down, in fact even if my ship completely lost main power. Enemies beaming in when the shields were down was, again, another super common problem in the shows. A safety

feature had also been installed to prevent my own transporter from being used while the scrambler was still on.

Another change was that I had a new crewmember, of sorts. Over the course of our long journeys together, I had taught Kira how to pilot the ship and she could fly it in a pinch, at least when at impulse, but Ro, who was a graduate of Starfleet Academy with some experience under her belt, was able to do a hell of a lot more. She understood the weapon systems and how best to use them, how to raise and lower the shields, how to read and use the sensor output, how to set a course for warp, she even knew how to use the comm system and the scanners! A starship pilot of her skill would open me up to do many other tasks if needed.

She couldn't, though, use the neural interface to pilot the ship like I did. We had tried but it had overwhelmed her and had actually knocked her unconscious within a minute. She was apparently fine, as she had woken up and vomited a few minutes later, but the sensory input had been overwhelming she said. I guess my neural interface was different than the kind the Dominion used, something that had been designed for my unique physiology.

What made this even better was that Ro and Kira, apparently, got along really, really well. With my ship packed to the ceiling with weapons and replicators and other supplies I could only keep the captain's cabin free for sleeping. It was hard to even walk through the corridors without bumping your elbow on a cargo container, that's how full the ship was.

History repeated itself yet again when there was some friction with the single bed and bathroom, of course, but they were both seemingly happy to have sex with me whenever and wherever I wanted. It was still somewhat bizarre to me, but best I could tell, Bajoran females just seemed to enjoy sex more than human women, were hornier as a whole, or were just more culturally open to it with their partners. My Augment stamina and strength was a huge turn on for them.

Ro also had a lovely habit of 'forgetting' to get dressed, which was pretty nice all in all. In fact, right now she was sitting naked in the cockpit, while looking over the ship's sensor scans, the star streaking by at warp. By this point, I knew from experience that she could do this pretty competently even while I was balls deep inside her. Meanwhile, Kira sat on my lap, apparently getting in the spirit of this clothing optional thing that Ro had started and had stripped down to her bra and her very small, nearly transparent panties, something that made me glad the auto-pilot was on while at warp because she was pretty distracting wiggling in my lap with her back firmly to my chest and nibbling on my ear.

She reached up and behind her with her hand, threading her fingers through my hair and kissing the side of my neck while grinding on my cock through my pants. Of course, I returned the favor by reaching around, one hand kneading a handful of perky breast, tweaking the nipple occasionally, while my other hand slid down her well-muscled belly, her skin silky smooth, and into her panties. Her folds were hot and wet and she gasped as I started to finger-fuck her. Ro looked back occasionally in envy, distracted from her work, her eyes locked on what we were doing. I winked at her.

"Why do you have a whip?" Kira asked in a sultry tone, trying to keep from moaning at my fingers playing with her pussy like a professional violinist, after finally noticing what I had been working on before she'd entered the cockpit. I could be pretty distracting like that. "Still mad at me for getting arrested? Are you going to whip me until I beg you to stop and fuck me?" She asked coyly, but I could tell her words were turning her on.

While it had cost me a favor to get her and Ro set free, kind of, again I didn't imagine that anyone at Starfleet Intelligence would truly think it equaled saving the entire human race. So, really, I wasn't that bothered or angry with either one of them, especially since it meant I'd gained a skilled crew member who followed my orders and loved how I thrust into her pussy like a man possessed.

"If you want me to whip you, my little Bajoran slut, all you had to do was ask," I flirted in a sultry voice, with a smile on my face. Kira always did enjoy some mildly degrading dirty talk. "It's something I've been tinkering with," I explained. "It's based on a Ferengi energy whip."

The energy whip was a hand-held weapon used by the Ferengi. When lashed, it fired a pulse of energy that could stun or kill a target. Apparently the energy could be sent like a projectile or be conducted through the whip itself when it physically hit a target. Using the whip physically could again be used to stun or kill. I was intrigued by its potential applications for torture and for going around corners and what not. It felt almost like a poor man's lightwhip from Star Wars, which, admittedly, played a not so small part in my interest. Was it the height of blasphemy to be thinking of something from Star Wars while in the Star Trek dimension? Maybe. Did I care? No.

"Might be poetic justice to use it on the Cardassians," I said.

I doubted that I ever would, the real reason I was making the whip was because I had a lot of ideas for cool bits of technology that I could create and it was best to start off with simpler things, like modifying an already existing weapon. There were some technical ingenuities in its design that I was interested in learning from. The things I learned in tinkering with *this* design could then be incorporated into my own designs.

"I'm seeing something on the sensors," Ro suddenly reported, interrupting mine and Kira's fun, the very serious tone of her voice feeling quite jarring in this overly sexually charged atmosphere. I sighed, knowing that my fun had come to a sudden end. Twisting Kira's nipple a bit, I nipped at her neck and moved Kira off my lap so I could take a seat at one of the other command consoles.

"Captain, I'm picking up a distress call, no, two of them," Ro reported, falling back on her old Academy training when reporting mission critical information to a superior officer. I wonder if she even realized she had slipped back into old habits. I certainly didn't mind. "One is from a Starfleet ship, it's very low powered, though, and not getting very far, badly degraded. I can clean it up a bit more. The other... I have no idea, but I can play it for you."

"Play the Starfleet distress signal first," I ordered.

A badly degraded audio transmission played through the cockpit's speakers.

“This is the Federation...U.S.S. *Tikuma*, issuing a general distr...We have been attacked by unknown alien aggress...Main power is down. Numerous casualties. Urgently requesting assistance!”

“That’s all we got, Captain,” Ro reported, her fingers flying over the controls.

Looking through the Federation database I pulled up whatever information was available on a U.S.S. *Tikuma*. There was little information, but it did identify the ship as a galaxy-class command cruiser. That was some serious firepower. If a ship like that had been attacked and was issuing a general distress call, my little ship was going to be nowhere near enough to deal with whoever had attacked them.

My thoughts raced, trying to connect the various datapoints I had available, to come up with a likely picture. My augmented mind worked through the many options, creating and discarding many before deciding on a course of action.

"Can you copy, boost, and retransmit the Starfleet distress call?" I asked Ro.

She nodded, “Aye, Captain.”

"Then do so," I ordered. "We may need back up.”

As the former Starfleet officer carried out my orders, I played the other distress signal. We were very near Cardassian space, so it was certainly possible that there could have been a skirmish between a Starfleet ship and a spoon-head one. There was supposed to be a general cease fire while peace talks were actively being held on Earth, but such things often didn’t last when tempers flared after people had been at war for a while. While possible, I doubted that that was the case here, though, my computer would have immediately recognized a Cardassian signal. My ship has been hidden on Bajor for a long while now and had passively picked up tens of thousands of Cardassian messages being sent to and from Bajor and its local space.

It wasn't until I played the message, which was both audio and visual, that I understood just how bad things really were, even though the universal translator didn’t work on this thing’s language. The alien speaking was a Collector, one of the incredibly dangerous aliens that T'Maz and I had faced not so long ago. They were back in our universe again.

"Well, *fuck*," I muttered quietly. Things had just gotten far more complicated.

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"We are in visual range of the unknown ship," Ro informed me.

Now that we had something important to deal with my two beautiful crewmembers were taking this very seriously, both working controls on the console in front of them. Being nude or near nude on the bridge was fine for hours and days spent at warp when nothing happened, where sexy games could be played to while away the time, but now was not the time for games.

They had both gotten dressed, putting on something like T'Maz would wear in combat for maximum movement. They were both covered from the neck down, but the outfits hugged their

curves closely enough to show that both of them were definitely worth seeing nude, and since I had seen them both naked, *a lot*, I kept picturing them that way, which was slightly distracting considering the seriousness of the situation. They were also wearing weapons, like I had encouraged them to.

"I'm reading low emissions and standard automatic passive sensor scans coming from both...*ships*, as well as life sign readings. Main power on both ships, including weapons, are offline and their engines are cold," Ro reported succinctly, obviously falling back again on her tactical training on how to report to a superior officer during an emergency situation. Her hesitation at calling the Collector vessel 'a ship' was understandable given how alien it was to the normal starship design scheme found in the alpha quadrant.

She might have been kicked out of Starfleet a while back, but it was clear that the Bajoran woman hadn't forgotten what she had been taught. She knew exactly what to look for when using the sensors. Kira could certainly benefit from internalizing these lessons. It would make her more valuable to me onboard the *Temptress* and later on in her career with the Bajoran Militia.

"That thing is massive!" Kira commented.

Her reaction was understandable. It was truly an impressive and unique ship. In fact, the word 'ship' really didn't do it justice. The Collector ship/vessel was a massive hallowed out asteroid measuring just over 5 miles in diameter, with no visible engines or weapons, although there were buildings or maybe machines of some kind attached to the craggy surface of the big rock here and there in no discernible logical pattern, yet it had taken down a Galaxy-class ship with no visible damage. The Starfleet ship, on the other hand, looked like it had gone five losing rounds with three state-of-the-art Romulan Warbirds.

Why were both vessels disabled then? Why hadn't the Collector vessel finished off the Ticuma?

The only possibility that made a lick of sense was that mere moments before being destroyed the crew of the *Ticuma* had either gotten off an incredibly lucky shot, disabling something truly important to this extremely alien vessel, or they had pulled a rabbit out of their ass by using some kind of overly complex, technobabble, hail maryish, last second idea to save themselves that flew in the face of reality or probability. I would not be surprised in the least if that was the case. The shows were replete with that kind of bullshit.

The *Ticuma* was a Galaxy-class, just like the *Enterprise*, so like her sister ships she had an overall length of 641 meters, an overall width of 473 meters, and an overall height of 190 meters. The Starfleet ship, while normally being one of the biggest ships in the quadrant, was totally, completely, and hilariously dwarfed by the Collector ship, a modern-day David and Goliath story.

"How the hell do you think one ship took something like that out?" Asked Ro in awe, who had clearly been thinking along the exact same lines that I had been. Which ships she was talking about was abundantly clear to everyone.

I could only guess, and this wasn't the time for such things.

"You would have to ask them," I answered, not even pausing as I continued taking as many different sensor scans as I could, my sensors directed here and there to closely examine any features that looked even remotely important. Getting as much information on the Collector ship was vital if the alpha quadrant was forced to fight them. That this data would be worth a hell of a lot of latinum to Section 31 had also occurred to me.

Ro attempted to get her own answers using my ship's sensors.

"Scans cannot identify any recognized weapons on the alien ship or active power emissions consistent with any known method of power generation, yet I can't imagine the power requirements to move this thing. I can detect no warp field distortions either, so Prophets know how it even moves or how they even have enough power to move such a behemoth. I'm guessing right now, but it appears as if their main power source is offline," she reported. "The *Ticumá* has lost life support on several decks. They have a few large hull breeches...and there are several dozen bodies floating in space," she finished her report solemnly.

"Understood," I responded. "I don't think they'll be going anywhere any time soon."

I continued to study the sensor readings on the display, trying to decide what our next move would be. This was a precarious situation, but right in front of me was a disabled, yet intact, Collector vessel. If the size was any indication, it was probably important too and represented a goldmine of intelligence information on this enemy. When would we have a chance like this again?

"What do you want to do, Gothic?" asked Kira.

Again, I went through my options. What I was seriously contemplating could go wrong on so many levels, but the galaxy had put this opportunity in my path, right in front of me, and if my Star Trek knowledge was telling me anything, it was that the greater risk the greater the reward. It was trite, but true, especially in the Star Trek dimension. On the other hand, I knew myself and I was really hoping being a greedy motherfucker was not going to get me or my crew killed and end this great adventure my life had become prematurely.

"Learning as much as we can about that giant fucking ship is the priority. I've encountered their race before and they're a terrible danger to the entire alpha quadrant. We're going to board that giant floating rock, take a look around, gather some data, then get the hell out and send it to Starfleet," I said, outlining my rough plan. "They'll wipe your records spotless in exchange for sure, and we'll want to gather some of their technology. There might even be a payday for all of us."

Of course, I meant we'd sell it to Section 31 and they could then decide if they wanted to share it with Starfleet. Given the mostly destroyed Galaxy-class out the window, a cover up might not be feasible or even desirable at this point in their eyes. I'd leave that decision up to them; their predictive models would guide them to the best course.

The two Bajoran women looked at me oddly.

I suppose they needed a better reason to risk their lives, and I suppose I would have too. How could I impress upon them that the whole Quadrant was at risk, but not tell them so much that I shot myself in the foot? What could I share here safely without exposing Section 31 or my status as a pseudo operative?

"Okay, I'll explain what I can as quickly as I can," I told the women, then explaining what I knew quickly, answering a few of their questions. "Are you with me? I'm not going to force either one of you to go on this mission; if one of you says no, we just won't do it. That I promise."

"We're with you, Captain," Ro responded quickly.

"Somebody's got to watch your back over there, Gothic," Kira answered with a small smile.

In that moment I felt truly blessed that they trusted me enough to go on this crazy mission and keep them safe.

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Shuttle Bay. Collector Hive Ship.

As the ramp of my ship lowered, Kira, Ro and I quickly and quietly entered the shuttle bay of the alien ship. I had considered just beaming onto the ship, rather than landing in this bay, but I figured it'd be much harder for them to turn their weapons on us and destroy my little ship when it was inside, rather than outside. It was a calculated risk, to be sure, just like this whole crazy mission was, if I was honest.

I was in front, loaded for bear with a plasma pulse rifle held tightly against my shoulder, with Kira and Ro on my flanks, each carrying a rifle and sidearm. Ro, predictably, chose a standard Type 3 Starfleet-issue phaser rifle, which she was probably very familiar with, while Kira actually went with a more exotic Klingon disrupter rifle, which was less a multi-purpose tool like Starfleet weapons tended to be, and more just a good means of killing things. I liked the way she thought.

I had no idea how skilled or familiar Ro was with combat operations, and hadn't had time to find out, so she would be responsible primarily for taking the majority of any directed sensor scans. Kira and I would focus on any killing or fighting that needed to be done.

The barrel of my chosen weapon was sweeping the room along with my eyes, searching for dangers. This rifle was a semi-automatic, repeating plasma pulse rifle, containing three independent, swappable energy cells. Each cell was capable of powering the weapon to fire 60 plasma bolts each. It was a beast of a weapon, but heavy as fuck, intended more for mounting on a fixed turret, but I had been impressed with its firepower back on that L-class world where I'd first encountered the Collectors. That dead Section 31 operative had some great taste in weapons and it was one I requested from Section 31 when we'd returned from that mission. I sent a silent prayer for my fellow practitioner of the *Way of Overkill*.

My ship's sensors had shown no active life signs in the immediate area, but I never fully trusted such things. With this much rock who knows how far our sensor beams had actually penetrated

the interior. There were no Collectors around that I could see, just an empty bay. It was quiet and deserted, the air extremely humid and cloying with some unpleasant scents in the air. I wasn't sure if this was a trap or if the xenos were simply too busy elsewhere trying to fix their craft to care about my little ship. Either way, we had to be careful.

I gestured silently with one hand, directing them to follow me as we headed in the new direction.

I watched as Kira's Klingon disrupter rifle, which I had modified by adding a larger power supply and an advanced scope, since she was quite the skilled little sniper, moved to cover every direction visually, the Bajoran freedom fighter looking all over for threats. She easily followed my lead and covered those angles I wasn't currently facing like a professional.

We had worked together on so many operations together with the Resistance that we knew each other's rhythms and patterns very well. She trusted me and I trusted her implicitly to watch my back. That kind of closeness was common amongst fellow soldiers who relied on each other for survival and who had saved each other's life many times over. That trust and intimacy was magnified many times over when you were also fucking each other too.

Ro only carried a standard issue Starfleet phaser rifle and phaser sidearm, following our lead as we cleared the room, albeit slower, taking her lead from us. I'd have to get her acquainted with some better hardware. If she was going to roll with us she'd better get used to using heavier weaponry. Right now, she was more a liability than an asset, given how little she knew of how we worked, but leaving her on the ship was too dangerous. For now, just taking active tricorder scans was useful enough.

As for me, I carried my dual pulse pistols on each hip as my secondary weapons, both of which had been extensively modified to fire more deadly shots as it took a lot of energy to take down a Collector warrior. With my enhanced hand/eye coordination these two pistols were deadly. If the various Collector types hadn't shown such a worrying resistance to being shot, I might have foregone the rifle altogether. I also had my sword strapped on my back along my spine, and my knife. On my back was a U.S. military standard issue duffel bag, strapped to my back backpack-style, filled with all kind of goodies, like plenty of spare power packs, my holo-tool, and a tricorder. All this I wore over my body armor.

Since I'd faced the Collectors before, I knew that their bio-armor could take quite a bit of damage before giving up, that was why I was carrying so many spare power cells for my group, though if we were forced to use those then we were probably fucked. The amount of energy required to kill the warrior type of Collectors would drain the power cells pretty quickly. Before we'd left the ship, I'd ordered Kira and Ro to set their weapons to kill. Kira hadn't batted an eye at the order, but Ro had balked at it. I was forced to share that I had witnessed these aliens eat humanoids and how they could tank lower powered shots. That had convinced her.

In my large duffel bag, and the smaller tactical backpacks the girls were also wearing, were 1.25-pound blocks of M112 Composition C4 Block Demolition Charges which I was intimately familiar with from my time in Iraq and Afghanistan and something my jail broken industrial replicator could produce pretty easily and in large quantities.

Though they weren't very destructive, at least when compared to the advanced explosives of this era, since they were simple chemical explosives, they were easy to replicate in large quantities, easy to shape, and easy to adjust the yield and detonate. With a simple enough trigger, you could even detonate them in an energy dampening field and modern sensors probably wouldn't even recognize it. The idea wasn't to destroy the Collector vessel with the stuff; I had no such illusions on that score. No, nothing short of a giant nuke would do that and I didn't have the time or the tools to build one.

Getting a modern explosive weapon in that range of power, like a tri-cobalt device, would be pretty hard and would probably set off a lot of alerts with the various parties in the galaxy that kept track of that kind of thing. Section 31 could probably get me one pretty easily, but even they would probably balk at letting me have one, especially as I was still just a free-lance operative. Really, the bombs were mostly distractions to help cover an escape, to break down any doors in our way, and for some light to medium anti-personnel uses. Secondary explosions were the ideal outcome. I'd had limited time to prepare for this mission, the idea that I'd be facing the Collectors again on some god forsaken moon-sized ship hadn't really crossed my mind. Sue me, my rampant paranoia hadn't even pinged on that kind of crazy idea.

"It's clear," Ro reported, consulting her tricorder's sensors.

Surprisingly, this landing bay was totally empty, no ships waiting for deployment, and our arrival had garnered no response or resistance of any kind. It was pretty bizarre. I knew that the Collectors had support ships, I'd fought them. Could they have been destroyed in the battle with the *Ticumá*, or perhaps they had flown away to get help, or even as part of an evacuation? This race was so alien that I could only speculate on their thought processes or how they'd react in the midst of an emergency.

At least they had what looked to be the alien equivalent of a control room for the shuttle launch bay, and while this was a good place to place a few blocks of C4, it was disappointing that no one was here.

"Any volunteers to venture down the super dark and creepy corridor first?" I kidded quietly as we moved out of the bay and into some poorly lit adjacent corridors.

My joke, meant to relieve the building tension in this creepy ass situation, appeared to work, as my words were met with soft chuckles by the two very brave women at my side, lightening the mood nicely.

"This isn't scary at all," Kira mumbled sarcastically, eyes still darting all around, but I could tell she was affected and wondering when the other shoe would drop. Even I was chilled in a way that had nothing to do with how cold it was.

"Is this ship really abandoned?" Ro asked quietly, sounding frustrated. "I detected enough life signs to populate a small city with the ship's sensors, but there's no one here."

Again, I was impressed by how well the ladies were keeping it together. Sure, Kira was a rebel soldier who had gone into many other extremely dangerous situations at my side and Ro Laren

was a former Starfleet officer, who had probably undergone numerous combat training scenarios, but this was a very odd situation filled with a lot of unknowns. They should have been at least a little overwhelmed. Was my presence that comforting to them? Or reinforcing their resolve?

I'd even dumped a load of unexpected information on them, telling them that I had encountered this race before while taking a Vulcan scientist to one of her people's outposts. This story didn't even compromise Section 31 as that was what was written in the official report I filed after the mission and it matched what T'Maz had told her superiors at the Vulcan Science Academy she worked at as part of her cover.

Any risk of either of the Bajoran women figuring out that I worked for a secret Federation intelligence agency was something I put to the back of my mind as we continued down the corridor, taking a brief moment here and there to examine the ship's infrastructure and anything else that caught our eye.

The tricorders we each carried were already active and set to continuous scan mode, even when unopened, from the very moment we left the *Temptress*, but Ro was actively directing scans at anything and everything interesting that she saw. She had become disillusioned of the Federation, but she understood that this could all be leading up to an invasion and gathering as much data as we could could save many lives if it came to war.

For that reason, I was going to send/sell a copy of everything to Section 31, via T'Maz. No doubt she would be very grateful for the extra data, taken onboard an active Collector ship, since she had gone back to working on the Collector issue full time. She and other agents were no doubt already planning what do in case of a full-scale invasion, and everything I learned here, no matter how seemingly inconsequential now, would undoubtedly help them.

Not only could this potentially save the Federation, which hopefully justified the risk I'd taken on with my crew, there would be a really nice payday in it for me from Sloan, of that I was sure. He was a man who understood that while I didn't work just for a reward, it was important to me that I be given something commensurately valuable for my hard work. I doubted that anyone had ever gone into the spy business only for the money, but it was nice to see a ridiculously full bank account after risking my life or saving the day.

While looking around I noted that the ground and the walls of the corridor were made with a material that none of us had ever encountered before. The color of the material was a light brown, and it looked to be organic in nature even though it didn't register as living to the tricorders, and given that the Collectors were pretty much bugs, I wondered if the stuff around us was something like beeswax. In other words, an organic material, but not otherwise alive.

There was also what seemed to be pipes all around, which appeared to be moving some kind of thick viscous liquid through the ship. I had no idea what was in them, but I had a sneaking suspicion it was some kind of enriched nutrient slurry.

Ro tapped away at her tricorder looking frustrated, "I can't identify what is in these pipes, Gothic, only a handful of the components are recognized, but I suspect it might be flammable."

“Kira, cover me,” I ordered, before swinging my rifle behind my back and pulling a couple of blocks of C4 from Kira’s bag, sticking the blocks to the back of one of the pipes with the adhesive strip attached to it, hoping for secondary explosions. The block was hidden in such a way that you’d have to be right on top of it to even spot it.

Upon leaving the corridor and entering a circular opening with a very high ceiling, we finally had something other than walls to look at. On the floor were several enclosed pods that were strewn about, which was pretty odd. If this craft was some sort of mobile hive, like I had thought, then you'd think it would be very well organized.

Concerns about messiness went right out the airlock when we entered the next room. Right in front of us was a small pile of human corpses, lying haphazardly in one big tangled mess, blood and guts covering the bodies, eyes and mouths open in their final moments of horror, detached limbs visible. No, not just humans actually, there were some aliens mixed in too, but all Federation member species. Judging by the lack of decomposition and smell they hadn't been dead for very long, and they *all* wore Starfleet Uniforms.

Kira took it in at a glance, but didn’t otherwise react beyond grimacing and looking even more serious, now gripping her rifle even more tightly and scanning for targets to vent her feelings on. If anything moved I had a feeling she’d shoot first and ask questions later. Ro, though, looked like she was about to throw up, but steeled herself after I gave her shoulder a squeeze and forced her to look at my reassuring smile instead of the pile of corpses.

“Scan the bodies, see if you can gather enough information to identify them, ok? Their families, friends, and shipmates will want to know,” I ordered quietly, but gently. She took a deep breath and nodded. Giving her a task was the right thing to do as she focused on that, rather than the macabre sight in front of us that few Federation citizens would have ever had an occasion to see. On Bajor, with the Cardassians’ casual brutality, Kira and I had found several mass graves with the Resistance.

I turned my attention back to the pile of corpses; there were simply too many for this to have been an away team. It was possible that the Starfleet Officers had attempted some sort of desperate boarding action, but that wasn't how they typically fought. My other conclusion was that the Collectors had grabbed them, and then for some reason had gone and killed all their captives, like they didn’t have time anymore to keep them alive. Perhaps they were from a different ship than the disabled *Ticuma* out there, and they had been taken as captives after a fight? Until we could identify them and where they had been posted, there was really no way to know.

"I have completed my scans, Captain," Ro admitted.

Ro looked ready to start crying, but still she somehow kept herself together. My respect for her went up another few notches.

My next action was to set my rifle to continuous beam mode and set it on a high enough setting to vaporize the pile of bodies in one sweeping beam. That many bodies took a good 20 seconds

to fully vaporize. With the scans we'd taken, assuming we got out of this alive, then we'd know who had died and their loved ones could properly mourn them.

"No one deserved that," I muttered, while wondering how my voice could be so calm and serious at this moment.

I wasn't the only one with such an opinion.

"Few in life ever get what they deserve," Kira observed dryly, never stopping her vigil, with all the wisdom of a survivor. "May their Gods grant them peace in the next life," she whispered.

True words.

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After only a few more steps we found ourselves in another open room with another very high ceiling, one with a path that led up a small embankment before the path snaked deeper into the ship.

Once we had followed that path we found something that simply took my breath away.

"Look at all of them," Kira said in awe.

There were tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of these honeycomb cells that were embedded into the walls, some of them lit up while others were dark.

"On the ceiling too," I heard Ro mutter.

Above us were even more cells, many of which were lit up. I idly wondered if most of the Collectors were sleeping, like the Wraith from Stargate Atlantis did between cullings, or if this was some kind of giant breeding and maturation chamber. If this was how they grew soldiers, the alpha quadrant was in some truly deep shit.

"Gothic, I'm getting something on the tricorder; there are no active life signs in any of those...cells or enclosures, whatever they are, that are dark, but they aren't empty," she told me.

Clearly there had been some real damage done to this mobile hive by the galaxy-class starship, something that had affected the entire craft. If this was a weakness common to their ships then we really needed to discover it, if at all possible, and there was no telling if the *Ticuma's* sensor records and logs would even be recoverable.

"If these aliens are bugs, or bug-like, like you mentioned, then they may use those... pods, I guess you could call them, to stay dormant till needed, maybe to conserve resources on long journeys," Ro speculated. "I think the dark ones failed and the light ones are empty. So not all the Collectors died; some must have woken up."

That would explain why we'd seen no aliens so far, and why that one room we'd been in had been so messy. The aliens who would normally clean up those messes, and keep an eye on the shuttle bay, must be dead, or reassigned to effect repairs. Those not in the combs, were probably

busy repairing this craft too. I didn't have the heart to share my guess as to the purpose of this room.

Then I spotted some movement far off, on the other side of this cavernous space. A couple of Collectors were dragging what I guessed was a desperately struggling human woman in a Starfleet uniform over towards a vault-like door. I put my rifle up to my eye and magnified the view with my targeting scope. The human woman was desperately trying to escape, but she wasn't strong enough and she was too far away to hear. The door opened to show a giant Collector, of a type that I had never seen before, but I suspected that it was their equivalent of a breeding queen. Thumbing a switch, I set my targeting scope to record what I was seeing.

I didn't hear a scream of terror, but I didn't need to as I knew the woman must have called out in abject terror as the queen gripped her tightly and brought her head first into its open mouth, biting off her head, then swallowing the rest of the woman whole.

For a few moments I just stood there, in shock, not quite believing what I had just seen. That act had been far more horrific than anything that the Cardassians had ever done to the Bajorans.

"We should get out of sight," urged Kira fearfully. Seeing someone eaten whole was a completely justified cause for fear, no matter how much of a badass you were. You got a pass on that one *from everyone*.

Given how high up some of the cells were, with no seemingly safe way to get down, there was a distinct possibility that there could be flying Collectors around who could spot us, so I decided to go with Kira's suggestion and we backed the fuck out of there and left as quickly and stealthily as we could. While I had been tempted to send a few shots at that Collector queen, there was little chance enough would hit and do any kind of significant damage before her minions stood in the way or she retreated. That was ignoring how unlikely it'd be for us to leave alive if we drew that much attention. No, we had to be smart if we wanted to get out of this alive and with our data in hand.

As it turned out, near the shuttle bay were some rooms that were likely meant to serve the needs of the Collectors who went out on missions. There was an armory, and what I guessed to be a restroom, maybe, although I tried not to think about that any more than I had to. There was also a chamber with bits of bio-armor in it. I was itching to get my hands on these weapons and armor and hopefully figure out what made them tick to improve my own equipment. Glancing between all the goodies in front of me, my duffel bag was feeling decidedly inadequate for this task. I really needed to up my opportunistic looting skills and bring along transporter tags so that I could grab tons of these weapons and beam them back to my ship. My bag just wasn't big enough!

While in the armory I grabbed a couple of rifles, it had a barrel and a trigger like a gun, and I'd used one before, yet it was still very alien to me. Still, I'd seen what these things could do and knew they packed a big punch. I placed a few blocks of C4 on one of the weapon racks; the secondary explosions from these weapons should make quite a bang.

Next I picked up what I figured were grenades, however for all I knew they could be life form scanners, or transport pattern enchanters, or even emergency rations. Only proper study of the objects would let me determine their true purpose.

I also grabbed several examples of their bio armor, which I was hoping I could learn from to improve my own. The few pieces I'd recovered on that one planet had been damaged by the sheer amount of times I'd shot the alien to actually kill them. These were intact with no damage.

After that we ducked inside another room and found what I guessed to be a sick bay of some kind. Only it was looked more like a dissection lab out of a horror movie than anything else I could imagine. Instead of a Roswell Grey being taken apart, though, it was a human who had been dissected by the aliens, her chest cavity and pelvis open to the air, her face locked in a rictus of terror. To my horror, it looked like this woman had been alive when they had started dissecting her. Ro finally lost the battle with her stomach and threw up in the corner of the room. Kira still looked fine; she had an iron clad stomach.

The women with me didn't look at the evil science project again, which I soon vaporized, but only after again getting a visual record and DNA scan. And it was only after doing that for the second time that I began to wonder about the lack of any alarms. A weapon discharge strong enough to vaporize an entire body would have set off every alarm known to man on a Starfleet ship after all. Once that was done, and we'd planted some more C4, we got to work.

We left the room and next found a space that looked like it was used to analyze any technology they stole or otherwise acquired from their victims. We found several pieces of technology I recognized, from Starfleet to Breen to Romulan. Looks like the Collectors had been on an acquisition mission.

Kira kept an eye on the door and corridor while Ro tried to interface with something that looked kind of like a computer. It fit the design aesthetic of the rest of this ship so we figured it was Collector tech. Meanwhile I pocketed a few more small things lying around, including a few pieces of Breen tech, considering the Federation knew so little about that race and its technology. I had little clue what they were or what they did, but they looked exotic enough to be worth studying, reverse engineering and/or selling. Maybe all of the above.

"Anything?" I asked Ro after a minute, sounding very hopeful.

The former Starfleet officer didn't immediately reply, and I was about to ask again when the Bajoran woman finally spoke.

"My tricorder was able to get some information, but only a fraction of what's in these databases," I was told. "I need a frame of reference to understand how its organized, though."

I'd seen no other computers, but we'd only explored a tiny fraction of this giant craft, and mostly nearly the shuttle bay where we'd entered, so for all I knew there could be whole rooms full of the things somewhere around here.

"These aliens are related to the ancient Hur'q, if that helps you interface with their systems," I shared.

“It does,” she answered succinctly.

'Hur'q' was a Klingon word meaning 'outsider', it was the name given by the Klingons to a species from the Gamma Quadrant who had invaded and plundered Qo'noS in the 14th century. Among the most valuable artifacts stolen by the Hur'q was the Sword of Kahless.

This I already knew and I'd even seen pictures. The Hur'q were insectoid scavengers, whose physiology resembled that of army ants and who wore armor like that of a samurai.

They had plundered much of the galaxy before the majority of their race had been trapped in another dimension over a thousand years ago. With most of their fleet lost, the Hur'q would eventually vanish, but they did leave elite units of Kam'Jahtae warriors in stasis, to awaken in the distant future, perhaps in the hopes of bringing the Hur'q civilization back to its former glory.

The Collectors were like the Mirror Universe version of the Hur'q, or possibly the Hur'q that had been exiled now trying to return after changing their race greatly.

They now wore advanced bio-armor that covered their entire bodies. Making them look like the Collectors from Mass Effect 2, which was why I had given them that name. Only these aliens were far more advanced, and as far as I knew weren't under anyone's control.

"According to the data I can access these are no longer Hur'q, as they were once known," Ro explained, summarizing the data she was reviewing. "Their DNA shows distinct signs of extensive genetic rewrite, and they've added cybernetic devices to their young. They probably went through generations of genetic engineering as well to get to this point, but I'm no xenobiology expert."

Now I was starting to wonder if the Collectors could actually be considered Hur'q *augments*. Which was a really scary thought.

"Their system is actually really easy to use once you understand the interface," Ro said. "It's all one big computer system really, with very little in the way of data security or silo'd information. I have access to so much information!"

I thought fast once again.

"Get the blueprints for this ship first, and anything else you can find that might help if they attack the Federation," I ordered. "Like a file labeled 'Galactic Conquest Plans', stuff like that. Save it all locally and try to uplink to my ship's memory banks."

Ro grabbed my tricorder and placed it on the alien computer.

"I'll need the extra memory storage and bandwidth," she said by way of explanation.

I tapped my comm badge, "Computer, establish interlink with our tricorders acting as signal relays, begin continuous download."

Clearly the Collectors didn't worry much about outsiders getting into their computer systems, and their physical security was a joke too. There were no patrols, no intruder alarms, the only way this could have been more easy was if there were sign posts to guide us to all the really

important places on the ship, but I had a feeling this ship was normally crawling with Collectors and what we were doing would be impossible under normal circumstances.

I was once again wondering if this could all be an overly elaborate trap, but it seemed unlikely as they would have sprung it by now. This whole situation didn't make sense, and not for the first time I wondered if the Collectors were a really alien species, in the truest sense of the word, as in the way they thought about and viewed the universe was fundamentally and profoundly different than our own.

For all their differences, races like Humanity, the Klingons, the Cardassians and the Romulans had a hell of a lot in common. I knew from TNG that was due to a race known as the Preservers, who'd long ago seeded virtually all life in this galaxy. When compared to the utter strangeness of the Collectors we all might as well have all been considered the same species.

These augmented Hur'q, on the other hand, were nothing like the rest of us and were just as dangerous as the Borg, if not more so, but at least we knew they could be beaten. I'd killed enough of them to know that they were mortal and could die like anything else, but numbers had a power all its own and we'd seen several examples of advanced technology that was beyond anything available in the alpha quadrant.

While I waited I did some more looking around and found some small creatures in vats of bubbling liquid. They looked like bugs of some kind, like a scorpion perhaps. Oddly, I was almost sure that I'd seen them somewhere before.

It took a while, as I had a lot of random bits of Trek knowledge stored in my head, and even after going through my memories I couldn't be totally sure, but I suspected that these bugs were the same parasites that had nearly taken over Starfleet Command. I wondered if the Collectors had made them, or were just studying them. I also suddenly wondered how Section 31 had dropped the ball so badly on that whole alien parasite fiasco. Section 31 had existed even before the Federation had, as such they would have been active during that sort of invasion.

"Oh Prophets!" Ro suddenly called out, sounding alarmed. "We have to return to the ship!"

She didn't bother to explain, and I didn't ask anything more.

Tapping my comm badge I called the ship and ordered an emergency beam out, letting the ladies go first.

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Cockpit. *The Flighty Temptress.*

As it turned out following Ro's call to abort had been a very wise decision, as mere seconds after flying my ship out of the shuttle bay of the Collector Hive ship, which was what I'd decided to call the thing, at a very unsafe speed I might add, the whole thing had gone to FTL.

We'd flown out so fast that I wasn't even sure that I had actually set off the C4 as the low-tech detonator I'd replicated had a limited range. Not that it mattered too much, as I'd put the detonators on a backup timer as well, just in case we'd been captured and needed a handy

distraction while escaping. I wasn't making any overconfident rookie mistakes if I could help it, those I'll leave for my enemies.

I was still in disbelief, though. The Hive was the size of a fucking small moon and it had just warped away like it was a normal ship. Seeing something that large go to warp was scary and jarring as fuck, let me tell you. From what little I knew about the science of this time, it shouldn't have even been possible for something that large to do that. The subspace field required would have to be massive, and the power requirements staggering. These aliens obviously had technology that was far more advanced than our own and that was scary.

Now that the Collector ship had left the area, I had planned on giving aid to the Starfleet ship, only we hadn't needed to as another Starfleet ship had soon turned up coming out of high warp, ready to do battle. The second Federation vessel had received the retransmitted distress call from the *Ticuma* that we'd sent, and had spotted us leaving the Collector Hive on their sensors. Its captain was suspicious and had questioned us. To ease the building tension, I sent them our scans of the various Federation corpses we'd taken, along with some other scans we'd taken, but had held back the majority of the other data and certainly not the alien database we'd partially downloaded.

Once that had been done tensions eased somewhat and the captain of the new ship had pretty much told us to politely fuck off, saying that the system was now off limits to civilians while the events here were being investigated. Either they didn't like civilians doing their job, or they knew I was an Augment. I wouldn't have been surprised if it was both. Thankfully our ship hadn't been searched so they'd not realized that we had stolen quite a bit of alien technology from the alien vessel.

The disdain in the captain's voice had been annoying, but so far the only people I'd met who even cared that I was genetically enhanced were those in Starfleet. Talk about prejudice from unexpected sources! Everyone else barely found it worth talking about, and as for the two Bajoran women I was with it barely merited a reaction after I'd told them, though they did express happiness at how it improved my sex game.

Those two Bajoran females were currently flying the ship as we travelled away from the area at warp. Sticking around right now seemed like a bad idea.

While Ro piloted the ship I once again donned the neural control interface and took a deep dive into the scans and data we'd taken from the Collector ship. My Augmented mind, aided by the power of my ship's computer, studied all this new data. Thank goodness my ship's computers and processing power had been upgraded recently; there was *a lot* of data here.

As I suspected the craft we'd encountered was, in fact, a mobile hive, though that's not what the Collectors called it in their language. According to the blueprints of the hive, it wasn't armed or even shielded though. It was armored, in a sense, but only by virtue of so much rock forming its shell. This wasn't as odd as it might seem as the Collectors, or Hur'q, or whatever, were bugs, and the primary defense of a beehive were the bees themselves.

I'd seen the Collectors fight before; they used expendable fighter craft, so expendable that they would literally throw themselves at the enemy in whatever numbers it took to destroy them should their weapons be insufficient, caring nothing for preserving their own lives. That was a very dangerous enemy to fight, especially since it was so contrary to the prevailing combat doctrine of the alpha quadrant. Our ships and defenses just weren't designed for an enemy using those kinds of tactics.

That must have been how the Galaxy Class had been crippled so badly against a ship with no weapons of its own. The fighters would have rammed it in great numbers, thinking to destroy it like they had the Klingon Bird of Prey, only the bigger and tougher Federation starship had not been blown apart.

The hive's lack of any real shields also explained how the *Ticuma* could have potentially disabled it. I didn't know for sure, but it seemed likely that the Starfleet ship had transported a bunch of photon torpedos near whatever they had in place of a warp core or some other vital piece of technology on the Hur'q hive ship. That would explain why the hive had lost main power.

Another thing I found out, and this was pretty shocking by itself, was that the Hur'q hive we were just on was only considered something akin to a scout ship. Its only mission had been to come to this dimension, look around and confirm that it was really home. Which meant that not only were there more hives out there, but that they also had *much* bigger ships. Wasn't that just plain horrifying? There was even a reference to something called a 'world ship,' which my guess was a planet-sized version of the craft I'd just been onboard. Never had I wanted to be wrong so badly before.

Given that the Hur'q of legend had been exiled to another dimension, it made sense that they'd want to come home. Many creatures had powerful instincts to return home after all, though it could be good old-fashioned revenge for their exile, assuming they even thought like that.

They could have been scouting many universes before they had found the right one; that might actually explain why the ones I'd encountered before had taken the rift making device to what had to have been an old Terran Empire outpost. Some of them must have already scouted out that particular universe and found that it wasn't their home.

There was a lot more information in the files Ro had downloaded, but it would take months, if not years, to study it all in detail. I had a good feeling that there would be plenty of worthwhile data here, but I just didn't have the time to really do a deep dive, at least not right now while I still had my mission on Bajor to complete. Section 31 would be better able to make use of the information.

There was little I could do about the Collectors' coming invasion--which I was sure would happen one day knowing my particular luck--other than to help build a stronger Bajor to eventually join the Federation and do everything I could to improve my own situation and capabilities.

Still, that wouldn't stop me from studying this information with whatever time I had left before we arrived back on Bajor. There could be something useful in there that could help us counter

these pseudo Hur'q. In the meantime, I had a ton of information to sell, technology to scan and reverse engineer and use to create wonderful new things to better my chances for survival, and an urge to have an epic tension relieving threesome with my beautiful Bajoran girls.

Surviving an extremely dangerous situation had that effect on people. Life affirming sex for the win!

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