

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

Last time on The Adventures of Augment Gothic

“You mean like in Star Trek?” Amy asked slowly. Several people had recognized what I was talking about as they had obviously seen the shows.

“Exactly like in Star Trek,” I instantly replied with a soft smile, patiently waiting for them to work through their thoughts.

The look on everyone’s face was priceless. There was disbelief, obviously, along with worries that I was a crazy person, but then their eyes would inevitably flash back to the impossible array of food in front of them and the cycle would begin again. I could practically see their thoughts, acknowledging how nearly impossible it’d be to get this wide array of fresh-looking fruit and food in the middle of the apocalypse, but finding even that nearly impossible feat more believable than technology from a science fiction television show.

“I can tell you guys need just a little more proof. Perfectly understandable. So how about this?” I asked before I turned my right hand upright, and a phaser materialized in my hand. I purposely slowed down the materialization process to more closely mirror the transporter effect they were used to seeing in the shows. Gasps of shock and fear were prevalent as many cried out and stepped back. “A standard Federation type 2 phaser the likes of which you have probably seen in Star Trek

TNG, Voyager, and Deep Space Nine. Can a television show prop do this?"

I pointed my phaser at the wall and fired, a bright beam of crimson colored energy struck the wall on the stun setting. Any fan of the show would recognize the phaser, the red beam, and the sound the weapon made. They were iconic.

The stunned silence continued till I broke it myself. It was much harder to doubt my claim now that I had done the truly impossible. Getting all that food together was only practically impossible from a logistical perspective, given the current state of the world, but it was in the realm of possibility. An actual, honest to God, working energy weapon from the television show Star Trek? Now that was a lot harder to explain away.

"My name is Admiral Gothic of the Bajoran Defense Forces. A dimensional traveler not of this world," I introduced, looking each of them seriously in the eyes, especially the wide and shocked eyes of my recent lovers. "And I intend to save this world from itself."

Amy's eyes rolled up in her head and she fainted, collapsing to the floor.

"I honestly think this went about as well as I could hope for," I joked. "At least none of you tried to shoot me."

Not a single person even smiled at my little joke.

The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Chapter 50

The world had ended, the dead roamed the Earth by the billions, and I had shocked some people with seemingly impossible information, yet go ahead and try to stop people who hadn't had a really good meal in months from partaking of a veritable feast in front of them. Yeah, you'd get your fingers bitten for the trouble.

The group of Walking Dead survivors were positively stuffing their faces with the feast of delicacies I had gathered from around the world, smiling and laughing, throwing manners and propriety to the wind, and *throwing glances at me near constantly*. I simply sat there in their midst and smiled right back at them, letting them digest things both physically and metaphorically. I had made a ridiculously large breakfast sandwich for myself, along with several platters of more food, truly feeding myself fully since I had come to this dimension.

My body had extremely high caloric demands if it was going to run at optimum and since coming here, even though I had eaten probably the same as 3 other survivors, I had been on the equivalent of a starvation diet. Of course my implanted power cells through my internal nanite network, since it was working again, could supply my enhanced physiology with all the energy needs it had, but eating was a far more fulfilling endeavor and met some basic human psychological need that I was reluctant to ever give up if I had a choice about it.

As I had expected, given the intimate moments we'd shared, Amy was the one to break the silence. It was a little harder to be afraid or nervous of someone that you'd had amazing rocking sex with.

“So, is Picard really bald?” she asked, a hint of mischievousness in her eyes.

My brain practically short circuited for a moment at the question. Of all the many valid and reasonable questions about the Star Trek universe that she could have asked first, she had asked that. I laughed uproariously at the sheer ridiculousness of the situation.

“Thank you for that, Amy, this awkward silence was getting a little much,” I joked right back with a large smile. “Yes, he actually is bald in the Star Trek dimension, but younger looking than Patrick Stewart. In fact, all of the characters you’re familiar with look younger than the actors who played them on TV as the medical technology is much more advanced. Data looks the same, though, for obvious reasons.”

“So Picard just decided to keep it natural?” Andrea asked confused, a hint of a smile on her face too.

“Yeah, at least I think so. There are ways to stimulate hair growth so I’m assuming he just decided to keep it natural,” I said with a shrug, speculating a little. “I mean I never specifically asked him. Given everything else that was going on at the time I felt like it was probably the least important thing to ask about and I certainly wanted to avoid anything that drew attention to my origins or my extradimensional knowledge of the Star Trek universe.”

Amy and Dale looked thoughtful at my answer.

“So, you come from a 20th/21st century Earth just like us? Where Star Trek was a series of television shows and movies and all that?” Dale asked.

“Yes,” I replied with a smile, feeling refreshed at once again not needing to hide this information, though Jarvis and my digital daughters were protecting this information from becoming known to my crew. Admitting my extra knowledge to the Walking Dead folks was a risk in and of itself, but one I felt whose benefits outweighed the inherent risks.

“All those stories about the multiverse; they’re true, aren’t they?” Dale speculated, not even really talking to me. “Our world is probably a story somewhere too.”

Something must have shown on my face because Dale’s eyes locked onto mine intently.

“No!” Dale whispered.

Deciding that there was really no good reason to hide it, I nodded, confirming his fear.

“We were a television show in your dimension?” he asked, everyone suddenly going quiet.

“You were,” I responded simply.

“You can’t just leave it at that, Gothic!” Dale complained bitterly.

I sighed, looking away, my thoughts racing. There was admitting the truth and then there was explaining it in detail.

“The television show was called *The Walking Dead*, based on a graphic novel series, set in a world in which there had been a zombie apocalypse. Many of you were part of the main cast. And yes, I know that your world doesn’t have the word ‘zombie’ in its vocabulary, but it’s an entire genre of fiction in mine and the author purposely chose to never use the word directly, so therefore, *you* don’t know it,” I explained.

“Who wrote the comic book series?” Dale asked intently.

“Could he be our creator? Or our universe’s God?”

My eyes widened at the question, the room going still as the weight of the question could seemingly be felt by everyone. I thought I was going to be asked fun questions about Star Trek for a few hours, not digging this deep into the metaphysical and asking fundamental questions about existence itself and the nature of reality.

“His name is Robert Kirkman and I- I don’t know for sure, but I don’t think so,” I admitted uncertainly, my eyes turning down to the table laden in foot, deep in thought. “You’re asking a question that I’m not sure omnipotent beings like Q would even know.”

“But what do *you* think?” Dale asked insistently, leaning forward, his eyes sharp.

“Why ask me? I’m not a God.”

“You’ve traveled the multiverse, been to dimensions that were fictional to you from your viewpoint, and given you’re a mortal

like the rest of us I might actually understand your answer,” Dale answered with a small smile that I returned.

I sighed, but tried to voice the ideas that I had struggled with myself in this new life.

“There are a couple ways to view the multiverse when I know and have seen that the stories I’ve seen or read about are real somewhere out there,” I tried, slowly answering, before thinking ‘fuck it.’ “Maybe by virtue of writing it, those authors or writers are truly creating whole universes from nothing. The power of creation itself. Or maybe they’re just channeling, or accessing the multiverse and being given glimpses of these already existing universes and writing them down. Like a biblical prophet. Or maybe it’s just the fact that the multiverse is infinite, truly infinite in a way that our mortal minds can’t even begin to fathom, which means that every story we can think up exists out there in the infinite multiverse, whether we’ve thought or conceived of it yet or not. Essentially, the monkeys in a room with typewriters thought experiment.”

The looks of incomprehension suggested that maybe that idea didn’t exist in this dimension.

“It goes like this, if you put a hundred monkeys in a room with a hundred typewriters, given infinite time, the monkeys will eventually recreate the entire works of Shakespeare,” I explained. “I personally think it’s a combination of options 2 and 3.”

“Do you know how all our stories end?” Rick asked after several long pregnant moments of silence ensued as everyone reflected on the nature of reality itself.

“I was taken from my world in 2016, during the show’s 6th season and it looked like it would enjoy many more because it was one of the most popular shows on television at the time.”

“Good to know our shitshow of a world was *popular*,” Daryl grumbled quietly.

“What happened to us?” Rick asked.

“Do you *really* want to know?” I asked pointedly. “You might learn things you might not like.”

Rick glanced around at everyone, but found no consensus, looking shellshocked and unsure at this unexpected turn in the conversation.

“Tell us. I don’t care how bad it was,” Rick answered.

“The main cast enjoyed more longevity than most of the ancillary characters, but that didn’t mean they wouldn’t die too as the show progressed,” I answered. “Some of you are ancillary, background characters that the show killed off in various episodes to drive up dramatic tension.”

“Is my brother alive right now?” Daryl asked, standing up.

“Yes, he cut off his hand to escape from the rooftop and managed to prevent it from bleeding out,” I replied with a small smile, happy to give a little good news. “During the course of the show you would have encountered him working as an

enforcer for a megalomaniac known as the Governor, but he dies eventually. You were still alive as of the 6th season though.”

Daryl fell back into his chair heavily.

“Who died?” Shane asked.

I hesitated, but plowed through.

“You for one, killed by Rick after he discovered that you were sleeping with Lori,” I answered, Shane looking surprised, but not actually disbelieving, as if he had likely always feared it would come to that. “My intervention in bringing out the truth early in a controlled setting likely prevented that, but I would suggest that you guys all sit down and make sure that there are no lingering hard feelings.”

Rick and Shane both turned and nodded seriously at this advice, looking at each other. It looked like their friendship would withstand my reveal.

Many more questions about their future were asked. Some, notably, like Dale, remained quiet, indicating that they didn’t want to know.

“Lori, you died in a prison the group discovers and tries to build a home in in future seasons,” I answered, choosing to not share about her pregnancy. “Jacqui, you decided to stay in this building with Dr. Jenner, just as it’s set to blow up because you didn’t want to live anymore. Amy, you were fated to die during the walker attack in the night, back at the quarry, but I prevented that. Carol, you were still alive when I left my reality, so was Rick and Daryl.”

“What about Sophia?” she asked, hesitantly.

I shook my head slowly, wishing she hadn’t asked that question.

“She was destined to be separated from the group on the highway upon leaving here and eventually was killed and bitten by a walker,” I admitted. “Her reveal as a walker was a huge shock to the audience in a future episode.”

“NO!” Carol cried.

I stood up and took her hands gently in my own.

“Those events will not be allowed to happen,” I stated with conviction. “Right now my starship is in orbit, and I intend to save this world by uplifting it.”

“What about the prime directive?” Dr. Jenner asked.

“Right now I’m in the perfect position to say, ‘fuck the prime directive,’” I said. “I’m going to have to guide this world for some time to come before things stabilize, but I’m willing to make that commitment and have certain AI resources that can do it in my stead when I move on.”

“It makes no difference how we lived or died on this television show,” Dale began quietly, “your presence here changed all that. I’d much rather look forward to the future with hope, rather than know that I died for *dramatic episodic tension*.”

“What happened after you arrived on the *Enterprise*?” Amy asked.

“I spent some time there for a while before I returned to Earth and tried to live for a while,” I continued. “Whether it was a

result of how I had been changed, or just a fan who wanted to explore and go on adventures, I did everything I could to get off the planet and go on adventures. Q gave me a starship, though I didn't know that at the time. Section 31 recruited me and convinced me to take a long-term mission on Bajor to help weaken the Cardassian position there to help the Federation win the war with them."

"You joined the Resistance!" Andrea said loudly with a smile of excitement.

I smiled at her enthusiasm. She really was a Star Trek nerd in denial.

"I even joined the Shakaar resistance cell, Kira's cell," I boasted.

"No!" Andrea returned.

"Yes!" I joked.

"What was it like?" Dale asked, referring to the Occupation, looking solemn.

"It was a 100x worse than anything you saw depicted in the show. It was a network television show, how could they really show it? Even describing it would have been too much for the network censors," I admitted and questioned. "Imagine if the Nazis had control of the whole planet and there had been worldwide concentration camps operating continuously for over 50 years."

"Did you help them win?" Dale asked.

“Yes,” I answered proudly. “Section 31 provided me with weapons and supplies to give to the Resistance and with my help and military experience we liberated Bajor years ahead of schedule. I even got my own Resistance cell.”

“Who was in it?” Andrea asked.

“Kira, of course, Ro Laren, who I recruited, and Neela,” I said, glancing around to see if anyone would recognize that name.

“The would-be assassin, the zealous follower of Kai Winn, who was convinced to try to kill Vedek Bareil!” Jenner yelled out in realization.

“Great memory, doctor. You nerd!” I complimented and insulted simultaneously, though the wink I threw at him softened my words. “Yeah, I wanted to save her from her fate. It’s kind of been my thing since I came to the Star Trek dimension, but unlike a lot of others, I’m not a fix everything kind of guy. I’ve made a life for myself and gone on adventures, banged hot alien women, made tons of credits and latinum, started my own business, bought an island and built a palace fortress on it, built a badass hyper advanced starship. So I’m not exactly living the hippy communist life of your typical Federation citizen.”

“Did you go to Risa?” Shane unexpectedly asked out of the blue.

“It seems we’ve got a stealth Star Trek fan here, people!” I joked, Shane looking away from everyone, acting embarrassed.

“I’ve seen a few episodes, ok!” Shane good naturedly shot back at everyone once his courage returned. “Always wondered what Risa would be like in real life, you know?”

“I did and it’s even more awesome than you could imagine,” I answered seriously. “Take your dirtiest fantasy and multiply it by a hundred.”

All the men in the room had wide eyes in shock, but were definitely looking intrigued.

Amy and Andrea, like the sisters they were, rolled their eyes in unison at the men’s reaction.

“How?” Amy asked.

Though she hadn’t fully vocalized the question, it was pretty clear to me that she wondered how I had gotten from my dimension to that of the Star Trek dimension.

“I’m still not 100% certain, but it appears a contemporary of Q, probably some kind of other multiversal, omnipotent, God-like being or eldritch horror, picked me up and put me in the path of the *Enterprise*, during the episode where Data was kidnapped by that alien collector, Kivas Fajo. They didn’t exactly ask first, but I would have thanked them for it,” I answered. “I woke up in Crusher’s sickbay, changed, confused, weakened but simultaneously *more*, all my senses stronger and overwhelming. It took some time to adjust and for the *Enterprise* crew to eventually realize that I wasn’t an Augment like Khan, that I wasn’t even from their dimension of reality.”

“You’re genetically enhanced... Now that...explains so much,” Amy said, looking intently at Andrea who blushed. “No one is that good in bed.”

Thankfully, Rick and Shane did not realize that Lori had blushed just as deeply, focusing intently on the food in front of her.

“Fuck, I wish I knew what the fuck you guys were talking about. Star Trek was for nerds and other sci-fi geeks,” Darryl grouched. “I’ve only seen a couple of episodes here and there.”

Rick, Shane, and several of the other survivors nodded their heads energetically.

“Dale and I are Star Trek super nerds, and so is Andrea, though she doesn’t like to admit it,” Amy smiled widely. An insulted ‘hey!’ coming from Andrea in response. “I’ll explain anything you want to know. I imagine Dr. Jenner is one too.”

Dr. Jenner looked mock offended.

“You think that just because I’m a scientist that I have to be a Star Trek super nerd too??” he asked with a pause, though everyone nodded back at him instantly. He practically deflated at their certainty. “Well, yeah, you’re right. I’ve even read the novels.”

“Did you face any prejudice for being an Augment?” Dale asked intently, looking excited at learning stuff about the utopian culture of the Federation, stuff that the shows had never covered. “Khan was in the era of Kirk. Surely all that time since would have given them more perspective.”

“Not really. The Federation is still very zealous with their anti-genetic enhancement ban and they really do prevent enhanced people from certain jobs or positions, or joining Starfleet,” I answered. “Although I didn’t want to join Starfleet anyway, it

was one of the reasons why I had a plan to get a ship of my own and start exploring. Q later told me that he was eager for me to start on my adventures and didn't have the patience to wait for me to slowly acquire the credits and materials necessary to acquire or build a ship of my own, so he sent one to me."

The conversation continued on like that for several more hours as they asked many questions about the life I'd built in the Star Trek dimension and what I envisioned for this one. With their help, I greatly refined my plans to save this world.

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CDC Operations Center.

"Have you made a decision yet, Doctor?" I asked, breaking the pervasive silence in the CDC Emergency Operations Center. "Because pretty soon your decision is going to be made for you."

Dr. Jenner, who looked like he had been lost deep in thought, jumped up and let out a very unmanly shriek in my opinion. I merely smiled unapologetically at his reaction before pointedly glancing at the bright red numbers on the wall, still inexorably counting down on the digital display to this building's complete destruction. Dr. Jenner's eyes, like I had intended, followed mine and he sighed.

"With all the other impossible truths I dropped on them, I think they missed the fact that you and Jacqui held hands and stared into each other's eyes, as the very air caught fire and this place was destroyed, *immolated* maybe? I don't get to use that word

very often. Not sure what word best fits,” I nonchalantly shared. “In terms of final moments, it’s not exactly a bad one, quick, painless, sharing that meaningful moment with another living person, letting go of a horrific life’s terrible burdens and looking forward to being reunited with loved ones in a single bright flash. There are a lot worse ways to go, let me tell you. The Resistance fighters I had the honor to fight beside were practically Klingon in their fatalism, in the way they wanted their deaths to have meaning and purpose, to serve the people they left behind, even as their lives ended.”

The reminder of my time in the Star Trek universe caused Dr. Jenner’s eyes to light up in reluctant excitement at this casual admission.

“Of course, I’ve rather seriously upended the apple cart there, haven’t I? Really fucked things up there, didn’t I?” I asked. “For that I do apologize.”

Dr. Jenner just nodded, but remained silent.

“Before it was probably all so clear. This world was over and there was little hope for anything to get better. Your final promise to your wife, which you had honored as you walked these tomb-like halls by yourself, had run its course. You could be proud of that fact, knowing that everyone was already infected, that there was no hope for a cure as all the vestiges of the old world failed and fell apart, science and logic to be replaced with savagery and barbarism,” I explained. “You’re a very smart man, Dr. Jenner, well read, practical and pragmatic, you know what life will be like outside these walls now. You

haven't directly experienced the horrors outside, but even without seeing them or experiencing them yourself, I'm sure you know what's out there right now and what you could expect to experience. The worse impulses of mankind running amok, hell on Earth. In the words of Thomas Hobbes, life in this new world would be 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.' And let's face it, you're not exactly built for this new world."

"Am I wrong?" Dr. Jenner asked. "You've watched six seasons of this world, am I wrong?"

"Oh no, you're exactly right," I said, shaking my head. "Tin pot dictators, rampant murder and rape, cult-like groups of crazies running around destroying any communities they find that have sprung up just to cause ruin and despair and not even for limited resources, even cannibals. All that and so much more. But that was before I came along."

Dr. Jenner watched me intently, hanging on to my every word.

"I'm going to make this world as close to a utopia as it gets, Dr. Jenner, whether it likes it or not and no one is going to have the power to fight it. I'm going to bring the best aspects of the Federation to this world, but it will need men like you," I argued. "What would your wife want you to do in this instance? Embrace death right now or roll the dice and play a big part in the rebuilding of this world, leaving your unique mark on it. Which will it be?"

I let the silence hang between us for a while as I patiently waited for a response, though I hadn't expected a bout of laughing.

“My wife was a bigger Star Trek nerd than even me,” Dr. Jenner laughed, tears running freely down his cheeks. “She’d kick my ass in the afterlife if I chose to die now rather than take advantage of this opportunity. How often do you get to build a new world?”

I smiled and held my hand out and a small device appeared from out of my transporter buffer inventory.

“This is a micro fusion generator,” I explained. “It’s small, but capable of supplying the power needs for this whole building for the next several centuries at least. How about we go and stop that countdown? I’ll deploy a few drones to guard the facility when we relocate.”

With renewed hope in his eyes, Dr. Jenner gave a firm nod, turning away for good from the bright red countdown, ready to start this new chapter of his life.

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“Welcome, friends, to the working group tasked with building a new world from the ashes of the old,” I said bombastically, as I glanced around at my digital daughters, Carl, and my entire crew. “I have many ideas for how to go about this, but I know I can’t do this alone. Believe me, I eagerly welcome your input and advice.”

We were gathered on my ship’s holodeck as it would provide us with the best possible working environment and could be adjusted to fit whatever we needed. Right now the holodeck was projecting a large conference table that we were all gathered

around. Above the table was a hologram of the Earth below us in orbit, updated in real-time by the telemetry from my ship's powerful sensors. While the anaphasic energy field that saturated the planet's surface still degraded the sensors' readings, the ship had been in orbit long enough for my crew to come up with a partial workaround.

“Where on Earth did you get this *planetary conquest and administration package*?” B’Elanna asked, her eyes looking up from a PADD that she had been intently studying, one which probably laid out the Minoan playbook for conquering and indoctrinating a planet’s population, a playbook meant to both maintain control of a population as well to change hearts and minds so completely that they welcomed that control. “The Klingon Empire routinely conquers planets, and I don’t think even they have something this...well thought out, insidious, and...*diabolical*.”

I subtly glanced at Carl, before focusing on B’Elanna, ensuring that he remained quiet. I had gone to great lengths to hide the fact that Minos was mine from my crew, so I wasn’t keen on giving anyone more information to connect the dots. Of course, B’Elanna learning of it wasn’t what I truly worried about, she was only one person, it was Section 31 realizing that I had all the resources and advanced weaponry/technology of a world like Minos to call upon. My threat level was already likely worryingly high in their eyes, especially since I had successfully hidden the fact that I had built and now possessed my own highly advanced warship, but add Minos to it and they might decide to just kill me and be done with it. Organizations like

Section 31 didn't like surprises at all, which is why I tried to keep them up to date with my goings on, well, as much as I could. At a certain point, no matter how useful and accommodating I was to them, their threat analysis would state that I should be eliminated, *just in case*.

"It is exceedingly comprehensive and maps out a very dispassionate and logical long-term program to subjugate a population, and over time, ensure that they accept their new lives and rulers," T'Maz stoically commented. "I approve."

B'Elanna scoffed at those words.

"I have to agree with, T'Maz," Neela replied with a smirk. "If the Cardassians had had this playbook, the Bajoran people might have happily accepted the Cardassian Occupation. The plan certainly has its more extreme elements, hidden as they are, but for the most part the planetary population is treated exceedingly well under this plan. The people of this world will see their lives improved in a myriad number of ways, after all. And let's be honest, anything is probably better than what they're experiencing now."

"Extreme elements? Extreme?!" B'Elanna laughed mockingly, looking around at everyone. "Did you know that there is an entire section of this plan mapping out counter-revolutionary/counter-resistance strategies? Guess how this plan deals with it. It actually advises the new ruling regime to foment the rebellion themselves! To basically find some willing collaborators to gather up the discontent, to create an organized rebellion around charismatic and visionary leaders, giving them

resources, including some successes to bolster their credibility in its early days. Then, once it reaches critical mass, to wipe them out from within!”

I couldn't help the small smile that reached my lips as she got more and more worked up. Some might see this as another example of her fighting me and my decisions, but this was exactly why I had invited her to join this working group, when I knew she would be a voice of dissension. My digital daughters (and Jarvis) were fanatically loyal to me, Carl was the consummate salesman and would do whatever I wanted as his leader, T'Maz was ruthless and practical and we thought very much alike, Neela loved me and trusted me and would support me in virtually anything I wanted to do given our long history and my track record of success. I wouldn't be getting a counterviewpoint from any of the others easily, well, unless I really went off the tracks, then I might.

Many times I had wondered why Section 31 put up with consummate do-gooders like Picard and Bashir who would see the organization destroyed if they had their way, but their contrary voices were valuable counterpoints to consider. It had taken a bit of introspection on my part, but I realized that B'Elanna's contrary viewpoint was valuable to me and was something that I should welcome and encourage as long as it lasted, because I had a feeling that the longer she was a part of my crew, the more opportunities she saw me succeed, the more likely it was that that contrary voice would fade away with time. Of course, recognizing the value of that contrary viewpoint didn't mean I would tolerate outright disloyalty or betrayal.

There were lines I would not let anyone cross, no matter how useful to me they were.

“I thought that was actually quite intriguing when I first read it, but I’ve come to see the wisdom in it,” I replied with a smile, infuriating B’Elanna a bit, much to the amusement of everyone else. “Rebellion or resistance or whatever you want to call it is inevitable, no matter how much better their new lives are, especially in the first 20-40 years or so. The people who have survived the end of their world are going to predominantly be not good people, they are the survivors who did what they had to to survive. There are also going to be many who thrived in this new world, who delighted in the unchecked freedom to act on whatever depraved impulse that occurred to them that will not be happy that that unchecked freedom is now taken away, no matter how great I make this new world. If Rebellion is inevitable, better to control its growth, bring all those folks together and deal with them all at once to preserve the whole.”

“That’s incredibly pessimistic, Gothic,” B’Elanna stated sadly.

“It’s also reality,” I returned. “There are going to be many, many people that don’t like the return of law and order, even if that’s accompanied with good housing, advanced medical care, education to a 24th century standard, and food security. Oh, and the lack of constant danger from billions of reanimated corpses eating them. I forgot to mention that one somehow.”

What I wasn’t willing to share with B’Elanna was that the drones I was building were programmed to deal with the more obvious of these elements who would not accept the new world I

was creating. The serial rapists, murderers, community destroyers, and cannibals would be vaporized before they even had a chance to infect the new world that I was building. Even now, Carl, with the help of the ship's powerful sensors and the former military satellites we'd reactivated or repaired, was building a database of those people marked for elimination along with appropriate proofs of their misdeeds. One of my ongoing tasks before I left this dimension was to review and then either approve or deny their inclusion on the elimination lists.

When possible, rather than vaporizing them in a large crowd where everyone could see and would know what we were doing, they would be eliminated clandestinely, or an accident would be arranged for them. This world was extremely dangerous after all, and people died all the time. The more subtly these eliminations could be achieved the better, that way the new regime would be viewed more positively. Where whole groups of mad men and women were marked for elimination, well, there would be no need for secrecy. Some would inevitably slip through our pre-selection nets, but that was what the counter-rebellion plan was for.

“What did you mean by the first 20-40 years?” Neela asked, sounding curious.

“The young children who grow up in the new world I'm creating, who don't remember the old, or really fully remember the horrors of the current one, will be its strongest supporters and defenders,” I explained. “It'll be mostly the ones that grew

up in the old world and thrived in the apocalyptic one that will be the troublemakers.”

I glanced around at everyone to see if everyone was happy with moving on in our current discussion. Everyone remained silent.

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“Great, moving on,” I said, before tapping on my omnitool and bringing up the agenda for this meeting. “Carl, B’Elanna, let’s move on to drone design. Where do we stand on this?”

At this change in topic, B’Elanna, the consummate engineer, perked up substantially, her eyes lighting up.

“It’s an elegant design, Gothic. Your design skills continue to amaze me,” B’Elanna gushed, looking a little starstruck, which nicely stroked my ego. Talk engineering in front of B’Elanna and even her most steadfast complaints were instantly forgotten.

“I made several small changes to the design which I outlined in the report I’m sending around to everyone.”

With that she fast swiped the report she had loaded on her omnitool, and it instantly was copied and displayed onto everyone else’s omnitool. My digital crew obviously having no need for the omnitool as an intermediary.

“To summarize, I made several small changes to the power distribution system to make it more efficient and stable at higher power draws, added a few micro thrusters for increased mobility in tight confines like a building, added a slight increase in processing power to better use external sensor inputs, and swapped out a few of the more exotic materials for ones that can

be obtained more easily locally or without a replicator,” she explained. “Once you approve, we can put them into large-scale production.”

I quickly reviewed the changes and approved all of them.

“I approve all the changes,” I said. “Carl, since the Echo Papa system will be producing this drone design, what are your thoughts on the new design? Will these changes increase production time per unit?”

Carl’s image froze for a moment as he dedicated most of his considerable processing power to answering my question, redirecting his focus from the myriad number of other tasks he was simultaneously carrying out for me across multiple dimensions.

“My lord, overall changes suggested by Chief Engineer Torres will actually result in a net 6% decrease in per unit production time,” Carl answered. “I do, however, recommend the elimination of the drone’s micro-transporter unit.”

“Hmm, explain, Carl,” I said. “You know I wanted them to beam out walkers trapped in buildings.”

“Yes, my Lord,” Carl answered. “However, elimination of the internal micro-transporter units present currently in each drone will result in an additional 17% decrease in per unit production time. There are also tangible resource savings in doing so. As you know, transporters require latinum to function and several other exotic materials. Latinum is a non-replicable material and is a vital resource used in most advanced federation technology,

including replicators. While latinum is now present in the system's asteroid belt, perhaps due to the machinations of Q, it is still a finite resource and a production bottleneck as it requires mining and refinement before it can be used. The latinum intended for drone production would be better served by being redirected to the production of industrial and food replicators, as well as the internal micro-replicators found in the construction drones.”

Several nods around the table told me that my crew was in agreement with Carl's recommendation.

“Beaming walkers trapped in buildings is a vital part of my plan to eliminate all the walkers on the planet, though,” I pointed out.

“A transporter unit and buffer can be added to the Gothic defense net you already intend to deploy around the planet, which would allow the same capabilities,” Carl continued.

“From a security standpoint, especially during the early years of this new society, limiting access to transporter capabilities will be essential in order to prevent free movement.”

“And a drone with a standalone micro-transporter unit is a much more tempting and more vulnerable target than a fixed location transporter hub, especially one in orbit,” I continued his thought on security. “I agree. Make the change in the design and begin production of the first 100 units in preparation for the first large city field test, which we have still not yet selected. Unless there are any objections?”

Looking around the group I saw no one had anything to add.

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“Moving on, Natasha, please give us a report on the walker elimination simulations I tasked you with,” I ordered.

“Yes, father,” Natasha bowed her head, looking pleased at my calling on her. “Thousands of simulations have been run with the goal of eliminating all walkers on the planet. Please note, the simulations were completed with the prior drone design, but I do not believe the results will be materially affected by the changes approved today given the fixed simulation parameters.”

“Understood, go on.”

The floating hologram of Earth changed to a highly complex chart, multiple copies facing the different participants so that they could each take in the complex information.

“As you might imagine, the more drones produced and deployed with the task of eliminating the walkers, the less overall time projections indicate it will take to eliminate all walkers present on the planet,” Natasha explained. “However, the inherent resource limitations involved with building a new society requires that only a limited number of drones be produced. Fixed simulation parameters were 1,000 drones designated for walker elimination and 500 designated for survivor location, transportation, and security with the rest of all overall resources going toward the rebuilding effort.”

“How much time do the simulations indicate the complete elimination of all the walkers will take?” T’Maz asked.

“That’s a great question, T’Maz, but there has to be a distinction made between those walkers that are free to move around in the open and those that are trapped in buildings or other enclosures,” I interjected. “Our preliminary elimination plans focus on groups of drones emitting loud alarms to summon all the free moving walkers into a large area, essentially herding them together in one area for efficient elimination as a large group. In large cities, that might be calling them into a large open space, like a public square or a crossroads of major streets, or a large highway. Go on Natasha.”

“Under our most optimistic projections, the elimination of billions of walkers present on the planet, specifically those able to freely move and be herded into efficient kill boxes, will require roughly 15 years of continuous effort,” Natasha answered. “The elimination of the walkers in enclosed spaces or buildings is projected to take approximately another 23 years.”

“Why so long?” Neela asked, sounding surprised.

“As they’re not capable of just marching to their deaths because of their confinement inside a building, extensive sensor scans to locate targets will be required and the drones will need to travel to each walker location to eliminate them by shooting into the building/enclosure, or by beaming the walker out,” I answered. “Thankfully, the anaphasic energy field each walker produces makes locating them relatively easy, assuming they’re not in a heavily shielded location, but given the sheer numbers involved, it will still take decades.”

“It would be most efficient to simply purge the matter buffer rather than rematerialize them after transport,” T’Maz pointed out, despite it being prohibited by a dozen or so galactic treaties and was considered a serious war crime by virtually every multi-planet polity in the alpha quadrant. No one wanted transporters to be weaponized and used to kill people that way, not even the Klingons, the Romulans, or the Cardassians.

I looked approvingly at my first officer/chief science officer, a little lust in my gaze, who was both sexy and ruthless in equal measure. Not only did she look sexy as fuck, like her beautiful ancestor T’Pol, but she was my little killer, who was willing to get her hands dirty. Section 31 was paying me to keep her on my crew, but the reality was that I’d probably have paid them to keep her with me.

“I agree,” I said looking at T’Maz, then turning to Neela. “As the new society I’m building matures and we’ve eliminated any hint of rebellion or resistance, more resources can be redirected toward the walker elimination project, thus shortening the time to competition. My first priority is building a safe haven for the survivors of this world, my second is to bring all the survivors to this new place.”

I glanced around to see if anyone else had anything to say.

“Thank you for all your hard work, Natasha.”

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“Carl, where do we stand on my production orders?” I asked.

“The Echo Papa 607 Primary Command-and-Control unit has been fabricated along with 100 replication and fabrication modules. They are currently deployed in orbit to prevent any survivors from interfering once they become aware of our efforts,” Carl responded. “The Command-and-Control unit will coordinate all drones operating on the planet. As the drone count scales up, tertiary command and control units will be produced automatically.”

“And the mining and refinement drones?” I asked.

“With Chief Engineer Torres’ help we have completed their fabrication and they have already been deployed to the asteroid belt. Their focus is currently on locating, mining, and refining latinum in the system’s asteroid belt.”

“Good, I’m glad to hear that,” I said, looking at my omnitool.

“Move the production of 100 weapon drones after field testing to the top of the priority list, but otherwise continue following the priority production list.”

“It will be done, my Lord,” Carl stated fanatically, bowing his head deeply at my command.

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“Hermione, please report on your findings,” I commanded.

“Yes, father. Given the timeline for walker elimination, father asked me to select a single desirable location to bring all the world’s surviving population to,” Hermione reported, looking around at the rest of the group.

“Why is that?” B’Elanna asked, sounding curious.

“As Natasha reported, simulations indicate it will be roughly 15 years of continuous effort before we can eliminate all the free moving walkers present on Earth,” Hermione explained.

“However, if we focus on a single desirable area, we can complete eliminate both the freely moving walkers and those confined by buildings or enclosures, in a fraction of the time.”

“Won’t the walker bodies decompose much sooner than that estimates anyway?” Neela asked.

“Preliminary studies by our doctors indicate the anaphasic energy the walkers are producing is slowing decomposition, perhaps even arresting it entirely,” T’Maz replied. “The walkers may continue to be a threat to the survivors of this world for decades to come, potentially longer.”

“Focusing all of our attention on a single area will result in it taking a fraction of the time to eliminate all walkers and render the area safe for the survivors,” Hermione repeated.

“The plan also highly recommended bringing the surviving planetary population to a single area for rebuilding, rather than letting the survivors remain in the countries and cultures they were previously a part of,” I expanded. “If you intend to build a new society, keeping people separate and living in the ruins of the old culture just doesn’t work. The cultural homogenization and shaping we’re encouraging will be much more effective if everyone is brought to one new location and allowed time to mix together.”

“Those cultures will be lost,” B’Elanna pointed out.

“I think that’s an exaggeration, but even so, those countries and cultures were already lost,” I pointed out. “A new world is going to require letting go of old hurts and prejudices. The old world is gone and they will need to embrace that. And even if they don’t or aren’t capable of that, their children will.”

I said that last bit with a devious smile as the education program was designed to expedite the cultural smoothing and shaping process.

“Hermione, what location did you select?” I asked, ready to move to the meat of this discussion.

“After careful thought, extensive study, and conversation with my siblings and Carl, I have selected the island of Great Britain,” Hermione answered with a bit of showmanship.

“Interesting choice, Hermione. Please explain why you selected it?” I asked.

“The island of Great Britain was the home of a first world nation with a pre-apocalypse population of roughly 62 million. Currently, much of its housing, industrial, and agricultural capacity remains intact. With minimal repairs and 24th century upgrades, it would be an ideal place to rebuild society for the roughly 10 million survivors that currently exist on Earth, beginning first with London,” Hermione explained excitedly, the holographic projection above the conference table showing scenes from Great Britain, including the largely intact city of London and the sprawling farmlands in the countryside.

“Also, as Great Britain is an island and the walkers do not possess the ability to swim, once the island’s walker population are eliminated, the walkers in the nearby lands will be unable to move into the area and replenish their population,” T’Maz pointed out.

“Exactly!” Hermione enthusiastically answered. “I had originally hoped for a more temperate island climate, one with less harsh winters, but other potential locations did not have the already existing infrastructure to support a population in the millions or the ability to allow for much population growth long-term. Australia was briefly considered, but was eliminated as the population was distributed too widely over the coastal areas and the native wildlife was considered too dangerous.”

I let the conversation of my crew wash over me as I listened with one ear while quickly reading through the hundreds of pages of detailed analysis Hermione had given me to support her choice of Great Britain and ultimately why she had rejected so many other options worldwide. Just like her fictional namesake, my digital daughter was an overachiever at heart.

When the conversation slowed down, I spoke.

“I agree with your analysis and choice, Hermione. Good work!” I stated and complimented, causing my daughter’s face to light up in happiness. “As soon as the 5 prototype weapon drones are complete, I want the first field test to be conducted in London. We’ll start eliminating the walker population there and spread out, both free roaming walkers and those in the buildings.”

Nods of assent were given around the table.

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“All right, let’s bring Dr. Gadot in for their report,” I said, the doctors instantly appearing before I could tap in the commands, my digital children probably calling them faster than I could act.

“You called for me, my lord?” Doctor Gal Gadot appeared with a bright beautiful smile on her face.

“Yes, Doctor, I’d like to hear of your progress with the cure,” I said.

“After studying your armor’s sensor readings, especially the changes your body made in the first hour after exposure, we have developed a retrovirus cure,” Doctor Gadot reported. “It will essentially revert the person’s DNA to what it was prior to exposure to the anaphasic energy field, while simultaneously preventing that same genetic change in the future, whether that is in death or being bitten by a walker.”

“I’m assuming the field experiments that I approved confirmed this?” I asked.

“Yes. We transported several serial rapists to the ship, gave them the cure, and allowed them to be bitten,” the Doctor reported. “Other than a wound from the bite itself, in the hours and days that followed they did not turn. We euthanized the rapists afterwards and confirmed that they did not become walkers. Upon death they truly died.”

I subtly glanced at B’Elanna, but other than a small grimace, I could see that the Klingon side of her pleased that these serial

rapists had been killed. I'd take these minor improvements wherever I could.

“And the other experiment I authorized?” I inquired, glancing meaningfully at B'Elanna to get her attention.

“We can report success there as well, my Lord,” Doctor Gadot happily answered. “Seeing no further experimental value, we arrested the turning of the woman who had been raped and allowed to be bitten by placing her in stasis. After we took her out of stasis and applied the cure, we were quite happy to see that the turning was arrested and reversed. Without more data we cannot confirm timeline efficacy, but we currently believe the cure can be applied successfully within 4 hours of the victim being bitten by a walker and still returning to normal.”

B'Elanna nodded at me, sending a thankful look with her eyes that I had kept my promise to her. I nodded back, happy to see it.

“Very good, Doctor. Please give my thanks to your team.”

“Have you yet been successful in aerosolizing this cure?” T'Maz asked.

Doctor Gadot shook her head.

“At the moment a direct injection is required, but we are continuing our work to further develop the cure so that it can be deployed in aerosolized form or as a food or water additive,” the Doctor answered.

While it would be much more useful in generating goodwill to make it clearly known to the survivors that we had a cure for

everyone, for those we had yet to contact formally, we may need to cure them ahead of repatriating them to London. There were roughly ten million survivors on the planet, and it would be impossible to bring them to London all at once. While we fully intended to use the first batch of survivors to help the subsequent survivors and ease the burden, the repatriation needed to be done in stages and carefully coordinated and planned for.

“Continue your work, Doctors. If you require more expendable experimental subjects, please coordinate with Carl,” I said, subtly referring to the ‘for elimination’ list of really evil people who had no place in the new world I was building.

“We will, thank you my Lord,” she said before her hologram was transferred back to sickbay.

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“Finally, let’s turn to government,” I stated tiredly. There was a lot of planning required when building a new society, and I knew that, but at my heart I was a man of action. “T’Maz, what are your recommendations?”

T’Maz stood up, then gestured widely from her omnitool transferring her report to us. As was her nature, she was direct and to the point, with little in the way of preamble.

“I have determined that the best form of government, given the unique circumstances and challenges this world faces, is a mixed form of government, combining an absolute ruler centered

around you, captain, with a democratic government serving at your pleasure,” T’Maz answered.

I sat back on my chair surprised.

“How did you arrive at this conclusion?” I asked.

“In my research on this subject, I have examined the histories of many worlds in our native dimension,” she explained. “The most useful examples, and the ones most similar to the Earth of this dimension, were those worlds and colonies that experienced a large-scale planetary disaster like a catastrophic asteroid strike or some other disaster, natural or otherwise, that eliminated much of the planet’s population. Several examples even included a pandemic which wiped out most of the population. The most successful examples of rebuilding were on those worlds whose new government had power concentrated in a single person or group, but still allowed some form of limited democracy. Concentrating power in a single person or group, especially one that is most interested in seeing the whole prosper, rather than glorying in their personal power and enjoyment, allows for quick decision making and action, limiting the ability for factions to develop with their own personal agendas that benefit the subset, rather than the whole. Relevant historical examples can be found in my comprehensive report.”

My thoughts raced as I took in the written details of how many worlds in the Star Trek dimension had come back from the brink after a devastating asteroid strike, a worldwide pandemic, a nuclear war, or even large-scale bombardment from an enemy.

T'Maz's dispassionate research showed that those worlds that had a strong and selfless authority figure to direct the rebuilding effort *invariably* did better than the ones that did not, or the ones that tried to resume their previous forms of government. Those latter examples usually ended up an utter freaking disaster and required the intervention of more stable alien cultures to bring them back from the brink of total destruction. You just couldn't immediately go back to that old form of government when 90 plus percent of your population was wiped out and the basics of survival were not assured.

"You make a compelling and persuasive argument, T'Maz, but how am I going to serve in that authoritarian role? My plan is to leave this dimension behind as soon as I can," I pointed out, feeling confused. "I have no intention of staying here for decades to come while this world rebuilds and stabilizes."

"A form of you *can* remain, captain," T'Maz pointed out, before sending a new file to everyone. "Carl provided a technology that would allow for the creation of a digital avatar based on a deep neural scan of your mind and memories."

Now that was a worrying idea.

"Are you talking about the creation of an AI based on me?" I asked with trepidation. "If so, I'm answering with a hard no on that one. There will be too much unchecked technology, too many resources, too much at stake to leave an untested AI, even one based on me, to run things here with little oversight."

"Your digital avatar would be a virtual intelligence at best, and we would not hide this from the population of this world,"

T'Maz clarified, a detailed timeline now being displayed to the group. I recognized many of the milestones from the Minosian plan that I had already altered to better fit this situation. A lot of the changes I'd made had been to make the plan less harsh and to reduce the conqueror vibe that was so prevalent in the old one. "During the first 15 to 30 years of the rebuilding, your digital avatar, ostensibly the authoritarian leader of this world's survivor population, will largely be following the pre-designed plan. In the years that follow it is hoped that the society and culture will stabilize to the point where more and more governmental power and day-to-day administration can be delegated from you to an elected parliamentary government. At any time, though, you will retain the power to veto decisions, alter plans, or reclaim some or all of your delegated powers."

I was intrigued. I'd be essentially leading this new society, even in my absence.

"I can't imagine that this avatar of me will be sophisticated enough to handle this role. How could it be?" I scoffed.

"That is accurate. Our preliminary simulations, based on other worlds facing similar circumstances, suggest that your avatar would be able to handle nearly 70% of the issues, circumstances, or decisions presented to it," T'Maz answered, again pointing to the simulation data. "The quantum communications link to this dimension allows for the remaining 20-25% to be escalated to Carl, Natasha, and Hermione for decision. The top 5%, those decisions that Carl, Natasha, and Hermione cannot reach consensus on, will be escalated directly to you."

“That is a really interesting plan,” I said after several long moments of deep thought. “I was worried I’d have to stay here for years before I could safely leave. Still, I want to more closely review the simulation parameter data.”

“It is available for your review at your leisure,” T’Maz answered before sitting down. Through her stoic look I could tell that she was feeling the Vulcan version of pride in her work. She should be. This was an ingenious plan.

“Are you sure you three have the bandwidth for this?” I asked. “It may be a tremendous amount of work in the first few decades and you’re already going to be running most of the autonomous technology that will be building this new society.”

Natasha and Hermione looked sheepish for a moment before Hermione spoke up.

“Father, taking on this additional responsibility is well within our processing capabilities,” Hermione reassured me with a smile. “In fact, we’ve been a bit bored and will welcome the challenge. Please let us do this for you.”

I frowned at this, feeling a little guilty. I hadn’t realized that they had been feeling bored. In fact, I thought that I had been *overwhelming* them with managing the ridiculous amount of data I was gathering every minute and the continuous processing my slowly expanding cloaked sensor network in the alpha quadrant required. Connecting what remained of Minos’ still functional planetary computer network into the quantum communication network must have taken much or all of the load off their primary systems.

I would have to do better by them.

“If this would make you happy, I’m happy to let you handle this,” I said, again feeling like a father who wanted to keep his children happy. “I think that’s the last item on the agenda for today. Unless there is anything else, I’ll let you all return to your priority tasks. I’ll be traveling to London soon to conduct a field test of the new drone design.”

Looking around at everyone, I saw that no one else had anything to add.

“Dismissed.”

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“Whoo!!!” I yelled as I gunned the ion engines on my tricked out 23rd century hovercruiser 924, lowering my head closer to the ‘handlebars’ of this futuristic vehicle which treated gravity like it was optional, at best. Given the low speed I was traveling at, at least relative to this vehicle’s top speed, I had the bike’s internal shield system deactivated, which meant I was currently feeling the full force of the air on my face as I cut through it like a fighter jet.

I was traveling only a scant 100 feet above the surface of the roiling ocean below me and my incredible speed had created a veritable vortex behind me that was causing saltwater to fly up in a large plume as I cut across the surface of the ocean at high speeds. It was a beautiful day, the sun was shining, wisps of clouds were in the sky, and the scent of the sea was all around me. In the middle of the ocean, land nowhere in sight, water all

around you, you could hardly tell that this world was still fully in the grips of an apocalypse that would likely, without outside intervention, likely see the extinction of the entire species.

Well, scratch that last one. There, in the distance, looked like an abandoned oil super tanker that looked mostly intact, now adrift. I wasn't detecting any living life signs, so its crew had likely been killed to the last man or they had abandoned it when food ran out. Now it was an environmental disaster in the making. There were probably a slew more of such things all over the globe. I relayed its coordinates to the ship for closer investigation and possible removal, while also adding a priority action item to remove all the nuclear weapons from the planet, where they would be stored on the moon. The most powerful weapons I'd likely keep for myself, figuring I'd find a use for them.

My destination was London in the United Kingdom. Of course, I could have just beamed myself there instantly, rather than traveling the distance from Atlanta to London, but where would the fun be in that? I had so few opportunities to take my hoverbike out these days, after all. The last time had been when exploring my empty capital city on Minos.

After much deliberation with my team of advisors, specifically Carl, my AI children, and my crew, we had decided to make London and the United Kingdom the new home for humanity's rebirth post zombie apocalypse. From there humanity would rebuild and reinvent itself under my continuing guidance and patronage. Hermione had evaluated hundreds of possible locations worldwide to bring the survivors to, but London and

the island of Great Britain had won out in the end. The practical realities of destroying billions of zombie corpses had driven the bus on many of the decisions to cross a particular location off the list.

I decided to ramp it up and instantly the roiling ocean below me went from a sedate 300 hundred miles per hour, to speeds this universe had never achieved on their own, even in a military fighter jet. A transparent and aerodynamically shaped shield envelope flickered into existence as I reached speeds that would be dangerous for virtually any humanoid pilot/driver. At these speeds, without the enhanced perception afforded to me by my Augment status, my surroundings would look like one long blur of color, but I could still see where I was going. A thick 3-dimensional red line was guiding me to my destination, overlaid virtually atop my visual field.

I let my thoughts wander as my hoverbike ate up the miles between me and my destination. A real-time map of the Earth in my HUD showed that I had already crossed into the Celtic sea and would soon be entering the English channel, the body of water separating the south of England from France.

Turning North, I gunned the engines to maximum for a burn of perhaps 20 seconds before laying off the accelerator, quickly crossing over into English airspace. Slowing down to a few hundred miles per hour, I took in the sights of the many little towns and villages below me along the way to London, separated by long swathes of greenspace and the A23/M23 roadway that cut through it. My bike's sensors, augmented by my ship's sensors in orbit, were picking up the distinct

anaphasic energy signatures of the walkers. Most of the United Kingdom's 62 million population in 2010 was concentrated in England, which matched where most of the zombie readings were clustered in my sensor reports.

Eventually I reached my destination in London, the famous Trafalgar Square, a public square in the City of Westminster, Central London. The square, as you might imagine, had seen better days. Abandoned vehicles and rotting corpses with their innards spilling out littered the area liberally. The large central area had roadways on three sides, with a terrace to the North, in front of the National Gallery. Nelson's Column sat at the center of the square, with a statue of Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson, a pair of large dried-up fountains flanking it. The fountains, devoid of water, were stained with a liberal coating of dried blood, as if that was what it was supposed to be filled with.

My sensors told me that there were no living people in the nearby area.

I closely examined my fellow Admiral, sending him a reassurance in the next life that I would save his home country and the world, before I ascended above the Column, slowly rising and rotating in place to take it all in. During one of my deployments overseas, I had chosen to spend some R&R in the UK, playing tourist. This was most definitely not what I remembered. What they also didn't show in the Walking Dead was just how much the bird population had exploded, especially the carrion eaters. There were even birds pecking at corpses that I'm pretty sure hadn't ever been carrion eaters before. Bird shit

was everywhere. With the ability to fly away from danger and the walkers unable to reach them, I shouldn't be surprised.

“Gothic to *Tempstress*, I am in position,” I advised. “Beam 5 of the prototype weapon drones near me. Everyone, please monitor the field test and readings from the drone systems. If you think we should abort the test at any point, go ahead and trigger the remote shutdown and we'll figure out what happened. If you want to conduct a different test, or add new variables, just let me know; I'm open to expanding the field test parameters.”

“Understood,” T'Maz replied, playing the spokesman for the crew, moments before five white colored weapon drones appeared, floating in midair, already active. A very quiet humming could be heard from the anti-grav systems keeping the drones hovering in mid-air, in stark defiance of gravity.

The x-shaped sensor and holoprojector modules of all five drones were facing me and surrounding my hovercruiser, waiting for my orders. The modules really did appear like eyes, and could move a little, which I had stolen from the movie. They had been intended to anthropomorphize the drones to a degree, and I wanted the same since the drones would be the way we first interacted with survivors.

“Jarvis, direct link to the drones, I want to see their sensor readings only, nothing from my armor or the ship, only display what its onboard sensors can detect,” I ordered, my omnitool holographically displaying the sensor readings from the drone itself. The sensor quality diminished significantly at longer ranges, but the close to mid-range sensors, a design mixing the

technologies of several advanced races, were very decent. “Considering we focused on ease of replication, I’m pretty pleased with the sensor output quality. That said, it probably helps that there is nothing around here, beyond the anaphasic energy field itself, that can interfere with the sensors.”

My eyes turned distant as I grew thoughtful.

“Carl, I’m concerned that as we add more 24th century technology to this world, the drones’ onboard sensors may be effected,” I theorized. “Add this issue to a running list that a future design improvement should be tailored to overcome. Well, first run a few simulations to see if this is something we need to deal with sooner, rather than later.”

“I have noted it, my lord,” Carl instantly replied.

Connecting to the flight systems of one of the drones, I mentally commanded it to rise 500 feet and accelerate to maximum speed in the opposite direction of my position. Near instantly, the drone practically disappeared as it broke the sound barrier, creating a sonic boom. Seeing through the drone’s sensors the cityscape passed by in a blur.

With my mental control of the drone’s distributed reaction control thrusters, I performed a dizzying array of evasive maneuvers in the sky, moving in and out of clouds, climbing to tens of thousands of feet before descending virtually straight down to the ground and pulling up at the last minute. Soon I took the drone on a trip between the buildings of central London, making hairpin turns between ancient buildings,

heading down dead-end alleyways before vectoring perfectly vertically, shooting straight up into the sky.

“I’m very pleased with the flight systems,” I said as I continued to pilot the drone back to my position. “It’s extremely responsive to commands. The distributed reaction control thrusters were definitely the way to go.”

“Any issues so far, people?” I asked through the comm link. My attention had been on piloting the drone, putting it through its paces by testing its flight limits, and ultimately not crashing into a wall; I had *not* been monitoring its systems for a potential power overload that could easily take out a city block. That’s why I had competent people to assist me and arguably, needed even more. For a guy who knew people were really out to get him, especially if they learned what knowledge and technologies I had access to, I understandably had trust issues.

“None, captain,” B’Elanna replied. “All systems are green for further testing.”

“Good,” I replied with a small smile. “Continuing the testing.”

Eventually the drone I was piloting returned to the square and took its former position amongst its brothers. Connecting to a different drone, I commanded its Minoan designed cloak to activate. Like a desert mirage, the drone appeared to waver visually for a moment before it disappeared entirely to my naked eyes. My armor’s sensor could still detect them, though, but that was mostly because I was intimately familiar with the Minoan drone cloaking technology and knew *exactly* what to look for. Even the most hardcore Federation science type would struggle

to detect my cloaked drones. Sending the command to deactivate the cloak, the drone reappeared.

Connecting to another drone, I commanded its holoprojection system to activate and begin a system check. One of the lenses in the 'face' of the drone lit up and a holographic test pattern of different colored 3-dimensional shapes appeared in midair. The shapes changed and twisted in midair, changing from the size of a baseball to a shape that towered over 30 feet tall.

"The color depth and visual contrast with the surroundings is excellent," I commented, though it lacked the solidity that could be found on a traditional Star Trek holodeck. This was a holo-image only. "Begin survivor greeting protocol."

Immediately an impressive holoimage of myself, but not life-sized, as you might have imagined, but one that was 30 feet tall appeared. I was a fucking giant.

"I'm getting some serious Skeletor, *Masters of the Universe* vibes here," I laughed, my eyes twinkling with mirth. "PEOPLE OF ETERNIA!!"

Of course, none of my crew had seen that 80s classic so the joke went right over their heads, like usual.

"I'm assuming I'm not actually meant to be 30 feet tall?" I joked. "People might get the wrong impression of me, you know. B'Elanna already thinks my ego is 30 feet tall."

"My apologies, my Lord," Carl hurriedly replied. "There was an error in the holo-emitter's spatial processing algorithm. The holoimage is meant to scale for the number of viewers, to allow

crowds to easily see and hear the message, but this size is obviously unnecessary for a single person.”

“Well, this is meant to be a field test, so test away,” I said.

The image scaled down accordingly after a minute or so, to life-sized, and I saw I was wearing a futuristic quasi-military silver suit. The choice in my attire, which I had largely stayed out of, had been hotly debated amongst the women of my crew, organic and digital alike. Virtually everything involved in the survivor greeting protocol had been hotly debated. My smile, my cadence, the fatherly but protective demeanor in the way I held myself, all of it had been carefully chosen. The protocol was intended for first contact with scared and paranoid survivors, with the goal of convincing them to join our new society. As the image of me appeared ready to speak, I interrupted...myself.

“Pause. Do I even really need to be the greeter in this scenario?” I complained lightly. “Aren’t I too intimidating and scary for this job, even at normal size?”

“Father, we already talked about this,” Hermione broke in gently, but sounding a little exasperated. “As you will be the head of this new government, their patron and savior, it was determined that each person brought into this society should see you *first*. It will be a shared experience for everyone, a new cultural touchstone. Plus we ran simulations, your good looks and obviously powerful physical form, coupled with the advanced technology, does a great job selling ‘better life’ and ‘security.’”

I sighed, but powered through my reservations.

“Resume,” I ordered.

“Do not be afraid for I will not harm you. My name is Admiral Gothic. While I am appearing here in holographic form to greet you, I am very much human. A real man. My heart beats like yours, I breathe like you, I love like you, and have the same wants and needs as you. I was born on Earth, but not the Earth of this dimension or this time. When I came to this world by accident, I was horrified and saddened by what I saw. Your world has suffered and without intervention, I fear for the future of humanity as a species,” my holoimage spoke heartfully. “I decided to help, I *needed* to help, to use my advanced technologies to save this world and humanity, if you’ll let me. In the city of London, in the United Kingdom, I have prepared a safe place, devoid of the reanimated corpses that prey on the living. *There* you will find security, shelter, food, education, and medicine if you accept my offer. If you accept, prepare your people and what you would like to bring; I will instantly transport you to your new home.”

When the image of me said ‘security, shelter, food, education, and medicine,’ each of those words triggered a new image showing what they could benefit from.

“I know that fear and distrust and paranoia have kept you alive when this world fell apart, but this is not a trick. For you and your children I offer a-”

“Pause,” I commanded. “Is this the best we can do, guys? This message feels a little hokey, to be honest.”

“Father, the initial survivor greeting is still under revision. It is an extremely difficult message to craft as it needs to accomplish a great deal in a very short time, specifically establishing who you are, that you are human just like them and not some alien that might have caused the apocalypse in the first place, like in the movies, and that you are offering help. It also needs to acknowledge their reasonable distrust, which has probably kept them alive thus far, but that should be set aside long enough for them to take advantage of this opportunity. It’s a big ask no matter how eloquent the message,” Natasha replied. “Once the Gothic VI is complete it will provide the first contact message to all survivors. It will be interactive and can answer all their questions and concerns. As it gains more experience dealing with the survivors, the message will improve and evolve over time, even crafting unique messages for different cultures.”

“Hmmm,” I answered. “Resume.”

“...new beginning.”

“Fuck you, Admiral Gothic!” I interrupted, waiting to see how it responded to someone going completely off the script. “Take your bright future and shove it up your alien ass! If you’ve even got an ass. I like this new world, I like raping little girls and women, killing whoever I want, whenever I want, and eating human flesh! It tastes really fucking good, like spicy BBQ, and I’m not giving it up no matter what your hippy ass says. What do you have to say to that?!”

The Gothic hologram froze in place and said nothing further. A long, pregnant silence ensued.

“Father, I did say the Gothic VI is not yet complete, didn’t I?”
Natasha replied eventually, as if embarrassed for me. I could hear B’Elanna and Neela laughing loudly in the background.

I cleared my throat uncomfortably, but refused to be all that embarrassed at what was an honest mistake that anyone in my position could have made. Yep, I was sticking with that.

“Well, we should probably have a response ready for that, preferably of the disrupter bolt to the face variety,” I said.

“Some people are going to like the world just the way it is and won’t want to give it up.”

“Your suggestion has been *noted*, father,” Natasha replied.

“All right, let’s move on to the weapon test,” I said eagerly, looking forward to seeing what these drones could do.

Like a hungry wolf pack waiting for their alpha’s command, the energy in the link I had established with the drones changed imperceptibly, each of the drone’s sensor eyes locked onto me, waiting for my command. Like all my creations that could potentially harm me or had the ability to act autonomously, I had programmed complete loyalty to me into them, to obey my every command, to protect me and never harm me. This would extend to even those of my descendants that had my DNA. Like all my creations, that was in their deep, core programming.

The drone base programming was nowhere near the level of a virtual intelligence, if anything they were more on the level of pack animals in the way they carried out their mission or responded to stimuli. The Gothic VI could piggyback on their

systems to greet survivors, even direct them in my absence when a complex response was required, but the drones were designed to operate autonomously most of the time, not relying on the Gothic VI to constantly direct their actions like an onboard pilot. Their primary purpose and what they would be doing the vast majority of the time, was to hunt and kill zombies, to purge this world of them forever. While simple in intelligence, they were eagerly anticipating my command.

“Drones, *hunt!*” I said, ascending even further in the air to give them some space and myself a better view of the field test.

With my command the five drones immediately, almost eagerly, turned in midair and slowly spread out equidistantly in the square, coming to a stop roughly 75 feet in the air. Each drone began emitting a loud alarm through its onboard speakers. The sound was warbling and changed pitch to better attract walkers, it was also nearly deafening, but thankfully not so loud that it broke the glass windows in the various nearby buildings. I made a mental note that five drones all emitting the ‘zombie lure’ as I was calling it, was probably overkill in a space this small.

Like moths to a flame, the sounds of grunting and growling and shuffling awkward steps came in response. Over the course of the next 15 minutes, the square began to steadily fill up with the walking dead, a large, newly gathered zombie herd clambering over each other to get at the sound that had attracted them, but unable to reach the drones hovering at a height that was impossible for them to actually reach, no matter how silly their raised, grasping, rotten hands were. My sensors told me that in only 15 minutes of calling them, nearly 5,000 walkers had

shown up. The capacity of Trafalgar Square was roughly 20,000 so there was still plenty more room for the walkers to fill in, but I wanted a little space between targets to better evaluate the drones' targeting program.

I made a note for the drones to calculate the ideal amount of time to sound the lure, based on the distance the sound could travel and the average foot speed of the walkers moving into the kill box.

I mentally commanded the drones to cease their alarm as I was worried they wouldn't be able to hear my verbal commands. The silence was blissful, at least of the five ear piercing alarms. The herd below me, though, was making plenty of noise all on their own, their heads turned up to stare at the hovering drones and myself.

"Begin targeting," I ordered, now viewing how their systems identified and painted the targets below for elimination.

Unfortunately, I did not like what I was seeing.

"Carl, Hermione, Natasha, real-time priority programming update," I ordered. "Update to targeting program."

"We are standing by my lord/father," came the swift reply.

"When drones are hunting together, there should be no duplicative targeting. Amend the targeting program to work together with the other drones to each select their own unique targets with efficiency in mind, which drone is in the best position to take the shot, etc."

After a minute or so I watched as each drone's pre-selected target list updated itself in the software. No longer was a single target being targeted, inefficiently, by multiple drones.

“Drones, commence termination mission. Power setting: vaporize. *Kill!!!*” I yelled unnecessarily, but I was excited to see how they performed.

Immediately, each drone's weapon systems deployed. On each 'side' of the spherical drones, a seam appeared that hadn't been visible before, as it opened and extended its two circular sides, two pairs of energy weapon barrel turrets extending.

Acid green disrupter bolts, rather than continuous beams, based on Romulan disrupter weaponry because of its energy efficiency to damage ratio, shot from each of the drone's four energy weapon turrets. The dead bodies struck below sublimated into atoms as their bodies were *consumed* by the acid green energy, leaving not even ash behind, as if they had never existed in the first place. Good riddance!

Each turret moved independently of the others to eliminate different targets, the barrels twitching minutely at these close distances when transitioning to its next target. Each energy weapon turret, when set to vaporize, which was a very high-power setting, was capable of firing 300 bolts per minute, meaning each drone could, theoretically, kill/vaporize up to 1,200 zombies per minute. Meaning under ideal conditions, with perfect firing efficiency, five drones could theoretically wipe out this herd of roughly 5,000 in about 4.16 minutes. Of course,

perfect firing efficiency was unrealistic, as targets moved unexpectedly, for instance, but it would be close.

I watched with delighted glee as this *symphony* of efficient and dispassionate death and destruction occurred below me, my bike slowly rotating so that I could take it all in from multiple angles. With a targeting accuracy that hadn't intentionally been nerfed by writers to ramp up the drama, my drones' firing accuracy was scarily good. Like terrifyingly good.

In a little over four and half minutes the zombie herd in Trafalgar Square had been wiped out to the last corpse. None of their bodies were left behind to litter the ground, as if this one-side massacre hadn't even taken place. The drones were still firing at long-range every now and again as more zombies slowly trickled into the Square's perimeter, but it was intermittent, maybe a shot every 10 seconds or so.

“Now, *that*, was a very successful field test, people,” I said, feeling very pleased. “Any issues with their systems?”

“No, Captain/No, my Lord,” B'Elanna and Carl both tried to answer. “Power utilization by its power core even at this high-power setting and its maximum firing rate, was as expected and never spiked into danger territory.”

“My Lord, while what you witnessed was the maximum firing rate for the vaporization of a humanoid body, the firing rate would be nearly 30% higher for a lower kill setting,” Carl pointed.

“Good point, Carl,” I said. “If I ever deploy the drones in battle in our home dimension, vaporization would be overkill for the most part.”

Though vaporization would be a good idea when the goal was hiding what I had done. Leaving no bodies behind to analyze would probably be a good idea.

“Are there any additional field tests you’d like to run?” I asked my crew. As no one spoke up, I decided to wrap it up. “Then we’re done for the day. All departments please submit your report on the field test and any suggested changes to the design. I want to finalize the drone design and begin replication of the swarm that will cleanse Great Britain first of the undead.”

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The Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Atlanta, Georgia. The Walking Dead Universe.

Walking into the CDC’s cafeteria, I was happily greeted by all of Rick’s group of survivors, including Amy who got up and threw herself into my arms, kissing me like she hadn’t seen me in years, even though it had only been a few days.

“I missed you,” Amy said quietly, but with a hint of sadness in her eyes.

Andrea, too, came over to us and gave me a hug. Lori, interestingly, was sending me some ‘come fuck me’ eyes that even Rick noticed. He just rolled his eyes at his wife’s antics. It seems they had reached a new arrangement in their marriage.

Amy and I had previously talked alone about my plans to return home, and she knew that once my preparations were complete, we'd be parted, probably for a very long time. While she was sad, she also didn't want to leave her sister and all she'd ever known behind, especially as this world needed everyone to help in the rebuilding effort. She had been very tempted to ask to come with me, she said, this world was still her home, and she couldn't leave it.

“How have you guys been?” I asked Amy and the group.

“Well, I think I've gained 10 pounds from all the good eating I've been doing lately,” T'Dog joked, many nodding in return as they pat their full bellies.

“I'm glad to hear it,” I said. “Have you guys liked your new toys?”

I was referring to the omnitools I had given everyone in the group. My crew and I had decided it would be a good way to keep track of all the survivors and to easily and quickly disseminate information. What the survivors didn't realize was that there was a shit ton of surveillance software that would monitor everything they did with the devices and whose sensors would constantly report back to the central computer network that Carl and my digital children controlled. That way, hopefully, any dissenters or people interested in taking over what I was building would be found out.

“It's fucking awesome!” Daryl yelled with a large smile.

“Pardon my French,” he apologized, glancing at Lori who was shooting him a dirty look while she covered Carl's ears, not that

he even noticed given how intently he was playing a game on his omnitool. Kids and video games, right?

This was 2010, so my people had been able to copy a ton of games that this world had already created, console and computer, from abandoned data centers all over the world and in some cases just beaming up physical examples to get at the data. It had been relatively easy at that point to make most of them work on the omnitools by using the basic holoprojector that every omnitool came with.

While it had never been my intention, when I returned to the Star Trek universe, I would have thousands of games from different eras to put up for sale or download on my omnitool's version of the app store, which would provide another revenue stream connected to the device. Retro gaming would be a thing, even if I had to invent that market in the 24th century.

I also now had (potentially) millions of product testers, designers, and software developers for the omnitool that I could that could supply me with new ideas and content for decades to come, monetizing all of it in the Star Trek dimension. That was a sweet deal all on its own. The Walking Dead universe would be a fantastic beta test group.

“Yes, thank you, Gothic, for everything you've done for us and for this world,” Rick said after coming over to shake my hand. “As a thank you, we've been working on improving the survivor greeting protocol your...digital daughters...sent us. We think testimonials from people like us on how much you've done for

us and how trustworthy you are would help convince some folks.”

My daughters hadn't informed me of this plan, but I heartily approved.

“That's news to me, but I think that's a great idea,” I said after a few moments' thought. “We had a very successful field test in London testing out the new drone design, wiping out a herd of 5,000 walkers during the test. The first hundred of the drones are being fabricated right now and they'll be deployed into London first to clear out the city for your new home. Once we clear out central London and complete the basic infrastructure repairs, we'll be able to slowly move folks into their new homes.”

“Can we get a copy of that test?” Daryl asked eagerly, with a little bloodlust in his voice.

“Happy to,” I said, before sending it to all of their omnitools, having anticipated the request. “I also wanted to ask if you guys would be my first group of ambassadors to the future survivors. A lot of the process is automated or will be handled by Carl and my daughters, but having real living people they can relate to, who experienced what they did, would be a great help.”

“We'll help in any way we can, but what jobs are you thinking about?” Rick asked curiously.

“Greeters, intake, showing them around, how to use the technology, how to turn on the sonic shower, etc.,” I answered. “Those testimonials you mentioned might be even more

powerful if survivors can ask questions of you guys in real-time.”

“We’ll do whatever we can to make this new place a success,” Rick said, pulling Lori close to his side. “For Carl and our baby.”

I smiled widely at this. So Lori had learned of her pregnancy and told Rick the good news. Shane looked happy and proud too at this news. As they didn’t know whose baby it was, that was going to be interesting. They probably didn’t realize that I could probably tell them, if they asked. Maybe they didn’t want to know.

“Congratulations!” I offered sincerely. “Maybe your child will be the first born in the new city. By the way, would you like to know the sex of the baby?”

Rick, Lori, and Shane all looked at each other questioningly and though they didn’t say a word, they reached a decision, with Lori nodding gratefully, a large smile on her lips.

I ran a general medical scan, my omnitool acting like a medical tricorder. With my omnitool’s advanced sensors, which had the ultra-advanced Vidiian tech built in, it was easy to scan the baby and create a holographic image of their baby in real-time.

The group gasped as Lori’s baby was displayed in midair, moving and breathing.

“Congratulations, guys, it’s a girl!” I shared.

As they hugged and kissed and received congratulations from the rest of the group, my sensors beeped, alerting me to new

information that I should view. My eyes widened slightly as my sensors told me that there were two other pregnant women in the room, in fact they were standing right next to me. Was I destined to leave children behind in every universe I visited? Was this the machination of Q?

I glanced at Amy and Andrea in turn.

“Amy, Andrea, we may have something to talk about,” I said quietly, not noticing how my chaos meter went up over 30%.

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Captain’s Ready Room. Onboard *The Flighty Temptress*. In orbit of Earth. The Walking Dead Universe.

“Natasha, engage black protocols on the room,” I ordered.

“Unless the ship is about to blow up, I don’t want to be interrupted.”

A powerful humming sound signaled the protocol had been activated. Black protocols not only locked the door, it put a forcefield around the entire room and actively disabled any potential monitoring or surveillance. I didn’t truly expect any, but you could never be too careful.

It had taken some time, but I had ensured the rest of my crew were busy and I would have some time to finally watch the DS9 DVDs my digital daughters had downloaded and carefully hid from the rest of the crew. Even now, much of their attention was on scrubbing or replacing any mention of Star Trek from the data we’d taken from the planet. Given how pervasive a cultural phenomenon it was in this world, like it had been in mine, it was

a particularly intensive process and had to be done right lest any of my crew realize the truth when they dug into the data.

Sitting at my beautiful captain's desk, I watched with building excitement as a huge holoscreen popped up and the soaring orchestral music of the show's first season could be heard, beautiful shots of the station could be seen, the runabout opening and traveling through the wormhole. Finally I would be able to re-watch the series and refresh my memories so that I can truly take advantage of every opportunity!

Just as the episode could begin though, the image turned to black and I could hear jaunty circus music?

I watched in disbelief as Deep Space 9 became *hardcore gay midget porn* with a clown and circus theme, and not just gay midget porn with humans, no, but hardcore gay midget porn with little Klingons and little Romulans and little Cardassians, etc., all ass banging each other. I'm pretty sure Tholians didn't even have penises and assholes as they were a crystalline-based non-humanoid species, but there they were with a little orange crystal penis. Q really did have a sick sense of humor.

It was the filthiest shit I'd ever seen as it got more and more fringe and gonzo the further I went into the later seasons. I fast-forwarded hours at a time and it was more and more gay midget porn. There were hundreds of hours of the stuff.

I sighed and turned off the screen. The message was clear. Just like I had been denied the Stargate universe because I would end up too overpowered, having access to all the shows available to review was obviously a touch too OP in Q's eyes.

Well played Q and now I suddenly wished I didn't have the perfect memory recall of an Augment.

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Two Weeks Later. Bridge of *The Flighty Temptress*. In orbit of Earth. The Walking Dead Universe.

“Are we ready to depart?” I asked the bridge from my captain's chair.

“All systems are operational,” T'Maz reported dutifully from her console.

“Carl, Hermione, Natasha, is our quantum link stable to all the technology we're leaving behind?” I asked. “We won't be able to return to this dimension for a long time.”

“The quantum link is stable, father,” Natasha reported. “As we still have our active link to the *Flight of the Navigator* universe, we do not anticipate any issues.”

“Good,” I said, while looking at the viewscreen, showing the many new installations in orbit of Earth.

The Echo Papa 607 command and control and its many distributed fabrication units were the first things I had built when I had decided on this course of action. The mining and repair drones had been second. The weapon drones themselves coming third.

Even now, hundreds of mining drones were constantly mining the system's changed asteroid belt for materials, transporting back the refined materials to continue the build up of this

world's new infrastructure. In time, once the higher priority items were handled, a new Gothic defense net would be built and deployed over the planet to protect it from internal and external forces, as well as serving as transporter hubs for the drones.

Over 200 weapons drones were even now scouring Great Britain, hunting walkers 24/7, after they had successfully cleared the city of London. Surprisingly, given the concentration of walkers present there, several thousand survivors had been found, contacted, and relocated to newly repaired and protected areas of the city. With the evidence of my advanced technology right before their eyes, virtually everyone had chosen to accept my offer. Of course there had been some bad apples in the form of a few petty warlords who were subtly eliminated. In some cases, though, the very people those warlords had oppressed, now seeing a better option in front of them that they really did not want to miss out on, had done the eliminating themselves. Respect.

Thankfully, all my efforts had paid off because my chaos meter was sitting at an astounding 200% and had seemingly maxed out. I hadn't even known it could go past 100%, but it had. What that meant for the next universe, I had zero idea and Q was, as always, not eager to share.

“Seatbelts on kiddos,” I said, as each of my crew's seats deployed a five-point harness and a personal shield emitter activated surrounding them. “Goodbye and good luck Walking Dead universe. I'm looking forward to seeing what becomes of all you.”

Then I reached out and tapped the button in my visual field simply labeled ‘JUMP’ and we disappeared from that dimension of reality.

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22 Years Later. Classroom. The Walking Dead Universe.

“In those dark days of the zombie apocalypse, your parents, my parents, and all the survivors scurried about the ruins of the old world, desperately searching for whatever food and supplies they could find to survive, all the while trying to avoid the ravenous zombie hordes that wanted to devour them and kill them,” taught the young, 21-year-old brunette teacher, facing her students. “Of course, the dangers were not only from the zombies, who simply wanted to kill you, but in fact the greater danger came from the other survivors themselves. As our Lord and savior once said, the breakdown of society meant many people could now act upon the darkest impulses of their hearts, with no fear of the consequences, with life in this post-apocalyptic being solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

In front of her, a group of 15 children, ranging in age from 7-10, a visible mix of different races and backgrounds. Each child sat at their desks, eagerly listening to their teacher’s history lesson on the fall of the old world and the rise of the new one. The classroom they were in was an interesting mix of 21st century classroom design aesthetic and 24th century advanced technology, with each desk having built in smart surfaces and holoemitters. Each child, notably, also had their own omnitools on their left or right forearm, depending on preference.

One of the children raised their hands, signaling that he wanted to ask a question. The young teacher, eager to impart knowledge, smiled and gestured for the child to ask their question.

“Miss Judith, are there still zombies around today?” a young boy asked.

“That is a great question, Joseph,” the teacher replied with a kind smile.

There were at least five children in the classroom named Joseph after their Lord’s VI had once shared that his birth name had been Joseph, before he had adopted the moniker of Gothic. The name ‘Gothic’ was sacred, though, and no one would use that holy name for their children, but many had chosen to use their Lord’s old first name to honor their savior, hence there were many, many Josephs in the first generation born after the reclamation.

“While our Lord’s wolf pack drones have already vaporized billions of zombies around the world, cleansing all the major cities of their taint, the wolves continually search for and still find more in isolated areas or enclosed in structures that resisted their sensor sweeps,” Miss Judith answered. “Rest assured that here in our beautiful city that you are all safe from harm, protected by our Lord.”

A moment later a delicate series of Betazoid chimes could be heard, indicating the class period and the school day was over. Without prompting, each child stood up and looked at the beautiful image of their Lord in a resplendent silver suit. Their

teacher led them as they chanted, each clasping their folded hands upon their chests, some looking up in awe and reverence at his image, others bowing their heads in deference, feeling unworthy to gaze upon him.

“May our Lord Gothic, our savior and patron, continue to guide and protect his chosen people all our days. May he return to us, in body, as well as in spirit, to lead us once again into a glorious future. For this we give thanks and pray. Amen.”

And with that the school day was over.