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Last time on The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Onboard The Flighty Temptress. On the edge of the Sol System.

"Anything on short range sensors?" I asked after we had successfully completed the dimensional transition.

Miracle of miracles, I was still sitting in my captain's chair on the bridge of my ship, rather than unconscious and thrust into yet another bizarre situation that only Q found funny.

Everything the ship's sensors were telling me indicated that we'd been returned to the 'prime' Star Trek universe, the reality we'd started off in before being pulled forcibly into another dimension by the Forge. In fact, we were on the edge of the Sol system itself, but some kind of intense interference was preventing us from checking on the Federation capital world or connecting to any Federation time beacons, as part of our final check to make sure that this was indeed the right version of the Star Trek universe and the right time for that matter.

More worrying, though, were the many garbled subspace distress signals we'd picked up coming from the Sol

System itself. They were near incomprehensible due to the fact that there were so many messages coming out of the same system, thousands of them really, all simultaneously. That was not normal. According to the long-range sensors, which could scan other nearby systems without interference, practically every Starfleet vessel in the sector was returning to Earth at maximum warp.

Could our arrival have caused this kind of reaction? I certainly hoped not.

No, something was up, and we were right in the thick of it again, I thought with a wry smile.

Why did I think it was going to be anything different?

The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Chapter 52

"Captain, there is a massive class-5 spatial anomaly in the Kuiper Belt. It appears to be the source of the intense gravimetric interference being felt throughout the system," T'Maz reported calmly and succinctly, her eyes still locked on her holographic console even as she reported to me. I could feel the gravimetric waves, like a roiling sea, causing a vibration in the ship's hull, which was saying something given the sheer number of inertial

dampers I had built into my ship's design. The many other starships in the system were probably faring a hell of a lot worse. "Earth has declared a state of emergency and Starfleet has mobilized its forces to converge on the anomaly."

Her thin, dexterous fingers were practically flying as she dismissed and created new, situation specific holo-displays showing the sensor's output. T'Maz had taken to her holo-console like a fish to water, practically gushing, by Vulcan standards, about how much more efficient it was than the standard, physical Federation control consoles and the incredible utility in being able to custom design her console by adding and dismissing situation specific screens and controls as needed or just to her personal preference. Her holo console wrapped from waist height to practically the ceiling in a 180-degree half circle around her. It oddly reminded me of those learning pods that we saw in the 2008 Star Trek movie that rebooted the franchise.

Beyond being in different dimensions the last few weeks, our travels hadn't exactly overly challenged T'Maz, at least scientifically. A different Earth in another dimension was certainly interesting, but the vast majority of the work I'd assigned her recently had been in acquiring information from the worlds and dimensions we had

visited, not dealing with unknown spatial anomalies and other scientific mysteries that Star Trek was famous for.

As for the Kuiper Belt, the belt was a donut-shaped region of icy bodies that lay beyond the orbit of Neptune. Within the belt there were millions upon millions of chunks of ice and rock that would be a serious hazard to even modern navigation, if the belt wasn't so well mapped from centuries of starship traffic through the system.

Similar to the large asteroid belt between the planets Mars and Jupiter, the Kuiper Belt was made of leftovers from the solar system's early formation, a failed world. That belt was thin, though, when compared to the one past Neptune.

The Kuiper Belt should not be confused with the Oort Cloud, which was a much more distant region of space at the edge of the solar system. That was also a hazard to navigation if you weren't careful.

Despite being able to see it with our space telescopes, the Kuiper Belt may as well have been the edge of the known universe itself, the people of my time having no ability to actually get there in a human lifetime with the primitive propulsion technologies that we had access to. In this time, the belt was pretty much practically within spitting distance of Earth, which made it extremely worrying that

a spatial anomaly had popped up there. A spatial anomaly in the Kuiper belt, interestingly and coincidentally, neatly bypassed much of the system's powerful static defenses, which was likely contributing heavily to the sheer alarm being experienced by Earth and the Federation. It was just too convenient and thus had the feeling of purpose behind it.

"Can you be more specific than *spatial anomaly*?" I requested of my sexy Vulcan science officer.

To be fair, it was an extremely general catch-all term that could cover a wide range of strange phenomena in the Star Trek universe.

"One moment," answered the Section 31 agent, continuing to add screens and sensor outputs to her displays.

I was not the type of captain that forced answers out of his crew before they had time to analyze the situation, so I waited patiently as she studied what the ship's sensors were telling her. Before long I received a report which she had compiled and sent to my screen, the report indicated that the anomaly was *remarkably* similar to the rift in space that T'Maz and I had encountered during our first mission together, indicating a dimensional crossover. This likely meant that the Collectors, or the Hur'q, if you

preferred the term, were here, and in potentially great numbers.

"Using our dimensional travels and the experience we have obtained with such phenomenon, I have compensated for the interference and have completed a scan of the system," the attractive Vulcan reported with urgency. "Please note that sensor accuracy is currently at 63% with the gravimetric interference present in system."

I nodded in response.

Looking over the sensor scans, I could understand why it had been so hard to get an idea of what was going on in the Sol System. *It was a war zone.* The gravimetric interference being thrown up by an active, huge, and open dimensional rift, coupled with dozens of starships fighting to the death, had hidden a lot from our sensors in the cacophony of energetic readings. When modern starships were destroyed, after all, their warp cores did not often go quietly. Active scans were picking up at least forty Starfleet ships of many different classes in pitched battle with thousands of Hur'q fighters, a dozen cruisers, as well as a class of Collector ship that I'd never seen before, something about the size of an escort ship, and there were well over fifty of them. There were probably just as many destroyed or adrift Starfleet vessels in the battle area.

“Red alert. All crew to battle stations,” I called out calmly, my thoughts racing. We had been thrown right back into the fire, it seems, which neatly explained the feeling or urge that I had had previously to return home, rather than continue on my profitable dimensional journey.

Calling for red alert-initiated hundreds of pre-planned actions, including armor plating sliding into place over every window, every airlock, and the ship’s three cargo bays, every security door and hatch closing.

Independently powered force fields also activated to protect vital areas of the ship like the bridge and engineering, the ship’s structural integrity field ratcheting up to maximum, and every auxiliary power source being readied to supply the ship’s power needs. The ship’s primary and secondary shields also went to full power and all weapons were powered up and readied to fire.

“T’Maz, I’m initiating my neural link to the ship,” I warned.

“Understood, captain,” T’Maz acknowledged, her eyes not even turning away from her sensor scans.

I opened up my neural connection to the ship fully as I absently felt my captain’s chair deploy the thickly padded five-point harness around my body, locking it securely in

place as an independent life support generator, inertial damper, and force field flared into visibility for a moment. Any of my crew's chairs could be sucked out into space and they'd still be all right as the chair could protect from the vacuum and stray weapon's fire. My captain's chair also reclined, putting my feet up to be even more comfortable.

As my mind opened, expanded, and began synching with the ship's systems, I could feel my ship's happy but determined affection for me, the happy rottweiler puppy ready to guard me and kill at my command. I could also feel Natasha and Hermione's warm embrace as their digital consciousnesses offered all the help I might need. Carl similarly stood by, waiting for my orders, eager to carry out my every order.

As my limited organic senses were replaced by the ship's far more powerful sensors, the entirety of the solar system became visible to me. What immediately drew my metaphorical eyes were the fucking *gigantic* hive ships, five vessels made from huge hallowed out asteroids, obviously converted by the Collectors to act as mobile carrier bases for other Hur'q ships. Each asteroid was large enough to have its own gravitational profile and stood out like beacons of light in my eyes, their gravity strong enough to even reach into the subspace domain.

We had long speculated that these giant hive ships were the equivalent of aircraft carriers, carrying in their bellies the Collector ships that weren't capable of dimensional travel on their own. These hive ships were hanging back and acting as mobile launch platforms for both the larger ships, as well as the hundreds of small Collector fighters pouring into the system, continuously launching new craft into the fight. These small unshielded fighters were no match for modern starships, being destroyed by the dozens, but the centuries old ship-to-ship combat doctrine of the alpha quadrant races had not been quick to adjust to Collector tactics. It took years to design, much less build new ships meant for such a different way of fighting. The thousands of unshielded fighters softened up shields for their larger ships, the swarms soaking up fire meant for their larger forces, giving up their lives without a care, and suicide ramming attacks were common to weaken or even destroy whole sections of a Starfleet ship's shield grids who were not designed to evade these kind of ramming attacks.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the huge dimensional rift remained ominously open, like an open wound in reality, which suggested that even more ships were on their way and/or were capable of being brought into the fight. Interestingly, with my new knowledge both learned and

granted by Q on dimensional science and transport, I could tell that none of the ships' presently in the solar system were capable of generating a dimensional rift on their own, which meant something on the other side had created it and was holding it open.

Unfortunately, it didn't take a tactical genius to recognize that with just the forces in-system, much less additional ones that they could potentially bring to bear, the Collectors' numbers would overwhelm even the state-of-the-art defenses of Earth in time. This was obviously the beginning of a full-scale invasion of the Alpha Quadrant, perhaps the whole galaxy. If they succeeded in capturing or destroying Earth, the very heart of the Federation, and also the organization at the heart of the alliance of alpha quadrant races allied against the Collectors, they would cripple any coordinated effective defense before it even started and possibly even force the alliance to fall apart.

The alpha quadrant alliance had been brought about by necessity, *not* friendship, many of the races having been enemies for years, decades even, prior to the Collector attacks. Wiping out the Federation's and Starfleet's Command and Control apparatus could easily see the other alliance races quickly forget their mutual defense obligations, concentrating their military might on protecting themselves, rather than the whole, turtling up

behind their own borders and saying, ‘fuck everyone else, every man for themselves.’ Panic coupled with an existential threat could do that to the best of us. At that point it would be all over. The Collectors could take their time, picking off individual polities at will, building up their forces and gorging themselves on the highly populated worlds they captured, systematically wiping out resistance on their own schedule, all the while expanding their technical capabilities by reverse engineering captured alpha quadrant technology.

The partial Collector database I’d stolen and subsequently sold to Section 31 had indicated that the Collectors had far more forces available to them than had been seen so far in this war. Every analysis Section 31 and I had conducted, much to our mutual horror, indicated that the Collector forces that had been fighting in the alpha quadrant had been more akin to scouts or expeditionary groups, gathering intelligence and technology on and from their enemies before committing their main forces to any one dimension. They had been quite successful in that regard, rapidly learning from the tactics and technologies of the forces they’d defeated.

For a race that could travel dimensions, their caution made perfect sense to me. Q knows how many grimdark dimensions they’d traveled to where they’d had the

misfortune of encountering some insanely powerful elder race or some kind of cosmic horror that destroyed their forces to the last. Putting all your eggs in one basket would mean extinction for a race that blindly traveled dimensions.

Judging by the overwhelming size of the invading force that had bypassed most of the system's defenses by appearing inside it, the only reason the Collectors weren't already on Earth, eating its people, was because Space Dock was putting up a hell of a fight, destroying the forces that got through the starship cordon to reach Earth.

Starbase 1 or Earth Spacedock, often referred to simply as 'Spacedock,' was the largest Starfleet starbase in the Sol System. While it wasn't strictly a military base alone, it boasted powerful weapons and shields, capable of repelling entire fleets of ships on its own.

This was likely why the Collector hive ships were hanging back and sending in the smaller and more expendable ships and no more ships were coming through the still open rift. Their purpose was likely to soften up defenses, while gathering intelligence on what kind of resistance Earth and the Federation could bring to bear against them when pushed to their breaking point. The fact that it had cost them dozens of large ships and thousands of fighter craft and the same number of pilots

was probably irrelevant to the insectoid race. If I was in their place and had their capabilities, that's exactly what I would do, especially if I didn't want to risk committing additional forces. Unlike them, however, I would have used drone ships.

They might not care for the lives of the individual Hur'q, but they probably wanted to keep their Hives safe, most likely because those ships were where they produced/birthed new Hur'q to continue the fight, as we'd seen. Section 31 and I also suspected that the hive ships served as the Collector equivalent of shipyards and drydocks, capable of both building starships and repairing them inside the giant ships.

Scans also showed that there were some small Federation civilian freighter ships in the area, though for some reason they weren't running away from the battle area. If I'd been the captain of such vulnerable vessels I'd be pushing my engines to the red line to get as far away from Earth as I could.

"T'Maz, scan those civilian freighters," I ordered, though the words had come from the ship's communication system rather than my throat. That was how deeply I'd submerged by consciousness into the ship's systems.

While I could and did initiate my own scans, T'Maz had a lot of knowledge and experience to bring to bear and I wasn't stupid enough to ignore that. Leveraging your crew's capabilities was the hallmark of a good captain.

Something just didn't seem right to me about these civilian freighters. They should be desperately trying to escape the battle. There were also a lot of Starfleet shuttles and runabouts trying to protect the freighters, which was mighty odd since they should be dealing with the big threat and the hundreds of enemy fighters now swarming the system.

"The freighters appear to have been boarded by the Collectors," T'Maz calmly reported. "It is unclear why they would undertake such an action under these circumstances."

While I would love to go and join the main battle against the Collectors, this ship having been built with the advanced technologies of the Husnock, the Minosians, the Collectors, and the Federation, designed from the start for war against a numerically superior enemy, Starfleet seemed to be holding its own, *for now*. Not that that would normally stop me from joining in the fight to protect Earth itself, as it was still my home world, sort of, but there was something going on here that I didn't understand, something that might need my immediate

attention and assistance, something the main Starfleet forces ignored or didn't have the spare resources to deal with.

"I'm taking us in for a closer look," I informed the ship, my words being sent ship-wide on the communications system.

I wished we hadn't been forced to decloak, but it was just too dangerous with so many ships in systems fighting. If Starfleet should detect me they may even fire on me. No, the chances for mishap were too high, including an accidental collision or being struck by an errant energy beam, thus giving away our position. I wasn't concerned with people learning my ship had cloaking capabilities, I'd rather openly showed that off. Besides, anyone who wanted to check could easily find out that I had been given a Klingon cloaking device as reward for capturing the Duras sisters alive.

Moving closer allowed us to see that the Collectors had fired their boarding torpedoes at some of the cargo vessels, the ones capable of penetrating shields, no doubt intending to plunder or capture them, as the Hur'q liked to do.

Unfortunately, I also saw another potential danger, one *even* more sinister than the Hur'q stealing technology

and/or eating the crew of those freighters, which wouldn't make sense in the middle of an intense battle with the Federation near Earth. Would it even occur to Starfleet? With how little individual Hur'q valued their lives, it wasn't a crazy thought that the Collectors might fly those captured Federation ships at full impulse speed into the surface of the planet to do insane amounts of damage, or detonating their warp cores in atmosphere or on the surface. Earth did not have a planetary shield to stop an attack like that (or orbital defense satellites), probably because of the other defenses in and outside the system and the huge amount of ship traffic that visited Earth daily.

In the chaos of battle, a Federation civilian ship slipping through the defenses to reach Earth was a distinct possibility. Starfleet might not realize the Collectors had captured the ship until too late, or if they realized, might even hesitate to make the hard decision to destroy the civilian ship, not wanting to destroy those ships with hostages onboard. Even a short delay in decisively responding might prove catastrophic to Earth. In an age of modern starships, a ship striking the planet at speed could kill millions in an instant and cause an environmental disaster that could take decades to clean up.

I'd even seen this tactic work on Earth before, during the Dominion War episodes of DS9, when the Breen successfully attacked Earth and crashed their ships into the surface, nearly destroying San Francisco.

"The Collector forces have detected us, Captain, and are turning their attention to us. Incoming boarding torpedoes on an intercept trajectory," T'Maz stated with urgency.

"They have an escort."

"Let them come," I said. "Better they target us than those civilian ships."

Interesting. The runabouts and shuttles, all based on Earth and lightly armed, were ill equipped to repel boarding parties, but were doing their level best in trying to prevent the Hur'q from capturing even more of the civilian ships. For those already boarded, the small ships had destroyed or disabled the captured ships' engines. Starfleet must be unable to spare any more powerful ships. When the Hur'q had first appeared in the system they must have sent fighters on missions against the freighters in order to cripple them, to keep them from warping out to safety.

Attacking freighters when there were Starfleet ships about might seem foolish, but it made sense to me. Those freighters were crewed by civilians, making them much easier targets for capture. Also, if Starfleet failed to

protect them, *while in orbit of Earth*, that would be a huge blow to morale, instilling fear in the population.

If a civilian ship could be taken right under the noses of Starfleet, in the very heart of the Federation, in orbit of Earth, nowhere would be considered safe. Just because the Collectors didn't value the lives of their race's individuals, didn't mean that they didn't understand that other races *did* value the individual. Such strategic thinking might be beyond the average Collector warrior, drone, or worker, but they did have an officer class, who could think in such ways.

The loss of the freighters and their crew meant little to me personally, but defending these vulnerable ships would make me look good and prevent them from being used against Earth.

"Tactical analysis of the escorts," I commanded, unsure of these new ships.

These were new ships, of a class that I'd never encountered before. They were a few times bigger than the shuttles and runabouts they had been trading fire with. They were, however, heavily armed and shielded, meant to give the fighters more of a chance to survive to reach their targets. Was this a fundamental change in tactics in response to the fighting they'd experienced in this

dimension so far, or did the Hives currently attacking the heart of the Federation simply have a different mindset than the ones we'd already encountered? Either could be true, but I suspected the former. They were learning from each battle with us, and they'd undoubtedly captured some small ships and studied their shield generators.

"We're in weapons range," Laren reported.

It was time to take my ship back into battle again.

"Natasha, Carl, assign priority targets between you, auto target and fire secondary weapons as needed," I ordered, concentrating on flying the ship and monitoring the big picture. "Fire at will! Hermione, keep overwatch of the battle."

"Aye, my Lord," Natasha and Carl replied in synch, just as a holographic image of them appeared, as if they were sitting in gunner chairs on either side of me, shooting down enemy ships like in a video game. While not strictly necessary, I understood they were doing this for T'Maz and my benefit. The dual joysticks with triggers were a nice touch, I thought.

I watched the tactical display in my mind's eye with excitement and imagined that if this was part of a Trek show or movie that the display would have already shifted to an external one in order to show the *Temptress* firing

all of its powerful weapons as it blasted apart the smaller enemy vessels. It would be the kind of scene that you could put in a trailer, all explosions, cool special effects, a veritable treat for the eyes and ears, despite the lack of any sound in space. What they wouldn't/couldn't put in the trailer, was my Augment form reclined in my captain's chair, on a pretty much dead silent bridge, my eyes closed like I was asleep during this battle, only a few beeps here and there interrupting the quiet.

No, it was much harder to show how my mind was, at that very moment, one with the ship and was taking the ship on a myriad number of evasive maneuvers, trying to give my AI gunners the best chance to score kills, trying to bunch up the Collector fighters for a volley of quantum torpedoes to take out grouped enemies.

The tactical display was far less impressive in visuals, but much more practical and useful in a large-scale engagement with multiple enemy ships. Dots that represented enemy craft simply winked out of existence as the advanced weapons of the *Temptress*, both primary and secondary, weapons designed for massed fire rather than maximum power, fired hundreds of bright, neon blue pulses of energy, blasting their ships apart, snuffing out the lives of the enemy with all the precision that an advanced AI and their predictive algorithms could bring

to bear. Those predictive algorithms had been trained on the sensor recordings of dozens of Collector battles waged throughout the alpha quadrant, by multiple races. It wasn't hyperbolic to say that my AI gunners had fought thousands of battles against the Collectors, at least in simulations.

For a few moments it seemed as if my ship would turn the tide of battle, or at least this part of the battle, only for something to hit us, something big, and boy was I glad that I'd gone to the trouble of installing so many secondary inertia dampeners and compensators, because if I hadn't everyone onboard who wasn't a hologram or an AI would have been injured severely in the collision.

With the way this dimension worked in the show, I'm sure at least one of my crew would have been horribly injured or killed, but almost certainly taken out of commission and unavailable to assist in the current battle. Sparks flying, consoles exploding, that was a given. But with my bridge being akin to a self-contained vault with independent power and multiple redundant systems, *including seat belts* to prevent the command staff from being injured, we felt a small bump at best.

"One of the escort ships destroyed several of their own ships to get through our weapon's fire and rammed us at

full impulse, captain,” T’Maz reported. “No injuries reported.”

“Engineering, damage report,” I ordered, as I continued to engage in evasive maneuvers.

“No hull breach. The escort ship exploded against the primary shield; shield strength down to 53% but is regenerating,” Neela reported professionally from engineering, just like you'd expect of a veteran of many life and death battles during the Occupation. I could hear B’Elanna directing multiple holographic damage control teams in the background. "There is a partial shield emitter failure on starboard--"

While Neela was giving her damage report a Collector fighter collided with a Federation runabout, causing the two ships to explode brilliantly. The Collectors made excellent use of the distraction as a Collector fighter and boarding torpedo impacted against the ship.

"A Collector boarding torpedo struck us exactly where the Escort ramming attack damaged our shields," T’Maz reported. "We have been boarded."

This was alarming, for many reasons.

“Any explanation on how they penetrated our shields?” I asked, grinding my teeth in frustration. "I made sure that the shields could stop their boarding torpedoes!" I yelled.

"The shield emitters in that section, both primary and secondary, were damaged by the Escort ship ramming us at full impulse, Captain. Another fighter then impacted in the same area at ramming speed," T'Maz reported. "Power had not fully been re-routed to the undamaged emitters before the second collision caused further failure in the shield grid, allowing the boarding torpedo to penetrate that small shield failure in that section."

Hermione then appeared on the bridge holographically.

"Father, sensor readings indicate that the Collector boarding torpedoes have a neutronium coating on the penetrating tip, allowing them to bypass the secondary shield," Hermione reported. "It's a relatively small amount, but it be would enough to penetrate the shield and hull."

"Neutronium? Where the fuck did they acquire that?" I asked, not expecting an answer. Not even the Federation had the ability to collect, shape, or create neutronium, despite wanting to. It was impervious to phasers and other energy weapons, after all. Where had the Collectors stolen that knowledge or material from? "Thank you, Hermione."

Until now only the freighters had been infested by the Hur'q. Life sign scans of the civilian ships showed that the

cargo ships were practically *overrun* with the bug-like aliens. If we weren't so close to Earth and we didn't need to disable our shields to do so, I'd disable the civilian ships' shields and start beaming the Collectors off those ships, then purge the buffers to kill them. I had zero issue killing the Collectors by the scores this way, but I had no desire to be brought up on war crime charges and you know the Federation would do it. There was just too high of a chance of some admiral with a prejudice or fear of augments that would try to take advantage of the situation.

No, with so many eyes on us, we wouldn't be doing that here. So hopefully the Collectors were just planning to collect those ships, their crews, and the cargo onboard those vessels, rather than immediately setting course to ram Earth at full speed.

"How are the Starfleet ships not getting boarded?" I asked aloud, not caring who answered.

"They may have found a way to modify the shields to prevent boarding," T'Maz said. "Starfleet Intelligence reports, prior to our forced dimensional travels, stated that countermeasures were in the process of being developed after several examples were found aboard wrecked Collector ships after battle."

That made sense. We had been mostly out of contact with the larger Star Trek universe and the data throughput on the quantum communications had been seriously reduced by the ‘dimensional distance.’ Hermione had had to prioritize everything that went through the quantum connection, and she would have had no idea when we would return. And that was assuming some countermeasure hadn’t been developed during this battle itself. Starfleet officers were infamous for coming up with quick field solutions to problems. Even if the countermeasure hadn’t been fully developed at the beginning of this very battle, no doubt some technobabble, hail Mary solution mid-fight was pulled out of some brilliant engineer’s proverbial ass at the last second, something that everyone would promptly forget about as soon as the battle was over or ignore the long-term implications of. That happened a disturbing amount of the time in Star Trek.

"Natasha, activate internal defenses. Intruder countermeasures, level *black*," I ordered.

“Intruder countermeasures are coming online,” Natasha reported with a bloodthirsty grin.

The Collector warriors would be kept quite busy by the bloodthirsty holographic horrors I'd created.

Unfortunately, the Collectors were unlikely to suffer the

psychological effects my xenomorphs, Predator aliens, and Imperial Space Marines had purposefully been designed to evoke, as they were biologically incapable of experiencing fear. Ah well, you couldn't win them all. Still, they'd do their primary job just as well, which under level black intruder countermeasures was *killing* intruders with maximum efficiency with no quarter or mercy given, and no holds barred in terms of tactics, psychological or otherwise.

This ship was designed for a galaxy spanning war with the Dominion, and unfortunately, getting boarded was part and parcel of this universe, no matter what paranoid level of precautions I took. It somehow had the feeling of inevitability. Even the vaunted *Enterprise*, the flagship of the Federation, had been boarded numerous times by incredibly unlikely foes, like a bunch of stupid Ferengi with a couple of obsolete Klingon ships in that one episode. I knew that no matter how well designed my ship was, it'd happen at some point, the universe practically required it.

Level black intruder countermeasures put the ship into full lockdown, activating every internal forcefield on the ship. Right now, in every 5 meters of corridor a forcefield augmented physical barrier slid into place, designed to impede movement. Every room in the ship had a force

field barrier at the doorway, and key locations, like the bridge, engineering, the brig, the armory, and weapons, had force fields with independent power supplies literally surrounding the rooms, in the floor, ceiling, and every wall. It was an incredibly resource intensive design, but I had built my ship for war. This would have been impossible on a normal ship as that would have impeded the crew's efforts and movements, including the work of the damage control teams deployed during battle, but I had a tiny crew that had no reason to leave the bridge or engineering and B'Elanna's repair teams were holographic and thus weren't stopped by the internal shields.

All-encompassing forcefields had been put in place to prevent changelings from shape shifting into or out of key locations, but worked just as well to keep conventional intruders out of key locations they'd need to take to take control of the ship. And these weren't the pansy Starfleet small shock type of forcefields, these were the fully lethal versions that could kill with one touch under the black protocol. My holo-killers, being photons and force fields themselves, could pass right through them to reach their targets, which was ideal. Their forces would be impeded while my holographic killers could freely move about the ship.

I had tried to be as creatively evil and ruthless as I could be, taking inspiration from numerous science fiction TV and movies, and liberally from horror movies. My first inspired bit of horror was the ability to raise the gravity in various parts of the ship. The gravity was artificially generated already, so why not increase it on command to slow down or cripple intruders? I had considered raising the gravity to lethal levels, but that was just asking for trouble in the Star Trek universe. A random ship malfunction could cause the gravity to activate at the lethal level and you'd even up killing your own crew. Suddenly experiencing 5x normal Earth gravity, though, while not lethal to most humanoids, would hamper anyone's movements and restrict an enemy's ability to fight back.

The second bit of horror was specially designed kill zones, where enemies could be funneled into choke points and trapped. A radiogenic pulse designed to stay within the kill zone, would then literally vaporize any intruder inside the zone perimeter. That idea I had actually stolen from an episode of DS9 where Chief O'Brien had been supposedly killed by a security measure he'd supposedly accidentally tripped.

Along with the holograms for direct offense, I had designed specially hidden auto-turret energy weapons to

rapid fire phaser and disrupter bolts on intruders, along with laser cutting beams at around neck and knee level that could be activated to decapitate or cripple enemies.

For most enemy intruders of the alpha quadrant variety these countermeasures would be gross overkill, and God knows Starfleet would arrest me if they knew and I wasn't an admiral in another planet's military, but the Collectors were unique in that they could quite simply overwhelm all the defenses through sheer numbers and weight of fire. The holo-emitters could be destroyed once found, the turrets shot out, the gravity plating destroyed, the force field emitters overwhelmed, etc.

There were always ways if you were determined enough and had enough bodies to throw at a problem. If they were using the boarding torpedo currently sticking out of my hull like a knife as a transporter relay to send more and more soldiers, like I suspected from the sensor readings I was getting, then it didn't matter how many I killed, they'd just keep coming.

Natasha had already informed me that there was some kind of transport disruption field in place extended in a limited bubble around the boarding torpedo, preventing her from simply beaming the Collector intruders onboard into the buffer and purged, though that could likely also be interference from their primitive, but effective

transporter relay that they were using to bring more troops onboard to replace the ones I'd killed.

Part of me was extremely disappointed that I couldn't just take up my sword and go join in with the counter boarding action, to feel the rush of battle as I slew my foes without mercy, but I needed to stay here, to trust the defenses that I had built for this exact purpose. My ultimate place was here on the bridge, commanding my vessel, and I could do far more good here on the bridge than I could by slaughtering the pests trying to take my ship. The internal boarding action onboard my ship was just a small footnote in this system spanning battle, after all, and there were many far more important things that needed to be done. One such task would earn me incredible amounts of goodwill and influence with the Federation.

“Can we adjust the forcefields in the decks around the torpedo to block the anti-transport field?” I asked my crew. “My goal is to transport from outside the ship, then directly into sickbay.”

“There should certainly be enough forcefields active to do it, Captain. Standby,” B'Elanna answered with a scoff. My overkill design philosophy was again paying dividends, I thought smugly. I'd have to rub it in B'Elanna's face after the battle was over. “I've altered the

field harmonics to limit the range of the Collector's anti-transporter field as much as I could, but I can't stop it entirely. They've destroyed too many forcefields near their intrusion point."

"Good job, B'Elanna," I said, before my mind reach out into the depths of space.

Connecting to the ship, seeing so much through the ship's powerful sensors, was a distinct advantage, no doubt. But sometimes seeing too much could be problematic too.

Throughout the battle I had seen hundreds of escape pods being launched from dying Federation ships only for the Collector fighters to ruthlessly destroy them, violating a dozen galactic treaties that they had never signed or agreed to. Hundreds more were trapped aboard dying Starfleet ships, unable to be rescued before they were jettisoned into the vacuum of space, or died slowly as life support ran out and those were some of the less gruesome ways to die.

It never quite made sense to me why a starship with shields up couldn't use their transporters. Sure, it made sense to deny your enemies the ability to transport onto or from your ship, but couldn't you open a random, small, and extremely short-lived hole in your shields so that the transporter would work? You didn't need a person sized

hole in the shield, after all. My Husnock transporters, with their shortened materialization routine, were ideal for this.

Reaching out, I locked onto the flickering lifesigns of dozens of dying Starfleet personnel in escape pods, or in starships that had been destroyed or were adrift, beaming them directly into my sickbay for emergency treatment. For those that I detected were too close to death, I shunted the transporter beam into the sickbay pattern buffers for temporary stasis storage, again using Scotty's ingenious transporter storage solution that was the basis for my armor's transporter inventory. My holo-doctor could bring these extreme cases out at their leisure, using the sensor record of the transport to ensure they had everything they needed on hand and ready to go to save their patient's life.

"Hermione, please take over," I ordered, before turning my attention to the corridors outside the hull breach.

"Coordinate with Dr. Gadot to ensure they're not overwhelmed with patients. Activate space marine security on the deck to ensure the Starfleet personnel we rescue do not leave the protection of sickbay and wander about causing problems."

"Will do, father," she replied. Natasha and Carl quite busy with destroying Collector fighters and ships.

While Hermione carried out my new orders, I turned my attention to the boarding in progress and immediately a holographic display filled the front of the bridge in full panoramic high-definition glory, like they were right in front of us in the flesh, though the lack of smell told the truth. It showed a charnel house. Hur'q bodies were lying stacked upon each other in the corridors like firewood, with blood pooling on the deck floor. Some were dismembered; others had obviously been killed by energy weapons.

My predator aliens were using their disc and spear weapons, their wrist blades and shoulder plasma canons to great effect. Several Hur'q had obviously been shot with a Predator's net gun, which shot a sharpened metallic net at hyper velocities, the net capturing and then contracting around enemies to cut them into pieces the more they tried to escape the net. In this case the holo net had done its job and disappeared, but the horrific cuts left behind on Hur'q bodies remained.

In that part of the ship holographic xenomorphs were grabbing Hur'q from above and below, their razor-sharp segmented tails cinching around Collector necks and pulling them into the ceiling, only for a headless torso to fall down to the deck plate with a meaty thwack. Some Collectors were pulled into crew quarters along the

corridors, separating some from the group, biting heads off and ripping and tearing bodies to pieces, their spiked tails striking like a scorpion into skulls.

The space marines were constantly cutting enemies to pieces with their chainswords and shooting their bolt weapons causing horrific mini explosions in flesh. Some were even taking advantage of their great strength and literally throwing Hur'q bodies into the remaining lethal force fields, or using the Hur'q's own weapons on them, all while the auto turrets that hadn't been destroyed were firing, sometimes even through my holograms. If we survived this day, the ship's internal security forces would benefit greatly from all the combat data they were acquiring. Connected to the ship as I was, I could literally see the dynamic coding evolve as they figured out which strategies were effective against this enemy, becoming more efficient killers (especially of Collectors) each minute the battle went on.

“FOR THE GLORY OF THE GOD EMPEROR, LORD GOTHIC!” the space marines bellowed in voices filled with reverent worship and bloodthirsty joy, as two space marines worked together to pull a Collector literally apart, like they were finally getting the chance to serve me, to worship me by killing in my name. *“DEATH TO THE XENOS!”*

I may as well have been Vulcan for how high my eyebrow raised at their zealous war chant, but I admit, I also had a smile on my face. This was the both the benefit and danger of holo-programming while neurally linked to a computer system, something as far as I knew only I was capable of in the known quadrant. When you programmed like this you weren't limited by using a keyboard or even voice commands to program a holo character, you were bringing to life a complete mental picture with all the depth that that could entail, both the author's conscious and subconscious building the character from the ground up.

I was famous in the quadrant as a holoauthor for the richness and depth of my holoprograms, but there were dangers when using this method. Sometimes you put in things that you hadn't consciously intended or even realized. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that I had put myself in the role of the God Emperor, the very focus of my holo-space marines' worship. I was honest enough with myself to admit that I wanted power and an army of zealous, loyal worshipers appealed to me on many levels given the dangers I knew were ahead of me.

“Don't worry, T'Maz, I'll tell them that you're a good xeno that fucks their God Emperor like a champ,” I

reassured and joked over the comm system. T'Maz's eyebrow of doom in response was hilarious.

As for the Hur'q, despite how many my forces and defenses killed, they continued to steadily advance through my ship. The Collectors, while alien, were *not* stupid and had realized that they needed to destroy the barriers, force fields, holo-emitters, and weapon turrets as they advanced. Despite my supplies, I couldn't afford to use independent power sources throughout my ship, eventually they realized that severing the local power conduits could shut down some of my defenses, but each and every meter they advanced was paid for in dozens of Collector dead. The only reason their onboard forces hadn't all already been killed, their boarding torpedoes only being so big, was that new soldiers were constantly being beamed onboard to replace the ones that we'd killed.

The need to supply power was unfortunately a glaring weakness of my holographic security forces. Both the hologram and their holographic weaponry, like the discharges of their weapons, couldn't extend beyond the field the holoemitters could reach, so cutting off the power to the holoemitters pretty much made them useless. This was why I was already planning on integrating NS-5s into my security forces.

"Gothic, the Hur'q forces are pulling back!" Neela reported.

That made no sense at all. We had the intruders contained onboard the *Temptress*, their advance slowed down to a crawl, but they were winning the larger battle with the freighters!

"The *Enterprise* is here, along with three ships from the Andorian Imperial Guard."

They were the primary military force of the Andorian Empire, and maintained both starships and Imperial Infantry Units. Unlike the Earth space forces the Imperial Guard hadn't been absorbed into Starfleet, which is why you didn't see many Andorians serving in Starfleet, but as far as I was aware they only protected Andor and a few of their historical holdings, they hadn't seen any real action in a good long while.

A Galaxy-class ship like the *Enterprise* was a match for a single Hive Ship, *somewhat*. While there were five such vessels here, the Hive Ships depended on their fighters for defense, much like how a hive of bees was defended by the bees swarming an attacker. The reason the *Enterprise* was somewhat a match for a hive ship was because the vast majority of the fighters and the other Collector craft

were away from the Hives, leaving the ships somewhat vulnerable.

Not that those details really mattered right now, at least not to me. I had aliens infesting my ship, with more still beaming aboard every minute trying to take control of her, and something on the scanners was visibly alarming T'Maz. Well, she looked alarmed by Vulcan standards. It must be something really alarming to get such a visible reaction out of her.

"I am detecting fluctuations in the spatial anomaly," she reported. "It is exponentially expanding in size, and there is something else..." she reported, trailing off for a few moments while intently studying what the sensors were telling her.

Once again I found myself impressed by how calm she was in this fraught situation. The ship continued to gently shake every now and again from weapons' fire, from the many ships we were still fighting ship-to-ship. And even while a pitched battle was being waged in space, the *Temptress* firing dozens of quantum torpedoes and anti-proton energy beams jacketed in positrons to destroy enemy ships and fighters, we were also fighting hand-to-hand inside the ship, the holograms even now fighting a ruthless battle with an ever-increasing number of Collector warriors.

"I've run another gravimetric analysis," she said. "See the results."

The data displayed before me made sense of the situation, well, somewhat. As best as I could understand a massive new gravity well had just appeared on our sensors, and a gravity well of this size was normally only found around a body in space that had a mass equal to that of Earth's moon or a small planetoid. Only there wasn't a moon in system to provide the gravity well, at least not yet. The gravitational field was coming from the other side of the rift.

"By the Prophets!" I swore, connecting references made in the stolen Collector database to the situation at hand. "They're bringing a small planet through the rift!"

In the records of the Hur'q, which were hard to understand even for me, I'd found references to a central hive, a supreme nest, or a world ship. The terms changed based on the era the record was from and which caste made the record. While each Hive was somewhat independent, even when working in tandem with others, they all answered to one central/supreme authority. Sort of like how the colony worlds of humanoid species would still answer to the home world.

That could explain the odd tactics of the enemy seen so far, they had been waiting for the supreme commander to arrive or determining if their presence was even required for this campaign. She would be a Hur'q queen who birthed new queens I felt sure. They were regrouping now, and not because the Hive ships were under threat. Thankfully that also meant no new Hur'q were being beamed aboard my ship to replace their losses. Natasha reported that there were still 133 Hur'q warriors still alive on the *Temptress*, but that number was going down every minute.

"Gothic, the *Enterprise* has taken command of the remaining local forces. It is on an intercept course for the event horizon of the anomaly. Captain Picard has ordered all vessels in the area to converge on the *Enterprise*," Neela informed me.

I didn't doubt for a second that the many times-over heroes that served on that famous ship had come up with an utterly insane, but brilliant plan to close the rift, thereby saving the Federation from total annihilation, because that'd be the only outcome if a Hur'q world ship made it into this system and dimension. That ability to win, to defy fate, was why three different series of Star Trek followed a ship called *Enterprise*. That was what they were famous for after all, at least when they weren't

encountering strange new forms of life, or playing taxi service for some VIPs, or some other random mission.

Many fans of the show had scratched their heads at the mission history of the *Enterprise*. The galaxy-class of ships had been designed to be a living community in space to allow the ship to go on long 10 to 20 yearlong exploration missions far, *far* away from Federation space. They never really strayed far from home, though. I guess the Federation as a whole just felt better with them being on hand instead of years away at maximum warp.

"Well, let's join them," I decided. "Setting course for the rift, full impulse. Destroy any Collector ship in range that gets in the *Enterprise's* way."

This would either be a heroic charge to save the day or a heroic way to die, either way it would be memorable and would earn me a ton of goodwill from the Federation. I wasn't too worried about dying, though, not really. The crew of the *Enterprise* would save the day; they always did. Besides, given the stellar distances involved we'd be bringing up the rear, so there'd likely be a lack of things for us to shoot at and be shot by.

"Captain!" T'Maz called out as I began heading to the rift, interrupting my train of thought. Had I seriously just jinxed myself? "One of the Federation cargo ship's

engines have been reactivated. I am detecting Collector and human lifesigns aboard. The ship is on a collision course with Earth, travelling at full impulse, collision with the planet will occur in 53 seconds.”

“Can’t Starfleet do anything right?” I grumbled, flipping the ship end over end to chase after the commandeered cargo ship. “Are there any other ships in range that can intercept?”

“Negative, all runabouts and shuttles previously in the area have been destroyed. All other starships in range are converging on the rift,” T’Maz answered.

“They waited for Starfleet’s attention to turn to the rift,” I said aloud. “Tricky little bugs. Can we destroy the ship?”

“Negative, distance to target is outside maximum weapon’s range.”

“What about a microwarp jump?” I asked quickly.

“Inadvisable given the intense gravimetric shear in the system. Our destruction would be near certain.”

“Engineering, I’m redlining the impulse engines to close the distance. Standby to make emergency repairs; keep the engines running no matter the cost,” I ordered tersely.

“Understood, captain,” B’Elanna replied quickly in a no-nonsense tone.

The ship lurched forward as it reached sublight velocities a ship its size had never been intended to reach, each second bringing us closer and closer to our target.

“Target is entering the planet’s atmosphere.”

Fuck! Firing on it now would cause all kinds of collateral damage if I missed.

My mind raced as I sought a solution that would prevent a half million tons of starship from hitting the Earth at full impulse. The extra speed, thankfully, had allowed us to close the distance to the cargo ship locked on a collision course with Paris, the seat of the Federation government on Earth, putting us within extreme tractor range. I activated my ship’s powerful tractor beam and immediately my ship began to shake violently as it caught the large, heavy ship in the beam. This was exactly what you *weren’t* supposed to do with a tractor beam. The cargo ship was heavily laden with cargo and was traveling at maximum sublight speed; it was now caught in the gravity well of Earth which meant that it was traveling even faster than before. Thankfully, my goal was to slow it down and pull it closer to my ship, not to stop it entirely.

“Captain, feedback from the tractor beam is tearing the ship apart,” T’Maz warned.

“I know. Emergency power to the tractor beam! Flood the area with any radiation or particles that will hide or obscure what I’m about to do from sensors, or at least as best you can,” I ordered. “Pull the cargo ship as close to us as possible.”

This plan, which I’d shamelessly stolen from an episode of Stargate SG-1, was insane on a myriad number of levels. There was a good chance we’d die carrying it out and even if we didn’t immediately die, I’d be exposing a capability that could see me hunted across the galaxy. Maybe Q’s notice me not magic would hide what I was about to do, maybe not. Part of me was tempted to just let the ship hit the planet, regardless of the consequences and the tens of millions of lives likely to be lost in an instant. If the target wasn’t Earth, if it wasn’t Paris of all places, I’d probably say fuck it and just let it happen rather than risk myself like this. The loss of the Federation government on Earth, though, would be disastrous. The Federation couldn’t handle a blow like that with the Dominion War coming in the future.

“Activating quantum slipstream drive, slipstream window forming!” I yelled. “Releasing the tractor beam!”

Focusing the deflector dish like a scalpel, I sliced a highly unstable opening in the fabric of reality directly in front of the cargo ship, at extreme range. This was yet another

example of how you were not supposed to use this technology. Thankfully, the rift stabilized a moment before the cargo ship entered the slipstream, bypassing Earth altogether. The rift closing moments later as I cut power to the deflector and pulled away from Earth.

Several hundred thousand kilometers 'past' Earth, the cargo ship was violently thrown from the slipstream corridor and the ship's warp core exploded, lighting up dark space in brilliant white light, thankfully well away from Earth. Fucking Collectors couldn't be satisfied with just flying the ship into the surface at full speed, they couldn't help but try to give that final fuck you.

The fact that I would have probably done exactly the same thing, well, feel free to call me a hypocrite.

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San Francisco. Earth.

It had been both years and hours since I'd last been back, but I was glad that I had finally returned to my new home, at least by some interpretation. This might not have been *my* Earth, but it had become my second home in the Star Trek dimension when I had arrived. In all my travels in this dimension, I'd still never seen anything quite like this city. It had such a diverse population, so many cultures and species somehow living in harmony, making this

place feel vibrant and full of life. No wonder Section 31 worked so zealously in the shadows, taking on the role of bloodthirsty amoral monsters willing to do the darkest of deeds to keep this paradise from being destroyed by a cruel and uncaring galaxy that would happily destroy everything humanity and the Federation had built.

The overall mood was quite somber at the moment. People should be celebrating the Federation's victory in the streets, especially with how close they'd come to death or enslavement at the hands of the Collectors, yet they seemed almost mute, numb even. I suppose the citizens of Earth were unused to an existential threat to their very lives, one that had so rudely, so unfairly, and so inconveniently made them aware of their own vulnerability, especially here on Earth where they should be the safest, the most protected. Perhaps this was exactly the kind of scare they needed to better prepare for and survive the coming Dominion War, exactly what they needed to shock them out of their own complacency. The Borg attack on its way to Earth had done that to some degree in the shows, at Wolf 359, so maybe this event could serve the same purpose?

The day had been saved by the *Enterprise*, of course, just as I'd expected. They'd fired some kind of beam into the rift, somehow forcing it to prematurely close just as the

fucking moon-sized ship began to transition into this reality. T'Maz later told me that the sensor data I'd sold to Section 31 on the rifts we'd encountered had been instrumental in the *Enterprise* coming up with their plan. Without those sensor records they'd have had no idea where to even begin. As always, destroying something was far easier than creating it in the first place.

I had long been paid for the sensor data, but you're welcome, Picard, I thought sardonically. Not that he would ever learn of my involvement.

The rift closed, ripping that massive planet-sized ship apart. Multiple fleets of ships would have had a hell of a time blowing that monstrosity up with all their powerful weapons, but when up against a spatial anomaly, size didn't really matter. After that the remaining Collectors had become completely disorganized and easy to defeat.

With their central leadership destroyed, some of the hive ships immediately fled the system, abandoning their smaller ships who covered their escape by sacrificing their lives, another had self-destructed for some alien forsaken reason, and one had been destroyed by Starfleet before the fighting had finally stopped.

With the battle finally over I finally had an excuse to leave the bridge and hunt the last few dozen remaining

Hur'q that were still onboard. It was *glorious*. My sword bathed in the blood of my enemies when I had the opportunity to go hand-to-hand. A side benefit of all this was that I now had literally hundreds of Collector weapons lying around that I had quickly stored in my armory, many of them with a still functional micro-singularity power cell. I'd have spares for years at this rate.

I wondered if that was the end of it or if the Hur'q would return one day with a new leader to exact revenge on the Federation. I simply didn't know, but it certainly fit the history of the Star Trek dimension. Defeated foes like Khan had waited decades to come back to exact their revenge.

The apartment I was in now was the one I had originally been assigned upon coming to this dimension. I kept it here, despite rarely visiting Earth these days, as the 'rent' was so stupidly cheap in comparison to my full wealth that it made little sense to ever give it up. My crew also knew that any of them were welcome to use it when on Earth too. In this case, I was glad I had kept it because my ship was in no fit state to live on at the moment, as it currently had a Collector boarding torpedo sticking out of its side like a knife and many decks were more akin to a

slaughterhouse with Collector blood and corpses literally everywhere.

The battle with the Collectors onboard my ship had also caused some unexpected losses in resources too. I had, admittedly, gotten a little greedy on Janus VI, and after filling every traditional storage space on my ship, had filled virtually every stateroom and corridor with containers filled with dilithium, pergium, and latinum. The fight with the Collectors inside the ship, curse them to hell, had destroyed many of the containers I'd stored in the corridors close to their boarding torpedo. I had very purposely kept myself from trying to calculate the sheer loss in value, but I knew that it was substantial. To clear up space and make repairs easier, I had already sold a small percentage in order to at least clear out the corridors. Given the attack on Earth, the commodity prices were sky high at the moment, so I had made a substantial profit. My plan had always been to keep a good bit of it, to keep expanding my fleet of cargo ships and to build the Gothic Defense Net for other planets, but in the months ahead I would slowly release more of my inventory.

B'Elanna had already completed her analysis of the damage to the ship and had recommended that we put the ship into a space dock for proper repairs. Given all the

damaged vessels up there, normally I would have had to wait weeks for a dedicated repair team to fix up the *Temptress*, but there were definite advantages to people knowing that I'd fought valiantly to protect civilians when under no obligation to, had destroyed over a hundred Collector fighters and ships, and had saved hundreds of Starfleet personnel by beaming them into my sickbay. Oh, and had saved Paris and the Federation government. No big thing. The 'Savior of Paris' had a nice ring to it.

Of course, I also had my Section 31 contacts to help expedite and move me to the front of the queue. Being a hero with influential contacts had its perks.

I did worry about those curious Starfleet types discovering just how advanced my ship's technology was, but my patron's notice-me-not magic/SEP field seemed to still be working these days. My ship had just fought a pitched battle around Earth using extremely advanced quantum torpedoes that did way more damage than traditional photon torpedoes were capable of, used energy weapons unknown to the Federation, had shields that shrugged off a Collector fighter fucking ramming the ship on a suicide run, and yet, *inexplicably*, Starfleet wasn't asking me any questions about my ship, yelling at me for possessing a powerful warship that I personally owned, or

trying to commandeer it to learn all its secrets for the good of the Federation.

I was purposely not thinking about how I had opened a corridor in space time and sent a ship through it.

Hopefully no one else would think hard on that one either.

So, with that field still up and affecting them, I wasn't too worried about the repair crews. They had a lot of work to do and little time to indulge their curiosity given the sheer number of ships requiring repair. Besides, even if they did get curious, the *Temptress* was the flagship of the Bajoran Defense Force, so doing anything other than fixing it up and cleaning out the bodies would cause a huge diplomatic incident. B'Elanna and Neela were already working on the more sensitive repairs to the technology that I didn't want Starfleet anywhere near and Natasha was always watching.

The Federation wouldn't want anything to happen to jeopardize their close relationship with Bajor, as they quite liked having control over the wormhole and as things were going, saw Bajor joining the Federation in the next few years as a near certainty anyway, though they wouldn't likely admit that fact. The Federation application process was supposed to be difficult, with many worlds failing to be admitted, well, unless you had something the Federation powers that be really, really wanted. In that

case, wink wink, the application process was pretty easy, practically a rubber stamp. And the Federation really, really wanted to maintain control of the wormhole, or at least didn't want an unfriendly or hostile power having control of it. Until Bajor officially joined the Federation as a member, Starfleet only maintained control over Deep Space Nine so long as the Bajoran government allowed it. And as the Federation had recently learned, the Cardassians were willing and able to engineer situations and circumstances which would see the Federation kicked out.

No, while some might be curious about my ship and its performance, there were far higher priority issues to deal with. Everyone was far too busy trying to clean up the huge mess left behind by the destruction of the Collector world-ship, for example, which was even now dangerously cluttering up the Sol System and making transit through the system extremely dangerous. Many of the pieces of the world ship were large enough to have their own gravity fields, which then interacted with the gravity of the Sol system itself, which meant the movements in the debris field were unpredictable at best.

Any of the larger pieces striking one of the many occupied planets in the system would be a disaster and could potentially kill millions, though they were plenty

dangerous enough as a hazard to navigation to the huge amount of ship traffic going through the capital system of the Federation on a daily basis. I couldn't imagine that anyone wanted to risk flying into a giant hunk of Hur'q moon when leaving or entering the system.

And that was ignoring the fact that the world ship debris field was a treasure trove that many races wanted a piece of. Everyone knew that intact examples of advanced Collector technology and valuable intelligence on the race were probably just waiting to be found in the debris field. Predictably, the member races of the Alliance were already at each other's throats fighting over the issue. It was only the fact that Earth and the Federation had suffered so much damage in the attack and had fought off the Collectors, without any of their actual help, that was keeping them at bay, at least for now. For the Klingons, at least, this was the Federation's kill and thus their notions of honor said that the spoils were rightfully theirs, though they still grumbled about it. The Romulans, as you might expect, were not particular fans of that idea. I suspected Section 31 would be busy for years protecting against covert operations targeting the world ship debris.

While watching the Federation President's speech and awards ceremony for the third time that evening with a wide smile, I looked over to the other side of my large

bed to once again admire the work of art that was Annika Hanson's very, *very* spankable ass. I smiled lusciously and gave myself a pat on the back for a job well done. Oh, I had spanked that ass plenty tonight when I virtually pounded her into the mattress, causing her to scream my name repeatedly. She was lying on her stomach, sleeping soundly as she recovered from the many filthy things I'd done to her sinfully beautiful body.

She'd actually come to see me, wanting to personally thank one of the 'heroes of the Federation' for all the lives I'd saved. I played humble for a while, which she probably saw right through. We talked for a while and then we just paused, mid speech, eyes locked, electricity building between us, and we practically threw ourselves at each other like animals. In fact, rather than take off her clothes, I had torn them off her sinful body, making her huge, perky tits bounce and jiggle so much my mouth just had to latch on, my tongue flicking her hard nipples. I had fucked her like an animal, taken her to pound town and she had loved it, screaming about badly she'd missed this, missed me.

After that we'd eaten dinner, letting her try dishes from the *Flight of the Navigator* universe, dishes I'd acquired in my travels that had no modern analogue in the 24th century as key ingredients had already become extinct by

the time of modern replication. Earth had lost a lot in the various wars it had fought, unfortunately. Of course, then I fucked her again. She'd collapsed into a drooling mess after the third round of Augment-level debauchery, halfway through already calling me 'master' and 'my lord' and 'my captain' begging me for more.

The 'my captain' stuff had me wondering what she had been thinking about recently. Maybe she had been reevaluating my offer of so long ago to join my crew. A man could hope. We'd have to talk about it when she woke up.

I'd left a few bruises on those wide hips I'd gripped to pound that ass into pleasure town. She certainly didn't seem to mind judging by the fucked-stupid grin on her face. Something in her obviously liked the alpha male, the dominant, the primitive man in me that came out when I fucked her like she was just a convenient body to take my pleasure from. We were both odd people.

The Federation President's speech tonight, after the awards ceremony, had been rather interesting, with all the expected talk about unity and disparate people's coming together, despite no other race's military assets defending Earth in the latest battle. You could play a drinking game using all the Federation's typical talking points.

The Federation Council, due to recent events, had been given a rather nasty wakeup call. The Collectors had done a number on the alpha quadrant and the Federation itself had suffered great losses, and now even Earth and the Sol system itself was suffering those losses. More ships and personnel had been lost during this attack than even that of Wolf 359, if I recalled the numbers correctly.

It couldn't be ignored anymore, and the citizens of the Federation were finally asking how this could happen. The Federation's defenses, against such an alien and powerful foe, were found lacking, to say the least. In my opinion, as an outsider with knowledge from many of the Star Trek series, the ideals and principles of the Federation were actually the reason why the Federation had performed so poorly.

Starfleet's purpose had never been to truly act as the Federation's military, and it really wasn't in terms of armament and training, nor in their strategy and tactics. Starfleet wasn't really a military, but it was being forced to reluctantly serve that role when it came to defending the many worlds that made up the Federation. As it stood, it just wasn't very well suited to the task. It could be, in time, but it would require a fundamental shift in philosophy, personnel, and assets to make that transition.

Clearly the Federation needed to take the job of defending itself more seriously, increasing its ability to defend itself as well as wage war, however most of the Council were concerned that turning Starfleet into a proper military organization would take away from its mission of peaceful exploration and scientific advancement.

They weren't wrong, but so what?

I suspected that they were actually more worried about Starfleet growing in power and how this would affect them, the Federation civilian government, and ultimately the sovereignty of its member planets. In the Cardassian Union, as well as the Klingon and Romulan Empires, for example, the military wielded the majority of the power, and this greatly reduced the influence of its civilian leaders.

Like I had long concluded, many, if not most member worlds, wanted all the benefits of membership, but none of the sacrifices.

The current President and leader of the Council, a man called Jaresh-Inyo, had made a speech to the Federation Council offering an end to the debates that had until very recently been consuming the leaders of the Federation. Many of the citizens of the Federation had been frightened by recent events and desperately wanted

increased security, with many member worlds calling for an expansion of Starfleet and a transition from its primary mission of exploration to the protection of the Federation as a more militaristic organization. Other worlds were vigorously against such a change, feeling that a more militarized Starfleet went against the founding principles of the Federation and represented a danger to the continued sovereignty of its member planets. Of course, that had then led to worlds asking to be given the right to build their own forces, which the opposition faction also did not like the long-term implications of. For the Federation, it had grown heated, to say the least.

Letting each member world build its own proper space navy, dedicated to protecting their personal worlds, rather than the whole of the Federation, would weaken the mission of both Starfleet and the Federation and be a disaster in its own right. Richer, more powerful worlds in the Federation would be able to build those navies, leaving less prosperous worlds resentful and weakening the bonds of unity that kept the Federation together. And from a logistical standpoint, too many planetary defense forces would mean less resources being dedicated to the Federation as a whole and less recruits for Starfleet.

So the President had come up with a compromise, of upgrading and increasing the planetary defenses of all

Federation member worlds with shields and orbital defense installations, while keeping those defenses under the local control of the sovereign planetary governments. This would lead to better defended worlds which would relieve much of the strain on Starfleet to always be there at a moment's notice.

As you could imagine, at those words, dollar signs lit up my eyes before they transitioned to strips of latinum when I remembered exactly where I was. There was no way the Federation, untapped industrial capacity or not, would be able to easily upgrade or provide planetary defenses to all its member worlds in a reasonable amount of time. The modern design for such a thing probably didn't even exist yet. Even when it did, it'd be years before the less important worlds got one. That spelled opportunity for me. And with this commitment from the Federation President, paying for it was no longer an issue for even the poorest of Federation member worlds.

Getting Kessick IV to purchase the Gothic Defense Net had always been important, but now it was an absolute necessity. A successful deployment and a happy President Moss would mean she'd sing my praises, other planetary governments would send representatives to see the Defense Net in action, in time I may have more orders than I could reasonably fulfill. At least, that was the goal.

Now that I was back in the dimension, and wasn't that weird to think, I'd have to reach out to President Moss and see if we can seal the deal.

Turning my attention back to the President's speech, I couldn't help but think how clever and effective a compromise this was given the opposing views of the two factions within the council. It would probably assuage those peoples and member worlds that sought greater security and safety, even if it really wouldn't help that much in other ways and in many ways would be a giant resource suck that arguably could have been better used to expand Starfleet and develop better military technologies. Pure defense was never going to be enough against a powerful enemy set on destroying you, they'd just work around those defenses. But still, it was better than nothing and would save lives in combination with a Starfleet that eventually took seriously the security/military role it only grudgingly took on. I was a strong believer in the value of an orbital defense net, obviously, but always in combination with traditional fleet assets.

Clearly Jaresh-Inyo was indeed a clever man and knew how to handle the Council, no surprise since he'd made a decades long career of representing his planet on the Council before eventually coming to lead it. The man's idea was surprising and part of me couldn't help but

wonder if my own actions might have brought it about. Kessik's IV had had to check with the Federation leadership to determine if they were allowed to deploy my system around the planet. Betazed, too, had made inquiries, I knew, after I put a bug in Ambassador Troi's ear. Had that inspired the man?

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

I glanced at my lover and amended my current plans to include her. She had sent me some vibes indicating she may now be open to it, so why not give it a shot?

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

ship to T'Maz. She'd need more people. My quickly growing businesses needed more people too, damn it.

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

Was that too much to ask? Nah...

It was time to do some recruiting and I had two great prospects right here on Earth.