

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

Last time on The Adventures of Augment Gothic

We'd finally arrived at our destination and my ship was now approaching the planet, a world with alternating horizontal bands of white and a verdant green. It was just as beautiful and alien as I remembered. I had kept my destination secret from the entire crew and had even sent T'Maz off the bridge to assist B'Elanna. I had also ordered Scarlett to prevent any ship systems from providing information to the crew on our current location. The ship's armor was also still deployed to prevent anyone from looking out a window. Handheld tricorders or other sensory devices not connected to the ship itself would also be blocked.

I suspected T'Maz realized that I was keeping this information from her and the others, but as a longtime Section 31 operative, she easily accepted that some information would not be shared with her. B'Elanna and Neela were unlikely to be as accepting as her, but I was keeping them sufficiently distracted and busy with the data from our slipstream journey.

As expected, I received a one-way hail from the planet below. Accepting the one-way communication, the Peddler, who I had renamed 'Carl' in a fit of whimsy, based on a used car salesman I had once dealt with in my old life, appeared on the screen. He still rocked his signature look with white puffs of hair on either side of his head, but instead of the vapid, welcoming smile seen on the show, he bore a serious expression this time.

"Incoming starship, you have entered the restricted space of Minos, the 'Arsenal of Freedom.' By order of the Arcon of Minos, Minos and its star system is closed, until further notice, to all travelers and visitors. You are ordered to please depart the system immediately. I repeat, you are ordered to please depart the system immediately. Failure to acknowledge this warning may result in your ship being destroyed, or impounded and crew killed. Have a wonderful day and journey back to where you came from."

I stood up and opened a two-way communications channel.

"Hello Carl," I greeted, an evil looking smile on my face. "I'm back."

His evil smile in return, of anticipation and happiness, would have made a lesser man tremble.

The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Chapter 38

Bridge. Onboard The *Flighty Temptress*. In Orbit of Planet Minos.

"Welcome back, Arcon, to Minos, the Arsenal of Freedom," Carl greeted that same semi-evil looking, but vapid smile on his face. I idly wonder if that 'Arsenal of Freedom' tagline could be

removed from his greeting protocols. “Per security protocols, you are required to submit real time identity confirmation sensor readings and authentication codes. Please do so within the next 30 seconds or risk your ship’s immediate destruction.”

“Acknowledged, Carl. Sending now,” I replied with a smile at the request, my bridge’s sensors shooting different colored sensor beams at my body to scan my body in real time before sending the results to Carl for confirmation that I was who I said I was, in this case, Gothic, the Arcon of Minos.

These extremely intense and invasive sensor scans were examining me on several dozen different levels and would prove that I was *not* a changeling, or a hologram, or even a clone copy of myself. The ship’s transporter system was even taking several small physical samples for study, including blood, brain fluid, even semen. A perfect copy of me from another dimension would even fail this scan. Section 31’s most pedantic and paranoid operatives would probably be impressed at just how complete and wide-ranging my identity conformation was.

The last time I was here I had been extremely afraid that my new position and planet would be usurped somehow. My paranoia was further inflamed by the acute terror that this planet killing weapon could potentially turn on me too. In hindsight, my adventure on Minos had been a *terrible* risk to take, perhaps one that shouldn’t have been taken at all, but one that had paid off handsomely many times over in the years since, even with being unable to return till this moment. You couldn’t argue with results like that. What I had accomplished in the years since I’d come here, after weeks of drowning myself in Risian pussy, was only possible due to what I had learned on Minos.

I remained completely still as the sensor beams continued to scan me and I grew even more introspective. A lot had happened in the years since I’d last come here. In some ways I had grown wiser and more experienced—I certainly had more resources and overall capabilities than I had before—but had I lost a bit of my edge? Had I fallen into the common trap of someone in my position, where they cared too much about preserving their future knowledge? As I was today, would I have taken the risk that Minos presented? Had I lost something? Or gotten too comfortable in this new life? I wasn’t sure.

My candid and harsh introspection and self-evaluation was interrupted by my ship’s sensor beams abruptly cutting off and the scan information was transmitted to the planet through our active comm link.

Carl’s face on the screen went unnaturally still as his system’s processing power was obviously taxed by the intensive analysis of the readings he was studying and comparing them to what I had left before. It was a full 10 seconds before he spoke again, all the while I kept my ship’s shields and armor deployed, just in case anything I had done to my body in the years since qualified as enough of a deviation that I no longer fit my old identity parameters.

That was a real danger when you got too paranoid with your security systems. Unlike androids, flesh and blood beings were in a constant state of change and I had added some tech into my body itself. Many an overly paranoid person had gotten too cutesy with their security systems

and hadn't built in enough deviation tolerance and their own security had killed them. *Fuck around and find out, indeed*, as the saying went. That would be a stupid fucking way to end my adventure in this new dimension. Killed by my own shit. How pathetic that would be.

"Identity confirmed," Carl said with a wide smile and my internal sigh of relief. "Please send authentication codes."

With a thought I sent a data package containing the stupidly complex mix of words and numbers and colors and sensory impressions that constituted my 'password.' If some cloning genius managed to get this far, the plan was that they'd hopefully stumble over this part of my security.

"Authentication codes accepted. Welcome home, Arcon," Carl replied. "Minos is yours, once again."

With that pronouncement, like an eager puppy, the planet's many integrated computer systems reached out to initiate an eager interlink handshake with my ship's computer systems, which I instructed Natasha to allow. Like a blooming flower, the planet's systems opened up to me to show what it had previously hidden, the codes to pierce the sensor dispersion field hiding the planet and orbit from my sensors freely given.

"Status report, please," I ordered from my standing position, watching as more and more was revealed to me in orbit of the planet. I idly confirmed that the rest of my crew were occupied with other tasks.

"In order to execute your final orders before departing Minos, the Echo Papa 607 weapons system was scaled up tremendously," Carl answered. "387 orbital defense platforms were manufactured and deployed into orbit. The defense net is currently fully operational and has undergone routine testing since initial deployment. The sensor dispersion field is also fully operational and provides full sensor blocking for the whole planet."

"Yes, I see the new projection installations built on the surface. Good work; I couldn't pierce the dispersion field even with my ship's powerful sensors," I responded, nodding, mentally reviewing what my sensors were telling me. "Why can't I see the defense net?"

"While the defense net is hidden from enemy sensors by the dispersion field, which extends into high orbit, each unit has its own internal and independent cloaking system providing two layers of sensor and visual obscurity," Carl gushed, sounding excited, like the good salesman and weapons expert that he had been programmed to be.

"I'm impressed," I said, and I really was. "Do I have full control of its command systems?"

"Yes. As Arcon, you have full control," Carl said, always eager to please.

Bringing up a holographic interface in front of me, the command systems for all Minosian technology within the system was displayed. It was an incredibly intuitive and easy to use interface design since it was intended to be used by Minos' many alien customers, many of whom did not actually have the requisite scientific and technological knowledge to create these systems themselves. The Minosians most definitely did not have their own version of the Prime

Directive. If anything, their Prime Directive was based entirely on whether someone could pay the bill.

Tapping a few controls, I commanded all cloaking in system to temporarily disengage. Immediately, spots all around the orbital space of the planet became blurry, like a desert mirage shifting and moving, before large defense platforms became visible to the naked eye. However, that wasn't the true showstopper. The truly impressive sight were the three gigantic anti-ship weapon drones that surrounded my ship. It was the same drone design that had attacked the *Enterprise* in canon and nearly destroyed them. One had already been built and deployed in orbit when I had arrived years ago and my final orders before leaving the planet had been to build two more, which had obviously been carried out.

"I see you built the two anti-ship drones, like I ordered," I said idly, while continuing to review the systems' logs.

"Yes, production was carried out ahead of schedule and have been useful in driving away alien visitors from the system," Carl answered, that same smile always on his face.

I looked up sharply at the viewscreen at those words.

"Explain," I demanded, not yet having gotten to any reference to alien visitors in the drone logs.

"There were 17 incursions into Minoasian space since your departure from Minos, all but one was turned away without significant incident," Carl calmly answered, his smile finally leaving his face when he obviously detected my abrupt change in mood. "Per your final orders, '*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, then carry out my orders.*'"

My own words were repeated back to me in my own voice, which wasn't at all creepy to see coming out of Carl's digital mouth. When dealing with a virtual intelligence you had to be extremely careful with your orders, especially one that would be left alone for years at a time

"Show me the 17 incursions," I ordered.

Immediately, like a video slideshow of alien vessels, sensor readings and playbacks of all these encounters played for me, including Carl's initial warnings by hail and their responses in return. Most of the alien races and ships were unknown to me, most likely independent worlds in this largely uncharted region of space that had had some diplomatic or trading relationship with the Minoasians. Thank the Prophets and my Patron that I had taken steps to prevent anyone else from taking Minos from me or realizing the opportunity that it presented.

From the semi-lengthy conversations Carl had had with a few of these visitors over comms—I had, after all, instructed him to *politely* warn them away---it was clear that several had been former customers. Like an eager puppy, the Minoasian database offered up customer relationship profiles on a few of them detailing past sales and providing more information on their worlds, species, enemies, and past conflicts the Minoasians had assisted them with. Most of these had

come trying to figure out why Minos had gone off the galactic map and both stopped communicating with anyone or selling their weapons and technology.

Again, most of these reluctantly accepted Carl's words and promptly left without incident, their ships being too primitive to be a true threat and them knowing it, though some of the more powerful had become belligerent and angry that their preferred weapon supplier was suddenly turning them away instead of selling to them like they always had in the past. In a few cases, a few had required warning shots on their shields before they got the point and promptly left the system.

From the sensor readings I had of these ships, there were some interesting pieces of technology that I would have loved to have gotten my hands on, but given the enmity this might earn from species I really didn't know much about, Carl had done the right thing. Greed needed to be tempered. In canon, I suspected these contacts had similarly happened, but the Echo Papa system had likely destroyed them all.

There were two incursions that truly caught my eye and I had a feeling that they were related in some way given the relationship between the two parties. The timing was also incredibly suspicious.

"Begin playback of incursions kappa and lamda," I ordered, the video playback beginning of the incursions from when the relevant ships entered Minosian space. Carl's face appeared on screen and his hail to the ship in system was heard.

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"Minos, this is Captain Paul Rice of the U.S.S. Drake, representing the United Federation of Planets. We have been dispatched by Starfleet Command to investigate Minos' ... disappearance from the larger galaxy, including reports that the planet has become unpopulated. Can you please help us understand these reports?"

At this, Carl's face went still for a brief moment, indicating that his systems were trying to develop an answer that would politely send the *Drake* off, but not reveal the truth. After a quick review of my memories, I don't recall ever *specifically* telling Carl to hide the fact that the Minosian civilization had been destroyed and its people all killed. Hopefully he'd recognize that my other orders were meant to hide the true state of Minos and answer accordingly. That was a terrible oversight on my part. I only hoped that Carl didn't reveal too much.

"Of course, Captain Rice. After a few unfortunate incidents and business transactions with our customers, ones that had unexpected consequences, Minos has chosen to enter a period of isolation and cultural introspection as we reexamine our values and belief systems. As such we have halted weapon sales and deployed an advanced sensor dispersion field which is obscuring

your sensors. This is likely why you mistakenly believe that the planet has become unpopulated. We humbly request that you honor our request for isolation and give us the time to do some much needed soul searching as a people.”

Rice glanced off screen, most likely at his first officer to determine what they thought of this, but looked accepting of these words, then turned back to face the viewscreen. Carl’s response was perfectly tailored for Federation sensibilities and I couldn’t be more impressed. His brief pause was most likely his systems going through the Federation database that it had taken from my ship when it had first scanned me years ago, and then trying to determine the best response the Federation would both accept and cause them to leave. The subtle suggestion that they were reexamining their profit motivated worldview, one where they sold extremely advanced weapons to any who would pay regardless of their species’ level of development? Starfleet and the Federation would eat that shit up with a smile.

“Would the great people of Minos be open to exploring a dialog with the Federation as you conduct this cultural introspection and soul searching? The Federation would be honored to send some of our best diplomats, sociologists, philosophers, or any other subject matter experts that you believe could assist your people in this time of change.”

“The Federation’s offer is generous, Captain Rice, but this is something we must do alone, for great change must always come from within.”

“I quite agree, sir. We will promptly depart your space, but please know that our offer is always open should you change your mind. Drake out.”

And with that, the *Drake* quickly departed, never knowing that my actions had prevented the ship’s destruction and the death of its entire crew. I had to give credit to Carl, he was masterful in adapting a message perfect for Federation sensibilities and had anticipated, based on my other actions, that I did not wish anyone to learn of Minos’ true fate. Federation idealism and their desire to induct everyone they could into the organization (and their way of thinking, though they would never admit that!) had done the rest.

“That was excellent work, Carl,” I praised aloud, knowing the VI could hear me as he was standing by to assist. “Please log in your standing orders that the fate of Minos, its current unpopulated state or anything related to its destruction, not be disclosed to anyone besides myself.”

“Thank you, Arcon,” Carl said looking extremely happy at my praise. “New standing order logged.”

“Begin playback of the next incursion,” I ordered, video and sensor readings showing the next incursion appearing onscreen. “You have got to be fucking kidding me.”

Onscreen was yet another familiar sight, that of 3 Klingon warships, a huge Vor’cha-class cruiser, the flagship design of the Klingon fleet, and 2 smaller Birds of Prey. The two classes present were both modern, but early iterations of the class and had clearly seen some hard light years and battles over their years of service. The Klingons historically used this kind of wolf

pack grouping for long-range missions of resource acquisition (aka stealing, looting, pirating, etc.) or the conquest of worlds with light to light-medium defenses.

Checking the star date stamp, I saw that it was only 2 months after the *Drake* had visited Minos, which was quite the coincidence. Had the Klingons been monitoring Federation ship movements this far out in the middle of nowhere? Or had they more likely intercepted a communication?

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“Minos, I am Captain Klee’tah of the armies of the Great Klingon House of Duras. We require weapons! And you will give them to us!”

“I am sorry, Captain Klee-tah, but our world and its star system are closed until further notice, by order of the Arcon, our planetary leader, thus we have suspended all weapon sales at this time. Please depart the system immediately.”

The bloodthirsty arrogant smile on his face, like Carl had just said something amusing, told me that this encounter would likely not go well or end peacefully.

“You misunderstand me, worm. I said you will give us weapons! Give them to use or we will rain fire down on your world and take them from the corpses of your people! But perhaps a demonstration of our sincerity is in order.”

With those words I watched as the Vor’cha’s fearsome main disrupter canon lit up ominously before a large sea green sphere of disrupter energy shot towards the planet. The Klingon captain had likely chosen a spot at random given the sensor dispersion field, but it still would have had grave consequences for the planet, even at this long range.

Several moments later, long before the energy had a chance to strike the planet’s surface, the disrupter canon’s green energy detonated explosively against a translucent energy shield being projected by several defense platforms that momentarily flared into visibility as the energy from the shield and the canon shot temporarily disrupted the defense grid’s cloaking in that section.

Carl’s vapid smile turned evil and bloodthirsty in a moment.

“Klingon, you have chosen...poorly.”

The communication between them suddenly cut off, “Carl, was that an Indiana Jones reference?” I asked incredulously.

“Yes, Arcon, it was found in your ship’s personal cultural database,” Carl freely admitted. “Did I use it incorrectly?”

I slowly shook my head at the sheer absurdity of my life these days. I subtly glanced around me just in case a fucking boulder started rolling towards me out of nowhere.

“No, it was pretty well done,” I said, my face lighting up due to the bright flashes in the video’s playback.

The orbital defense platforms began firing immediately on the three ships with thick beams of burnt orange energy, gradually ramping up their power with each shot according to the battle logs from this battle.

“Carl, why are the defense platforms not firing at full power?” I asked, eyes still glued to the screen.

“As your orders indicated impounding the ship was an option, it was deemed more profitable to attempt capture of the enemy vessels first,” Carl explained. “Should tactical analysis show mission success probability dropping below 70%, orders were given to immediately fire full power to either destroy or drives these ships away from our local space.”

“Hmm, I approve,” I replied quietly.

The battle was rather one-sided as the cloaked defense platforms in orbit continued to pepper the ships with increasingly more powerful shots as the Klingon ships’ shield strength was continuously analyzed. The Klingons attempted to fire on the cloaked platforms, but the platforms had been designed to randomly adjust their positions to make return fire much harder. When the three cloaked anti-capital ship drones entered the battle, it was all but over.

Whole sections of the shield grid of the three ships were purposely targeted and hit repeatedly in order to cause a brief failure in that section, despite the desperate evasive maneuvers the ships were engaging in. When the shield failed in that targeted section, dozens of drones were beamed into the ship to begin pacifying the ships. *Pacifying*, in this case, was a euphemism for the wholesale ruthless extermination of the ship’s entire crew complement. In the case of the undermanned Vor’cha class ship, which normally had a complement of 1,900 flight crew and soldiers, that was a little over a thousand Klingons.

Gradually, as the drones killed more and more of the crew and took over critical sections of the ship, the ships slowly started to stop fighting, letting more of the shield grid fail, and thus more drones could be beamed inside. Before the end, three new generations of drone designs were created and deployed to adapt to the tactics, strategies, and security/defense capabilities of the Klingons and their ships.

It was a frightening demonstration of cold, ruthless efficiency and another stark reminder that this weapon system had killed all of its brilliant creators, eliminating an entire race.

“Good work, Carl,” I said with a calm voice, carefully modulating my tone to hide my thoughts and feelings at this display. “Where are the Vor’cha and the Birds of Prey now?”

“They are in secure impound facilities,” he said, a glowing red dot suddenly appearing on a depiction of the planet along with coordinates. “All damage sustained during battle has been

repaired per the technical databases found on the ships' onboard computers; the ships' other databases have also been downloaded for your review."

Huh. That was efficient. Pulling up Captain Klee'tah's personal log gave the game away. The man, like many arrogant Klingons, cared little for operational security so it was all laid out right in his log. The Duras family had compromised several Federation long-range subspace communication relays and had used the intelligence it granted them for years, typically selling it to third parties or acting on it themselves if something should prove particularly enticing. In this case, Captain Rice's report to Starfleet had been intercepted and they had learned about the Minosians and their current situation. Section 31 might find that information worth paying for. Alternately, I could just keep the intelligence for myself.

In the Klingons' minds maybe that translated to the Minosians abandoning their weapon mongering ways and making them ripe for the picking. Who knows. They simply wanted the Minosians' advanced weapons to continue their civil war. Interestingly, I speculated that the unexplained loss of these ships had hurt the Duras family's war efforts and had forced them to rely on their Romulan allies even more than originally planned. In a sense, my inadvertent actions had struck yet another blow against them and their cause. Go me!

"Arcon, in preparation for your arrival, the capital city has been restored, including the Arcon's traditional palace headquarters," Carl gushed, looking eager to please. "I hope you will enjoy your work on the planet."

"I'm sure I will, Carl," I said with a smile. "Please shut down for now."

Carl immediately disappeared from the screen and I confirmed the command link to the entire planet's systems remained at full strength, including the full emergency authority and powers granted to me by virtue of being Arcon. My smile fell from my face.

I had had over two years to learn everything I could about Minosian computer architecture and programming, even used much of what I had learned to develop my VIs, armor, and ship's programming. With the powerful mental abilities of an Augment of my level, well, I imagine my current grasp of their technology probably rivaled or even exceeded their top computer scientists when they'd still been alive, especially since my knowledge had come from multiple advanced races.

"Natasha, Hermione," I called aloud, summoning them. "Prepare to upload the Minos system update package. I want you to monitor the changes and take action if anything goes wrong. Alert me immediately if there are any anomalies."

"Understood, my lord/father," they said together, as they'd taken to doing lately.

After crossing my fingers and taking a deep breath, I mentally initiated the upload.

Within 30 seconds, systems all over the planet began to shut down as their core programming was being updated due to the emergency override powers granted to me as Arcon. I had learned a lot over the years and had come up with numerous additional safeguards to prevent the Echo Papa system from turning against me. Much of what I was doing was exactly what I had built

into every VI which served me, including Hermione and Natasha. Just like with them, the new programming went far beyond Asimov's 3 Laws. The core programming all over the planet would preserve my life and safety as a top priority, but would value my freedom of choice and agency even higher. Under a set of elaborate conditions, including my death, I had put self-destruction orders in place to keep these weapons from falling into the wrong hands or running amok with no one left to control them.

Amongst the many changes being written into their code was also the redefinition/reclassification of the position of Arcon. Before, similar to the corporatocracies I'd seen in various dystopian movies, the Board of Directors of Minos had the power to depose/fire/replace the Arcon. There were numerous Minoan safeguards in place to prevent exactly what I was doing, but luckily there was no one left alive to protest my actions or do anything to stop my plans.

At the moment, of course, I was the only Minoan citizen alive, but the loopholes I'd once exploited could potentially be utilized by others in the future. Best to nip that in the bud by making myself akin to an absolute monarch with no ability for anyone to remove me. I'd even made the position hereditary, but only with my explicit consent, confirmation of successor, and no unexpected circumstances surrounding my abdication or death, so that none of my future children got the bright idea to assassinate me.

As the status bar in my mind reached its end, I readied the ship's engines to jump into warp at a moment's notice, my finger on the proverbial button should this fail and my extermination be ordered by some violation of Minoan law still left on the electronic books. With systems this complex, there was no way to be completely sure of anything.

All over the planet, the planet's systems booted back up to full operational readiness. System information began coming in and according to the logs, so far everything *appeared* to have gone as planned. The planet's defense net and the anti-ship drones were certainly not firing on me yet or ignoring my orders.

"Hermione, Natasha, have you detected any anomalies?" I asked quietly for some reason, maybe because of how tension filled this moment was.

Both were utterly still, staring out into the digital ether, before Hermione responded, "No, father, your work is impeccable, as always. Your changes have been integrated and accepted into the planet's core programming. We can detect no resistance to the changes made or any systems isolating themselves from the main command network."

I opened up a communications channel to the planet, Carl appearing on my screen a few moments later.

"Supreme Arcon," he greeted. "Do you require anything?"

I released a sigh of relief, "No, Carl. Also, sir or my lord is just fine most of the time. I'll be beaming down shortly and visiting my...palace headquarters."

“Very good, my Lord. I hope you will be pleased at our efforts to restore the capital,” he said with a smile, before the image cut off.

Guess it was time to see my new office.

XXXXX

50 Miles from Minoasian Capital. Planet Minos.

I heard nothing but the slow rhythmic thrumming of a guitar coming from my hoverbike’s studio grade speakers, feeling the bass beats practically vibrating my chest, and it was hyping me the fuck up! So, yeah, I couldn’t resist what I did next, though thankfully there was no one around to see it, or so I thought.

“Flash, ah-ah! Savior of the universe!!” I sang at the top of my lungs along with Freddy Mercury of Queen as I flew down from orbit into the strangely deep aqua blue sky of Minos approximately 50 miles from my new palace headquarters, a huge smile on my face. *“Flash, ah-ah, he’ll save every one of us!”*

When was the last time I had had silly fun like this?

I had chosen this distant starting point to both protect myself from any unexpected surprises, but also to get a bird’s eye view of my planet. Beaming in and out of places took away a lot of the best parts of travelling, as you missed so much of the beautiful sights along the way, so I thought, why not use my Hovercruiser 924 that had sat in storage for years?

Since restoring and rebuilding it back on Earth, I had had no opportunities to use it since. There were times during the Occupation I was tempted to use it, but using a 23rd century piece of human technology from Earth would have been a mistake on a hundred different levels and attract all the wrong kinds of high-level attention from the Cardassians.

Executing another high-speed turn at hundreds of miles per hour, I continued singing, really getting into the moment.

“Flash, ah-ah. He’s a miracle!” I sang loudly, doing a spin that had me flying upside down for several seconds, my modifications keeping me firmly locked in my seat. *“Flash, ah-ah. King of the impossible!”*

Speaking of impossible, my head snapped to the side with whiplash as I caught a flash of something out the corner of my eye, something which hadn’t shown up on my bike’s advanced sensors until a moment ago and by all things rational shouldn’t even exist. Flying right next to me, who my sensors were telling me was 100% real, was Flash Gordon himself, played by a young Sam Jones, flying on his ridiculous 1980s inspired flying rocket cycle, which looked kind of like an old Wave Runner. He threw a giant 1980s movie star smile at me in greeting, shooting his ‘bike’s’ weapons into the air, before he pointed beyond me to my right.

I turned my head and was again greeted by the impossible, specifically the bushy brown beard and exaggerated smile of Prince Vultan, played by a young Brian Blessed, his feathered wings flapping insufficiently to truly keep him aloft and flying. His long black mace held in one hand.

He flew closer, raising his head in the universally understood gesture of requesting a high five, which I happily gave him before he flew up and off into the distance, disappearing from my sensors.

Turning back to my left I gave Flash Gordon a high five too, his smile getting even larger before he rocketed off into the clouds.

I shook my head in fond exasperation at how ridiculous my life was and sent a mental ‘thank you’ and ‘well done’ to Q, who was the only one with a penchant for chaos and the requisite power to pull something like this off. I heard laughing on the wind.

I had added some synaptic control technology to the bike before taking it out today, so a holographic display popped between my handle bars at a mental command showing me where I was on the planet and giving me a heading back to my new capital city.

This far from the city the land underneath me was virtually an impassible jungle, the planet’s vegetation having taken back much of the land as the Minosians were gone. In a fit of whimsy, I activated my hovercruiser’s weapon system and pulled the trigger on my right handlebar, strafing the ground from a thousand feet in the air with powerful disrupter energy bolts. Every bolt that hit the vegetation and ground below plumed up in a deadly pulse of energy, causing explosions and vaporization and many small secondary fires. I left a long line of devastation below me.

Climbing ten thousand feet in a handful of seconds, I came to a complete stop in midair, the inertial dampers working hard to negate the forces that should have affected me after such a maneuver. With the slightest of movements on the controls, I started to very slowly rotate in place as I took in the amazing view of a planet that was for all intents and purposes, *mine*.

In my old life, I had not even owned my own home with a little piece of property to call my own, always living at my parents, or in base housing or otherwise had been on years-long deployments overseas. Now, though, I owned an entire world. How far I’d come in this new life, even if I couldn’t admit it to anyone and had to actively conceal the fact from even my crew and ladies, the people closest to me in this life.

Again, on a whim, I activated the missiles and micro-photon torpedo launchers hard mounted on my bike’s wings, and fired two micro photon torpedoes, set on low yield, on a random bit of forest that my sensor told me had nothing valuable concealed underneath. My target lit up like a miniature sun, like I had just fired two tactical nukes. My whimsy left a half mile impact crater and utter destruction. These were weapons that had been designed to be used on shielded targets in the depths of space, not on a planet’s surface where the air itself could help propagate secondary blast damage.

“Carl, dispatch some drones to the area that I just fired upon and make sure things don’t get out of control,” I ordered through my comm link.

“By your will, my lord,” Carl responded as drones were transported in to deal with the consequences of my actions. Not having to personally deal with the consequences of your own actions was a great perk of being the boss.

I stopped my rotation once I faced the large city I could see in the distance and suddenly gunned the engines at half speed. The city grew closer and closer at the speeds I was traveling and I was both impressed and a little surprised. The city's architecture and design aesthetics were obviously alien, but it was similar in many ways to advanced Federation worlds. There were historical buildings obviously from another era, but also large futuristic modern skyscrapers. There were also parks and other natural areas spread throughout the city, which suggested that the Minosians valued and enjoyed partaking in nature. That also might explain how quickly nature had overtaken such an advanced world after their species went extinct and no one was left to halt the spread of its growth.

The last time I was here this entire area had been overrun with growth, to the point that you could barely tell that a city had once been here. Carl and his army of drones must have been working for years to uncover and repair this city in preparation for my eventual return.

A dotted line with a waypoint was displayed showing me the way to the palace headquarters of the Arcon. As I approached closer and closer, that feeling of recognition got stronger and stronger.

The palace looked like an ancient pyramid-esque temple colored a sandy orange, which suggested it might be one of the oldest buildings in this city and likely had some historical significance. It sat on a large square piece of land and was like a multi-stepped pyramid with large angled towers on each of its four sides, which suggested that it had been added onto over the centuries. At full operation, it could likely house ten thousand government workers or administration comfortably. In the very middle, at the top level of the pyramid-like building, was a large square shaft that went straight down, likely providing natural light to much of the building's inhabitants.

That, alone, wasn't triggering my recognition. If I didn't know any better, I'd say that this was a faithful replica of the Tyrell Corporation headquarters from the 1980s movie *Blade Runner*, which was another favorite of mine and had been one of those movies that encouraged my love for science fiction. Was this Q fucking with me again? Did it really matter in the end?

I was directed to a large open-air balcony at the very top of the pyramid, in the middle of one of its sides. It was pretty clear to me that this was the best 'office' available and was thus the Arcon's.

Hovering over the balcony, my sensors scanned it to ensure that it was structurally sound enough to support my bike's full weight, which was considerable. While the palace headquarters looked archaic, as if made of ancient sandstone, there were some extremely advanced and strong materials being used under the surface and my sensors showed no issue with it setting down safely.

Piloting the bike down, I set it down expertly on the surface of the balcony and disengaged the anti-gravity generator and engines, its hum slowly coming to an end.

Walking up to the gigantic open-air opening that measured 50 feet by 50 feet, I smiled at this display of wealth and power; it fit perfectly with my image of a people obsessed with acquiring

wealth. There was obviously some advanced shielding in place to prevent high winds or inclement weather from disturbing the Arcon's work. In my time, corporate employees used to go ga ga over the corner office, but this office was the picture of an extremely powerful CEO/planetary leader, with a ridiculous amount of open and unused space to emphasize their power and authority.

I raised my left arm and had my omnitool take some intense scans of the room. The office was huge, with large stone pillars throughout the room. The floor was covered with some kind of native stone tiles polished to a near mirror finish. Near the balcony was a large beautiful desk, the size of a conference table, perhaps if the Arcon wanted to have meetings with his advisors they would meet around it.

Despite how refined and archaic this space looked, I had a suspicion, so I directed scans specifically at the pillars, the desk, the walls, and the floors. Just as I suspected, the room was inundated with advanced technologies, including sensors, holographic emitters, weapons, and advanced computers, including the command control system for the Echo Papa weapon system itself. I was glad I had my armor still fully deployed.

With a mental command, I linked to Carl and asked him to appear. A moment later he appeared in the center of the room in holographic form, the office's holoemitters projecting him.

"How can I be of service, my Lord," Carl asked with a smile, in that smarmy salesman voice that I've come to associate with him.

"You've done excellent work preparing the city for my arrival, Carl," I praised, turning to the large opening that showcased the city in all its alien beauty. The local star hung in the aqua blue sky, but it appeared more orange as we were approaching sunset. The shadows the large buildings of the city were casting were particularly captivating.

I don't know how long I took in the sight of my new capital city, but Carl did not interrupt. Snapping back to the here and now, I cleared my throat.

"I noticed that you moved the command-and-control system for the Echo Papa to this office," I stated, though it was clear that it was a question.

"I hope you do not mind, Supreme Arcon, but I felt you would want direct access to the system," he explained. "It is the master command and control interface for all sub units throughout the planet; all others are connected and linked to this unit. The Echo Papa system was scaled up thousands of times over in order to carry out your final orders and manufacture and deploy both the orbital defense net and the two ship-drones protecting Minos; as well as creating the drones designed to reclaim the city from decades of neglect. Does this displease you?"

"No, Carl, this was good thinking," I said, my mind running through all the angles. "Thank you for your foresight, please prepare a full and comprehensive report on everything you've done in order to carry out my previous orders."

"I will do so, my lord," Carl immediately stated.

“You may go,” I said and with a nod, and he did.

“Hermione, Natasha,” I called out aloud and into the digital ether and they instantly appeared in the room, glancing around my new office in an affectation of human behavior to make me more comfortable, even though it wasn’t strictly necessary for being like themselves. It was a nice touch and I appreciated them even more for it. With my control over Minos’ systems they had planted themselves deep inside the digital architecture and had access to the entire planet’s sensors and databases. “Begin stage 2, keep me up to date on your progress.”

“Understood, father/my lord,” they said, before they both disappeared.

Stage 2 was to upgrade the technology of Minos with everything that I had acquired over the years. Minos was an incredibly advanced world with technology that surpassed the Federation greatly in some areas, especially in weapons technology, but not in all areas. For example, due to their shortsightedness and concern for profit, they really hadn’t explored torpedo technology, or virtually any weapons technology that used consumables or were otherwise one-off weapons. Energy was cheap once you advanced far enough technologically as a culture, but there were plenty of instances where a weapon like a torpedo or missile would be useful.

What I had learned from the Husnock database and what I’d learned from the Collector’s technology would dovetail well with Minos’ systems in several areas. Hermione and Natasha, working in collaboration with Carl, were in charge of integrating these new upgrades throughout the planet. The drone construction and repair technology I had created for my communications network would be ideal for this purpose.

I had a great deal left to do before I left Minos (and a ticking clock to get it done), including finalizing my own orbital defense net designs, but the view out my new office’s window, the setting sun and the many shadows the buildings cast, sucked me in and I couldn’t help but stop and appreciate it. With my arms locked behind my back, I let out a relaxed sigh of contentment, enjoying the moment, delighting in the sight of my burgeoning empire.

I had plenty of priority items on my to-do list, but I was happy to let them wait for now.

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Office of the Supreme Arcon. Palace Headquarters. Planet Minos.

“No, Hermione! We’ve already talked about this,” I replied in frustration, sighing, glancing over at Natasha. “I want each defense platform to have an independent power system!”

Hermione looked equally frustrated, but she knew I was the boss and was trying to change my mind.

“Father, giving each platform an independent power source would *substantially* increase the costs for the overall system. Construction time, materials costs, overall the number of units necessary to defend an average sized planet, all would increase substantially,” she argued. “If we instead supply power from the planet’s surface, we can accomplish the same goal with only 70%

of the costs. If we also supply the processing requirements and targeting data from the surface as well, we could further reduce costs by another 10-15%.”

“And make the entire system more vulnerable to sabotage or a single internal or external strike taking out the whole system,” Natasha argued.

I nodded at Natasha’s words, “Even if it costs more in materials and time and overall complexity, this is not an area I want to cut costs on.”

“I agree with our Lord,” Natasha chimed in with a smile like she had one upped her sister. “I propose a two-part power system, one onboard and independent, and another coming from the planet’s surface. This would provide two power sources, making the entire system far more secure.”

Hermione looked vexed at her sister’s words, before snarking, “Of course, you would say that. You’re entirely unconcerned with the actual costs of building, maintaining, and ultimately paying for this thing.”

“Ladies, it’s my decision,” I said reasonably, glancing between the both of them. “Hermione, I hear you and agree that your points are valid, but I think Natasha is right. There are times when you can and should cut costs, but this isn’t one of them, not when people will be relying on this system to protect them. Please look over the preliminary design for the independent, onboard power system that I created. Hermione, add whatever is needed to take advantage of power sent from the surface and submit for my review.”

“Understood, father,” Hermione said before she disappeared from view.

“Natasha, see if there are any cost cutting measures that could be implemented without impacting the system’s overall effectiveness,” I ordered. Natasha had a sour look on her face, but nodded and left with a “Yes, my lord.”

I shook my head and chuckled at the antics of my digital ‘daughters.’ They could be quite a handful at times, but their ‘hearts’ were in the right place and they provided me with an immense amount of help and assistance with all my many projects. I turned back to the large scale and highly detailed hologram depicting the current design for the Gothic Orbital Defense Platform, as I was calling it. I walked around it slowly with the critical eye of an engineer, taking in all of its details and cataloging any changes that I wanted to make. It would be much easier to spot an issue and correct it now, rather than later when I had already manufactured hundreds of these units.

Anybody from my time and dimension who was a fan of the show Stargate: SG1 might recognize the AG-3 design that I had wholesale ripped off from the show. Well, maybe. It was from a one-off episode in the show, and even then, just a dream sequence from a potential horrific future, so it wasn’t like it had been featured in the show beyond that singular episode.

The platform’s shape was that of a large pyramid. If it sat on the ground, it’s three sides would have a large circular chunk taking out of them with a medium sized protruding dome coming out of each side. These ‘domes’ were long-range sensors to scan space for targets, shield generators

meant to link up with other platforms to provide a shield for the planet, and a Minoan cloaking field generator.

At each platform's beating heart was a small, but advanced, Minoan fusion reactor formerly used in some of their cannons along with a low-level networked computer core with quantum entangled communications technology built in. The computer core used in the design was intentionally less powerful than it could be to keep overall costs down since hundreds of platforms would be needed for even an average sized planet, but thankfully the computer cores were meant to be networked together in order to scale up the processing power of the entire defense net. Additional processing power could be 'borrowed', as needed, from my other systems with a quantum entangled communications link. A lot of processing power was needed to maintain and monitor a planetary shield grid, targeting at extreme distances in space, and conducting an overall tactical analysis during any engagement with so many moving parts and elements to consider.

On the very bottom of the pyramid was another protruding dome which contained the propulsion systems of the platform, allowing the platforms to move as a group or to reorient to fire on targets.

At the very tip of the upright pyramid was the firing aperture or weapon tip, from which the platform could fire and deal damage to targets. This tip was covered by hardened plates that would slide down to expose the firing aperture, in order to prevent the aperture from being damaged by micro-meteorites or the like when not in battle.

Like all Minoan technology, the platforms were an energy-based weapon only. I had considered adding torpedoes or some form of missile technology, but the costs for that would add significantly to the price tag for each unit. The maintenance and resupply needs long-term would also be exponentially more difficult and onerous than a pure energy-based weapon system. That said, the Gothic orbital defense platform had a few tricks that made up for the lack of torpedoes. The firing emitters themselves were based on my rifle, thus it could fire different energy types. Based on the defense net's target analysis, it could dynamically choose which energy type to use for best effect given that target's unique characteristics, thus it could fire phasers, disrupters, or even plasma-based pulses or beams, or even a combination of them if a target's shields were purposely attenuated to better withstand a single, specific weapon type.

For targets that required immediate elimination or were beyond the destructive capabilities of a single platform, the defense net could fire collaboratively, in groups of 4, 6, or 8. While collaboratively firing, each platform could feed its destructive energy to a central point, building up a larger and larger beam charge, with a single platform acting as the targeting lens to unleash the combined energy on a single target. It could be a devastating attack on even the largest ships the alpha quadrant currently fielded.

"Carl," I called aloud, my eyes proudly fixed on the weapon I had designed.

"My lord, how can I serve?" Carl asked, never taking his eyes off me.

I hand waved his attention towards the model of the Gothic Orbital Defense Platform, “Link up with this design and analyze.”

Nearly 30 seconds went by before Carl spoke again. While I trusted, cared for, and valued my VI daughters far more than Carl, Carl was created with weapons technology in mind and thus he was uniquely suited to offer an opinion in this case.

“A formidable design, my Lord,” Carl eventually said, having taken to walking around the platform like I had previously; acting like a flesh and blood humanoid was part of his programming and meant to set his customers at ease. “Tactical analysis based on current design parameters suggests in both defensive and offensive effectiveness a 33% increase over the current orbital defenses surrounding Minos, though there are some obvious areas for improvement. I assume cost was the deciding factor there, my Lord.”

I laughed at how quickly he picked up on that.

“Yes, exactly. I don’t have enough Collector power cores in my inventory to use those instead, despite how perfect they’d be for this purpose,” I stated. “I could use better materials and a more powerful computer core to further increase its overall effectiveness as well. Or add some kind of torpedo or missile technology.”

“Your recent upload of new technologies into the planetary database has preliminary designs for what you described as a ‘self-replicating mine,’” Carl said. “Those mines have capabilities that could be valuable additions to the Gothic Orbital Defense Platform.”

“You mean the ability to self-replicate new mines?” I asked with a smile and a laugh in my voice, though we both knew that that was the answer. “Those mines were purposely kept as simple and uncomplicated as possible in order to ensure self-replication and replacement was viable; my defense platforms are far more complex, though not necessarily beyond self-replication capabilities given a large enough power source...” I explained, trailing off slowly as my mind went on another design tangent. Eventually I snapped back to the present. Carl had waited patiently for me to fully explore my errant thought on my own.

“This design is meant to be deployed to worlds where I would not have direct control over the system. I’m hesitant to use my most advanced designs and ideas lest they fall into the wrong hands, despite all the protections I intend to integrate into each platform to prevent that from happening. As it is, I’m contemplating installing a small replicator and micro-transporter unit in every 50th platform. This replication unit would be able to produce my spider repair and construction drones to maintain and repair the defense net completely autonomously. Thus, in a 300-unit defense net, only 6 would have a replication unit installed.”

“I presume there would be no easy way to determine which platforms had the replication unit installed for priority targeting?” Carl asked.

“Precisely, and the net is designed to randomly move and reorganize at all times not only to prevent collisions with objects or ships, but to make targeting them far more difficult during battle,” I answered, turning my attention back onto the platform. “If I acquire another world that

I control completely, only then would I be willing to build a defense net with every advantage I currently have.”

“Do you wish to replace the defense net currently in orbit of Minos, my Lord? I can begin tasking the relevant factories with the priority manufacturing orders, though we are still implementing your mobile construction yard technology into the existing factories.”

“No, no, not at this time, Carl,” I replied. “I strongly considered it, but my current defense net design borrows a bit too heavily from recognized sources in some areas, so it’s better to keep the current orbital defenses firmly in the Minosian design scheme to avoid anyone getting suspicious should the secrets of Minos become even slightly known.”

“Arcon, various statements you have made suggest that you intend to sell the scaled down Gothic Orbital Defense Net to third parties,” Carl stated with interest. “Do you have a potential customer lined up?”

“I do, Carl,” I said, thoughtfully, wondering if this idea was a good one and how it would ultimately affect the future. “Help me prepare a brochure and a bit of advertising, won’t you?”

“Nothing would please me more, my lord!” Carl gushed and for a second I thought Carl’s digital head would explode.

First, though, I needed to make sure that this plan wasn’t going to get me killed by people who knew me far too well.

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As the coded subspace connection stabilized and our various decryption algorithms synced up over the many lightyears of space, I wondered if I was making a big mistake by doing this. Initiating a long-distance subspace communication while on Minos itself was a slight risk, but I was routing the connection through Natasha on the *Flighty Temptress* and she was routing our call through my burgeoning communications/sensor network that I was slowly seeding the alpha quadrant with. The signal entered into the traditional communications network far from here and was being bounced around thousands of times to hide my location.

However, the security of my communication wasn’t my largest concern.

A familiar face appeared in my holographic display, his average looking face and ‘pleasant’ smile equally as familiar.

“Sloan, how are you?” I asked pleasantly. “It’s been too long.”

“It has, Gothic. I’m well, despite the current circumstances plaguing the alpha quadrant,” Sloan replied, never afraid to engage in the pleasantries that we often started our conversations with. The alternative was two galaxy-class ruthless monsters baring their teeth at each other, bandying threats. “My congratulations on your recent victories stopping the Circle and their Cardassian secret backers, as well as stopping the Collector incursion on Kessik IV. Such conclusive victories, even if not provided by Starfleet, are useful in keeping morale high. While many in Starfleet might not acknowledge or thank you for what you did, you have our thanks.”

“You’re very welcome,” I graciously replied. “Thank you also for providing me compensation for the valuable service I provided to the Federation. I was hesitant to intervene given my status and how untested my new ship was, but your payment helped make the decision easier in the end.”

“We are always willing to reward those that serve Federation interests,” Sloan responded. “Beyond your monetary payment, we have run interference on our end with those that are concerned that an Augment like yourself is in possession of such an obviously powerful starship. Inquiries by other powers into you have also proved useful in exposing spies and creating opportunities for counterintelligence operations.”

I sighed at this, but it was something that I had expected and knew would happen once I got involved in this war. There was always going to be consequences for exposing my capabilities, but hopefully exposing them while saving a Federation world from the Collectors would mitigate most of the damage and potential consequences.

“Was Captain Jellico that worked up about it?” I asked, feeling amused.

Sloan uncharacteristically laughed, which suggested that something had happened that I wasn’t aware of.

“His initial report was less than glowing, but his feelings have tempered in subsequent reports,” Sloan shared. “I’m mostly referring to Admiral Pressman of Starfleet Intelligence. He has tasked Captain Sisko of DS9 with spying on you and was quite vexed with Sisko that he was seemingly unaware you possessed such an advanced starship. We have quietly deprioritized, redirected, and/or shut down several intelligence gathering operations targeting you.”

“I appreciate that,” I said, before mentally changing gears. “I’m calling because I wanted to give you advanced notice of some of my plans to avoid any issues between myself and Section 31. I’ll be contacting my lawyers in the coming days to reorganize my business interests and start new ones, including a company that sells highly advanced defensive weaponry as well as a new high value shipping concern.”

“You are referring to the orbital defense net that you suggested you might be able to provide to Kessik IV?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, trying not to roll my eyes. “Somehow, I suspected it would not be long before it got back to you. Does Section 31 have any issue with this proposed action? If so, I will tell President Moss that things didn’t work out.”

“We have no issue with the offer, though we believe it unlikely you are unlikely to outright sell the technology,” he answered. “If fact, if Kessik IV took you up on the offer, we were going to subtly encourage other Federation worlds to follow suit, if not necessarily with you as the supplier.”

“Can you please explain why you’d do that?” I asked.

“Of course,” he returned. “The Collector Invasion has exposed many systemic weaknesses in the Federation and Starfleet, both numerous and significant. More worlds utilizing such a defense net could free up valuable resources and personnel from their defense duties to take the fight directly to the Collectors.”

“What are your analysts predicting?” I asked.

Sloan visibly hesitated for a bit, which frightened me more than I’d care to admit.

“Our best predictive tactical analyses state that if we do not stop the Collectors within the next 5 years, we will not be able to,” Sloan grimly admitted. “The alpha quadrant will be conquered. By the five year mark the Collectors will have captured and reverse engineered our most advanced technologies and spawned or hatched more soldiers than we can reasonably defend against. This will cause the defense alliance to fracture and break as each polity, then world, prioritizes its own defense over others,” Sloan grimly laid it all out. “Strategic weapons like the Genesis device or banned subspace weaponry would then be our only choice.”

“King of the ashes,” I whispered.

“Indeed.”

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Sitting around my office’s conference table, in holographic form, were some of the best lawyers money could buy in this galaxy. Some of which I had worked with before when getting my omnitool patent protections and setting up its mass distribution throughout the quadrant, others were new and had been highly recommended. Standing behind me, ready to assist me as needed, were Hermione, Natasha, and Carl in his new holographic skin. While the Minosians were remarkably similar looking in appearance to humans, I felt it an unnecessary risk to keep his appearance and clothing as it was, so I gave him a fully human modern look.

“Thank you, gentlemen and ladies, for coming on such short notice. I know how busy and valuable your time is when you are the very best in your fields and areas of expertise,” I thanked them, meeting each of their eyes across dozens of lightyears. “Each of you has detailed instructions on what I want to accomplish and the required information to carry out your individual work, but seeing the whole picture is valuable and will be helpful to you going forward.”

I made a gesture and a chart appeared in midair and was displayed to all of them.

“In the next few days all my business holdings will be reorganized with the following corporate structure. Owning all companies will be a new entity called ‘Empire Holdings.’ Wholly owned by this company will be the Gothic Tools Company, which is the company responsible for the marketing, replicator licensing, manufacturing, and distribution of my omnitool and its many future variants. For now that company will also provide the same services for the Bliss Baton product.”

I could see several of the lawyers who had assisted me in patenting the omnitool and negotiating a deal with Grand Nagus Zek nodding at the wisdom of setting up a new concern specifically for the omnitool product.

“Gothic Arts and Culture is my company in charge of receiving my holonovel royalties and any ancillary or tie in products coming from this sector. In the future this company may evolve to become a holo-publisher in its own right, but for now I don’t want to rock the boat with Zek,” I explained, a couple of my Ferengi lawyers nodding sagely at those words, looking relieved that they wouldn’t be forced to go head-to-head in business with their planetary leader. “Finally, two entirely new companies I’m starting are the Gothic Arms and Defense Corporation and Gothic Secure Shipping, which will be a cargo and shipping concern with heavily armed and cloaked cargo ships for transport of high-value goods.”

Several eyes perked up at this news.

“Dossiers with the relevant information are available for your review. Please work as fast as possible to get these new enterprises off the ground and licensed to operate in the areas of space you’ve been tasked with. Thank you for your time,” I said, before my guests disappeared one by one.

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“Father, President Donna Moss of Kessik IV is standing by to speak with you,” Hermione warned me.

“Very good, give me a moment,” I said, as I sat down behind the desk of the Supreme Arcon and ensured a fake digital background showing my ship’s conference room was visible. “Put her through.”

Immediately a large rectangular holographic display came into existence, showing the beautiful face of Donna Moss.

“Admiral Gothic, it’s good to see you again,” she greeted, a small smile on her lips. “I hope I’ve caught you at a good time.”

“A perfect time, Madame President,” I reassured her. “I’m assuming you have had a chance to look over the *brochure*?”

The president laughed heartily at my words, “A ‘brochure’ is one way to put it. I have to admit, I’ve never seen a product brochure in the form of a holoprogram, but it was devastatingly effective given our recent troubles; it gave my government and I much to think about.”

Carl was a genius when it came to weapons marketing. With his knowledge of my skills as a holoauthor he had suggested that I use Kessik IV’s own sensor recordings taken during the recent Collector attack and invasion to create a custom holoprogram to market the defense net. It was basically a ‘what if’ scenario program, showing how the attack could have gone had the planet possessed the Gothic Orbital Defense Net. After only a few moments of consideration, I realized that it was pure freaking genius. A truly objective tactical analysis later, one that I hadn’t

even needed to put my finger on the scale for, conclusively showed that the Collectors would have been repelled given the same makeup of forces against the shielding and firepower of my new creations.

“Thank you, Madame President. I hope your advisors confirmed the result was accurate per even the most conservative predictive tactical analysis. The tactical data the program based its outcome upon was from your own planet’s sensor data along with information I secured from the Hur’q vessels themselves, part of which I shared with the holoprogram.”

“They confirmed that it was an accurate depiction and outcome,” she answered, her face turning serious and perhaps a little forlorn. “All those deaths could have been prevented had we been better prepared. In some ways it was both good and bad to learn that.”

I stayed silent and still, giving her the time to quietly experience these tough emotions. My patience wasn’t wholly altruistic as experiencing these extreme emotions meant that she’d likely buy what I was selling. She visibly shook herself before continuing.

“We are interested, but my advisors and I have several large concerns,” she explained. “The first is that of control, few worlds would accept placing a system like yours above their heads without being given full control of the system.”

“You would have *full control* of the system, though, Madame President,” I clarified. “Whether the defensive planetary shielding was up or not, would be under your full control and no one else’s, including mine. I would suggest giving daily control of the shield grid to your space control administration. The offensive firing of the system, whether at selected targets or in auto-defense mode, would also be under your full control. As our literature states, depending on your government’s desires, we can vest full control of the offensive capabilities of the system in the planetary executive or a mix of executive control with legislative consent. *That* would be entirely up to you and your people to decide, however. Firing on targets on the surface, though, I would highly recommend have the strictest controls and be used only during declared emergencies given the high probability of collateral damage even at the platforms’ lowest yield settings.”

“Apologies, Admiral, I misspoke when I used the word control, *ownership* was actually the word I should have used,” she corrected. “Your proposed agreement is one of a long-term lease, rather than an outright sale.”

“Ah, I see. That’s correct, Madame President,” I replied. “The agreement I propose is that of a 2-year license to use the technology, to essentially rent it. Though human, I am a citizen of Bajor, a Federation ally to be sure, but not a member. The Orbital Defense Net technology is proprietary and highly confidential, and could be extremely dangerous if it fell into the wrong hands.”

“I can understand and appreciate that, but are you suggesting that ours and the Federation itself are the so called ‘wrong hands?’” she asked pointedly.

“Not necessarily, Madame President. I admittedly was thinking more of the Cardassians or the Romulans perhaps even the Klingons given their recent internal political and martial unrest, but you are not fully wrong. Just as the Federation would be unwilling to share highly advanced

weapons technology with me or Bajor, so too am I unwilling to share my technology with them,” I explained.

“You are differentiating a single, sovereign member world like ours, from the whole of the Federation or Starfleet itself,” she said aloud, looking thoughtful. “I suppose that makes sense and is fair from your perspective.”

“Licensing versus ownership does come with several significant benefits to you and your people, Madame President. While licensing the technology, my company would be responsible for ongoing maintenance, any repairs it may require down the line, assuming it was not from misuse, theft, or negligence, and any upgrades that may be needed as technology advances or new threats become known. You would incur no costs for those items; it’s truly a once per contract term expense,” I explained, gesturing with my hands as I talked up the benefits of a licensing agreement versus buying the system, which wasn’t an option I was truly offering. “The system is fully unmanned and none of your people would be at risk in its operation or maintenance. At the end of the contract term, you can decide whether or not to renew.”

“That’s actually something many in my government are quite happy about, especially as it keeps the cost fixed and known and doesn’t require some technical expertise we may not have in our small population.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” I said, giving her a smile.

“We also have concerns with the system being potentially hacked and its control suborned,” she explained. “A bad actor could do terrible harm to our world if they got control of the system.”

I nodded. It was a valid concern, but one that I had anticipated, and thus had a ready answer for.

“The system has been rated for the highest level of data security and resistance to penetration, similar to that of a starship in Starfleet. It is fully compliant with Federation law, in fact it exceeds the minimum requirements,” I proudly replied. “I would welcome and invite your people to attempt penetrating its security as a test prior to agreeing to anything.”

She nodded in appreciation and seemed moved by both my confidence and my urging for her to test my claim.

“Another significant concern is a clause in the proposed licensing agreement that states, *‘Kessik IV, as a sovereign world, separate and apart from its status as a Federation member world, is required and affirmatively obligated to prevent the Gothic Orbital Defense Net technology from being examined, boarded, tractored or removed in any way from orbit, and/or reverse engineered, through known or unknown means or methods, by any party, internal or external, including other Federation members or the Federation’s Starfleet, regardless of official or unofficial orders from any official in the Federation government or court. Failure to adhere to the letter and spirit of this clause constitutes a breach of contract and may result in the Gothic Orbital Defense Net taking autonomous action to fulfill this obligation through its own defensive actions. Kessik IV and its President agrees and shall hold harmless, indemnify, and grant pardon for any crimes convicted, if necessary, for any autonomous actions the Defense Net takes*

per this clause. Should this clause be breached, Gothic Armaments and Defense may choose to reclaim the system with no refund to the licensee for any time remaining in the contractual term,” she read aloud from the contract. “I want to know for certain what this means, Admiral. Is this clause saying that if some party, including Starfleet, tries to seize your technology, legally or illegally, in order to reverse engineer it or discover its secrets, the system could act autonomously to defend itself if we do not prevent it, regardless of our supposed control of the system?”

I had anticipated this question and had decided to clearly answer with no bullshit.

“Yes, the system will defend itself and its proprietary technology from any party, if you otherwise do not act to protect it or prevent it,” I answered. “The system will similarly deactivate and only protect itself, rather than the planet itself, should you not pay the contract renewal fee within 30 days of the previous term ending. My company would then have the uncontested right to reclaim the system. It would also resist any attempt at you or the Federation itself nationalizing the technology, up to self-destructing. In the event of imminent capture, it would also self-destruct.”

What I wasn’t telling her was that the Defense Net would also not fire on me or mine regardless of what it was commanded to do by the authorities/powers on the planet. Furthermore, all the sensor data it gathered would be clandestinely sent back to Hermione as well to be added to our database. The system itself would also serve as another relay in the quantum communications/sensor network I was building, right in the middle of Federation territory.

“That’s what we thought,” she replied with a sigh. “I tasked our best legal minds with examining the question of whether or not a Federation member world could even legally accept a deal like this, or purchase from a non-Federation member third party. All of them tentatively said yes after consulting the Federation Constitution, our Federation membership agreement, and Federation general law. As a sovereign Federation member world we are entitled to maintain our own defenses, and have a great deal of latitude in that regard, including fielding our own ships and utilizing an orbital defense net. Many of the more prosperous member worlds either built or purchased their own defense nets during the Federation-Klingon war of a century ago and those laws granting that authority are still on the books.”

I continued to listen intently, intrigued at what I was hearing. I idly wondered if Section 31 had subtly helped her legal experts, and/or those they had consulted, reach that conclusion.

“Even as President of my world my authority does not give me direct authority over Starfleet personnel or assets. I can’t necessarily control what Starfleet might do in any given situation or if they might try to seize your technology,” she said. “The thought of firing on a Starfleet vessel, even just to warn it off, fills me with anxiety and unease, but that feeling is many times worse when I think of the many citizens who lost their lives recently and how it could have been prevented by your defensive technology. That said, I made a solemn promise to my people and to myself that I will do everything in my power to ensure the tragedy and horrors that befell my people will never happen again, if I can help it. If we agree to this deal, I will warn Starfleet that

we are obligated to defend your property and its secrets and should they prevent us from fulfilling our obligation, that the system can defend itself and we will do nothing to assist them.”

“I promise you, Madame President, my defense net will offer a level of safety and protection to your people that they have never had before. *It will be worth it,*” I assured her.

“It fucking better be, Admiral,” she practically growled, showing the steel underneath her beautiful exterior as she leaned forward to stare into my eyes across so many lightyears of space, before her tone again shifted on a dime. “Pending the results of a real demonstration, let’s talk price; you mentioned that you’d be willing to take payment in our planet’s mined dilithium. If I’m only licensing the technology, renting it rather than outright buying it, I expect the price to reflect that.”

My genuine smile in response to her haggling on the price was practically Ferengi. Now we were getting somewhere.