

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

Last time on The Adventures of Augment Gothic

On the main viewer was a rather ugly planet, reddish brown, with a thick turbulent layer of clouds slowly rotating. Just looking at it you could tell at a glance that it was most definitely not a class-M planet, perfect for life. It was class-F, geometallic, volcanic and barren. While no one would be vacationing here for the beautiful beaches and exotic locales, this planet was probably one of the most valuable in the quadrant, not that the locals seemed to realize it given my sensors showed no other ships within our substantial range.

"Neela, scan the planet as well for any evidence of mining operations, past or present," I ordered, staring at the viewscreen from my standing position, my arms crossed behind my back.

"No ships in range, no evidence of any mining operations, past or present, Gothic," she said in awe and a bit of excitement.

"Scan the surface for pergium, platinum, cerium, uranium, and dilithium deposits," I ordered, a huge smile on my face.

Looking up with a smile, she answered, "I'm detecting huge veins of those substances and more very near the surface, Gothic. The conditions on the planet's surface are inhospitable to humanoid life, but it should still be very easy to mine."

"Ha!" I exclaimed while pumping my fist in the air at this little plan working out.

This had all been a bit of a gamble, but it had paid off in spades. I had been worried another race had set up shop here and would defend this place to the death or even worse, the planet could be different in this reality and not have any valuable resources at all.

As soon as we landed I was going to stuff this ship to the proverbial gills with every valuable substance this planet had to offer. My plan was to stuff all three of my shuttle bays to overflowing from floor to ceiling. Then, when that was full, I was going to fill every unoccupied stateroom onboard, then the holodeck, then the corridors themselves, then I'd fill up any unused space in the other rooms. I wanted the ship so heavy with riches that when we left this planet the floor plating would groan from the sheer weight of the ship. Thank the Prophets that I'd built this ship so damn overpowered and my storage vaults on my island so ridiculously overlarge. My overkill philosophy was once again kicking ass and taking names.

The Adventures of Augment Gothic

Chapter 42

Main Bridge. *The Flighty Temptress*. On the surface of Janus VI. Alternate Reality.

There is nothing quite so satisfying or perhaps as ego reaffirming as a long shot, random, shot in the dark plan coming together in glorious victory. That was the reason behind the soft grin on my face as I lay reclined in my captain's chair (aka 'Captain's Recliner'), immersed in my ship's sensors, on the bridge of my ultra-advanced luxurious warship that I had named the *Flighty Temptress* in a moment of whimsy. For some reason, my mind was fixed on the past and all that had happened to me to get to this point.

My ship's name was a line from the Harry Potter book series from my home dimension, one that had always stuck in my mind, something that the Gandalf impersonator, Dumbledore, had once said to Harry Potter. He had said, 'Let us step into the night and pursue that flighty temptress, adventure.' That was a line of dialogue that was locked in stone and would be included when I added that particular book to my Harry Potter holonovel series, a program that was coming along rather nicely. For some reason, no one had ever asked why I had given my ship its particular name.

My new life was filled with *adventure* these days and the latest one had seen my crew and I tossed in yet another dimension, on my new ship's maiden voyage no less, where I was somehow in just the right time and place to stop an alien invasion of my new home's galaxy, an invasion that had a very good chance of succeeding in my opinion. Our victory there had seen us thrown into yet another dimension, ironically enough, into the past of an alternate Star Trek dimension, one where the Federation existed, but history had taken some weird freaking twists and turns.

Luckily my ship was advanced even for 24th century Star Trek and had two distinct forms of cloaking, neither of which the immediate locals could see through, so thankfully we'd been spared much in the way of conflict while my ship was still undergoing much needed repairs. On the one hand, it was fortunate that their technology was inferior to ours, and thus they weren't as much of a threat even on a couple dozen to one basis. On the other hand, it was unfortunate, because it meant that there was shit all in terms of looting potential.

The incredible temptation to go hog fucking wild and fuck shit up with little thought to any long-term consequences had been there, *oh it had been there*. What had kept me from going total murder hobo on everyone was the knowledge that this was a Star Trek dimension and thus time cops from the future might show up to kill me, with technology 500 years more advanced than mine and armed with temporal weapons that I had no true defense against, if I registered on their temporal radar by having too big an impact on the future.

Call me a pussy if you want, but I didn't want my Star Trek adventure to end just because I enjoyed causing chaos from time to time. Of course, that didn't stop me from taking the entire database of that half-destroyed Federation ship we'd stumbled upon, but a long shot idea to profit from this little joy ride through the multiverse had definitely paid off with Janus VI. Thankfully, even if someone discovered this incredibly rich world in the future, what I was taking from it was highly unlikely to affect the future in such a way that the time cops would show up.

I opened my eyes and glanced around my empty bridge to confirm that no Federation time cops had beamed in after that errant thought, before I closed my eyes again and relaxed, chuckling quietly at my paranoia.

The discovery of Janus VI in the early 23rd century had been an incredible boon to the fledgling Federation of the time, giving the new polity the resources to truly grow and become the powerhouse it was today. It was an incredibly resource rich planet with ample supplies of gold, pergium, platinum, cerium, uranium and dilithium. Gold was worthless now when modern replicators could produce the stuff, but the other materials couldn't be replicated and there was enough on this planet to supply the needs of a thousand spare faring planets for centuries. The Federation began mining it in 2217 and mining continued to the modern day. It was also the home planet of the Horta race, but that was irrelevant for the moment since none of our sensors could detect any of them on the planet, which was mighty strange. Who knows what differences in this universe had led that race to go missing here.

The Federation of this dimension had seemingly never discovered this planet, based on the lack of any mining here. I could only assume that not having this planet to draw upon was one of the big reasons behind the current state of the Federation and probably accounted for many of the changes I'd seen so far and read about in that stolen database.

While that certainly sucked for the Federation of this dimension, it was an incredible opportunity for me to profit from this forced joyride through the multiverse. I had all of Janus VI in an unexploited pristine state to mine, a literal buffet of riches. Suddenly I wished I had designed a bigger ship!

Our powerful sensors had detected rich veins of starship-grade dilithium and pergium practically sitting on the planet's surface ready to be picked up by hand. There were huge chunks of platinum too just sitting there, which was *literally* money in the Star Trek dimension as it could be refined and liquefied to be placed into gold pressed latinum to be used as currency and used in a slew of different advanced technologies that required the stuff, including replicators. You know the funny thing about that? Probably 90% of what we took from the planet would be the other materials. It was simply a matter of value and the fact that we had limited space onboard the ship. A cubic foot of starship-grade dilithium was worth many, many times the value of a cubic foot of latinum (even after we'd refined it). We'd still be taking plenty of latinum, for immediate liquidity's sake, but the other materials were just worth more when you remembered the limited space we had onboard the *Temptress*. I couldn't even use my transporter buffer trick as it could negatively affect the material if left in the buffer for too long.

Immersing myself once again in the ship's sensors over the course of the week we'd been here, I watched as only the highest-grade material was carefully selected by B'Elanna with Scarlett's help and tagged for either transport, if the material allowed it at all, or by traditional mining by holo-engineers through the use of holo-emitters deployed near the best deposits.

It was a heady feeling to see the galaxy through the 'eyes' of a powerful starship's sensors. Every time I did it it felt like I was blind before, but *now* I could see. In fact the first time I'd felt like that was when I woke up in the *Enterprise's* sick bay and I experienced my Augment-senses for the first time. The sounds and smells and sights were overwhelming, but now I couldn't imagine being so blind ever again. This new body, this new *life* was a miracle and a gift. Without my enhanced mind and physiology this deep dive into my ship's sensors via the neural interface

probably would have killed me by now, or driven me insane. The progress I had made recreating the Iron Man armor from Avengers Infinity War certainly wouldn't have been possible without the neural interface, but more on that later.

Getting up out of my seat on the bridge, I let a chuckle out at being the only flesh and blood person actually here. At the Conn, Ops, Tactical and Science were the non-descript holo-officers working the controls. Since we were essentially 'parked' on the surface of this world, I had felt my living crew was best utilized elsewhere. In many ways, they were entirely unnecessary as Scarlett and I could do everything they were doing, without a computer-generated hologram tapping on computer-generated holographic control panels. They weren't truly independent from the ship itself, but it felt like a good idea to test this system in a low-risk situation like this. In fact, I should do a bit of a captain's walkabout and see how things were going.

I called aloud, "Scarlett, I'll be taking a brief walkaround of the ship. You have the bridge. Notify me if anything comes up that requires my attention."

"Aye, captain," Scarlett responded in that super sexy, smoky voice, after holographically appearing on the bridge in response to my command, promptly taking my seat. Her leather Black Widow outfit from the movies looked fucking amazing on her. She sent me a coquettish smile as the turbolift doors swished shut.

Of course, it wasn't strictly necessary for her to 'show up' as it were, or to direct the holo-officers in physical form, but it was a nice touch and it set my mind at ease a bit.

"Main shuttle bay."

Since my ship only had 7 decks, the bridge being on deck 4 in the dead center of the ship, it was only 10 or 15 seconds later that the turbolift doors opened to the corridor to the rather imposing site of a 9-foot-tall Space Marine decked out in full armor, but currently without his full load of weapons beyond a pistol and a power sword, waiting to get in the turbolift. Thank goodness I had made the corridors large enough.

I gave the hulking goliath a brief nod of acknowledgement, to which he bowed back reverently, immediately stepping to the side to allow me to pass, he did not raise his head until I was fully past him. In this universe, I was his Creator, I was his God Emperor of Mankind, with all the loyalty and fanaticism that entailed, minus the overwhelming xenophobia since my living crew had no full humans in it besides myself. When designing him and the others of his kind, my thoughts of Warhammer 40k had unconsciously shaped their character profile, though it was nowhere complex enough to use them as characters in a holonovel. His purpose 'in life' was to protect me, my crew, and my ship, in that order. The many skills I had given him had made him a very competent killer.

Even though I had carefully designed these space marine combat holograms primarily for shipboard security duties or should we ever be boarded, they were plenty smart enough to be drafted as porters in a pinch. These guys had been a pretty startling sight for my crew when we first started mining and moving the valuable resources from the planet, then onto the ship, but

after 7 days of this it was old hat now for just about everyone to ignore the silent hulking giants pretty much.

This guy, designated 'Marine 3' on his armor I saw, an addition probably made by B'Elanna for practicality's sake, was pushing an antigrav sled full of starship-grade dilithium crystals sitting in a large standard container used the quadrant over as ideal for the protection, storage, and transport of the incredibly valuable crystals during interstellar flight. From watching TNG, I knew the amount on the sled here could be used in half a dozen galaxy class warp engines.

We'd already filled up both cargo bays 1 and 2 to the freaking ceilings, using a really creative honeycomb storage system that B'Elanna had designed to keep everything secure and safe, even if we were to go into combat and the ship had to perform evasive maneuvers, or if there was an interruption in the ship's inertial damper network or gravity control. This container of dilithium was probably destined to be stored in one of the many spare guest suites I'd designed for the ship. The planet's untapped riches were just so plentiful and easy to acquire, we'd simply run out of the traditional storage spaces onboard the ship to keep the stuff.

With a living crew of only 4 people at the moment, myself included, the vast majority of the ship's luxurious guest rooms sat empty. The furniture in all of these rooms had already been recycled back into the replicator to free up all the space we could. A bunch of couches, tables, beds, and assorted art and décor, stuff that I could easily replicate again in the future, no matter how nice they were, just wasn't worth the space that dilithium or pergium could rest in instead. Neela and T'Maz had even moved into my quarters temporarily to free up three additional spacious cabins for storage use, not that they spent much time there in the first place. B'Elanna, however, not yet in my lustful orbit, drew the line at giving up her quarters and moving into mine, so I didn't make it an order considering how awesome a job she'd been doing.

B'Elanna had come through in a really big way this past week, first, coming up with a sound strategy to extract what we could safely and economically via the transporter, versus traditional mining, with help from T'Maz and Neela, second, tweaking the holo-engineers to do the traditional mining on materials that we couldn't use the transporter for, third, designing a refinery setup in the main shuttle bay, and fourth, working with Scarlett to design a storage system that most efficiently used all the available space throughout the ship in a way that wouldn't put us in danger, yet maximized our profit. Everyone drew the line at storing materials in spaces like engineering or on the bridge.

Her ability to set up an improvised refinery on the fly for the various materials was a godsend as it allowed us to maximize the value of the materials by storing it in the smallest space possible. If we weren't refining the material as we went, we probably could have filled the ship up by day 2 on this planet. I had sincere doubts that a by-the-book, rigid doctrine, Starfleet engineer would have been able to do as well in so short a time. Of course, I saw her do it on *Voyager* when lost and alone in the delta quadrant with far more limited resources, albeit with a lot more skilled help, so my confidence in her was high as I had already seen what she was capable of.

Once we got back to my palace fortress on Bajor, we'd have our work cut out for us unloading everything into the secure storage vaults I'd built in the many subterranean levels and outfitted

with the best security technology I had available. My girls had questioned me back then why I needed such a thing, and as I always said back then, 'I'd rather have it and not need it, than need it and not have it.'

I'd hold back a percentage of the total materials for any future needs of mine, but would slowly release them for sale on the galactic commodities market. With the Collector attacks, the prices were only going up, up, and up. Even if we should defeat them tomorrow, the rebuilding period afterwards would be the work of many years and similarly drive material prices up.

Waiting for me to pass, the hulking Space Marine silently pushed his quietly humming antigrav sled into the turbolift and proceeded to his destination. After it was gone, I did the same and leisurely continued my walk down the corridor to the main shuttle bay.

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Main Shuttle Bay. *The Flighty Temptress*. On the surface of Janus VI. Alternate Reality.

The shuttle bay doors opening revealed just what kind of work we'd been doing over the course of 7 days of hard work. My living crew were putting in 18-hour days, while my holographic crew never stopped working or took a break. I didn't recognize a lot of the specialized equipment currently whirring and beeping and making quite a racket, but I could see material going in one end of an elaborate process and coming out at the other end, refined. In the case of the platinum we'd transported from the surface, the solid material was being cleansed of impurities and liquefied. Liquid platinum was how it was present in the currency form of gold pressed latinum, but it was also the preferred state for the material prior to being used in various vital technologies the quadrant relied on, like replicators, which was why the material was valuable enough to be used like a universal currency among advanced races. Purifying and liquifying the metal would also be the most efficient use of our limited space.

I had long seen the need for the *Flighty Temptress* to have at least one heavy/large shuttle onboard, similar to the runabout-class or the *Delta Flyer* from *Voyager* fame, hence why I'd gone far beyond the *Dauntless* design seen on *Voyager* to expand the main shuttle bay. Too many episodes from multiple *Star Trek* series had shown time and time again just how incredibly useful it was to have a self-contained and independent ship within a larger ship. I had plans for such a ship and now I had all the non-replicable materials I'd need to build it when we got home, but at the moment it was lucky that I had not yet gotten around to it given all the unexpected shit that had happened on this shakedown cruise. The huge shuttle bay being entirely empty made this refinery operation possible onboard. Sure, we probably could have built something on the surface of the planet, but that would have been a much more complex undertaking, would have left larger traces of us being there, and would have been a security risk if we had to leave quickly to fight anyone.

Turning my attention back to the people in the room, I tried to remain unseen while B'Elanna and Neela worked with their holo-engineers, barking out orders as the refining process continued.

"Red, Delta, watch the throughput on the pergium line! The graviton filter needs time to work on the material properly; slow down input of new material for now. Good, keep it there for now.

Blue Epsilon, adjust the phase variance on the dilithium line, I'm not liking the readings I'm getting!" B'Elanna shouted to her underlings, her eyes never leaving her console as she watched the various lines work simultaneously, her fingers flying across the control interface making minute adjustments.

B'Elanna had been a skeptic at first when it came to using the Husnock inspired holo-engineers and relying on them so much to handle the significant daily maintenance and repair needs of this large and advanced starship, not believing that they could be as good as a flesh and blood engineering crew. She was both right and wrong about that. Yes, the holo-engineers would never be capable of true improvisation or bursts of creativity to come up with MacGyver-like solutions in crazy situations that were so commonly seen in Star Trek, but that was what *she* and Neela were there for, and they were damn good at that! No, what the holo-engineers were *exceedingly* good at was following orders and possessing an extremely high level of competence and repeatable precision when completing extremely complex, but ultimately routine, engineering tasks and repairs. In other words, the bread-and-butter stuff that was part and parcel of operating a highly sophisticated and complex machine like a starship.

Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of the engineering staff, even onboard a Starfleet vessel, were not engineering geniuses the like of Montgomery Scott or Geordi LaForge or Reginald Barclay or Chief O'Brien or B'Elanna Torres, for that matter. The vast majority of even a Starfleet ship's engineering crew were just competent, normal people that followed orders and filled their workdays with routine maintenance and repair tasks, swapping out broken or malfunctioning parts as they happened with little in the need for improvisation or incredible creativity.

You didn't need to be an engineering genius to recognize when a light bulb had burned out and then know how to replace it, did you? In fact, it might be better if you weren't an engineering genius confronted with a burned-out light bulb, because perhaps they'd feel that that mundane task was beneath their genius. Of course, the repair of battle damage, especially while in the middle of combat, introduced a new layer of complexity, but the holo-engineers could still replace and repair to what their database said the ship's systems should look like and could prioritize properly as well. They could also take on incredibly risky tasks and complete them much faster because, as they weren't living beings, the debilitating effects of fear were missing and stringent safety measures would not be required to protect them.

B'Elanna was most definitely a believer in them now. They worked 26 hours a day, 7 days a week, maintaining the ship's systems with little direction from her beyond the initial orders and the maintenance and replacement schedule for the ship's components that she had created herself. They didn't sleep, they didn't need time off, they didn't get sick, they didn't question her orders or her competence or her credentials, they didn't react at all when she was having a bad day and yelled at them. No, they always did *what* they were supposed to, *when* they were supposed to do it, and they did it with an extremely high level of competence and precision, *every, single, time*. She had confided in me that she loved the fact that she knew with certainty that everything would be done just as she ordered, when she ordered it, and that it would be done right. She also knew that if there were anomalies or issues the holo-engineers detected and couldn't deal with on

their own, that they'd immediately report the issue to her with all the information needed for her to step in or to give new orders in light of the changed circumstances.

Again, they weren't great for bouncing ideas off of, or offering creative suggestions and possible solutions, in the same way you couldn't just query the computer to give you the solution on the shows, but Neela could help her with that. She often served as a sounding board for B'Elanna on complex engineering problems and together they'd come up with some amazing fixes and solutions. Neela was having a ball learning from such a skilled engineer and B'Elanna recognized another person with the same passion for engineering that she had, someone who had done amazing things herself during the occupation with very little to work with and very little formal training to rely upon.

I had to laugh at the names she used for the holo-engineers helping her. They were pretty much non-descript human figures that all looked the same and had no personalities to distinguish them from each other. *That* was a deliberate choice on my part. Too many times in the shows, holograms that were operational for too long could take on a life of their own, so I'd made sure to put hard limits on their holo-matrices. They could learn new skills and adapt to work better with their living engineering supervisors, like B'Elanna and Neela, but there was not going to be any personality there. My crew would not be making friends with them or anthropomorphizing them. There would be no discussions on the nature of humanity or becoming more human-like or exceeding their programming, etc. That was a disaster just waiting to happen.

B'Elanna had come up with a rather interesting way of differentiating them when she needed to address them, by splitting up the engineers into five teams of five. There were red, yellow, blue, green, and black teams. She had even amended their visual parameters files to put them in a corresponding all red, yellow, blue, etc., coverall uniform for easy visual identification. Each team one was further broken down by the Greek letter written on the front and back of the middle of their shirts, identifying them as alpha, beta, gamma, delta, or epsilon, hence why she called out 'Red Delta' and 'Blue Epsilon.' She might have assigned each team to work solely on specific systems, like Red Team for the weapons, but I really wasn't sure and didn't really care to ask. As long as the work was being done she could call them 'shithead 1' and 'shithead 2' for all I cared.

"Yellow team, start replicating the next batch of storage containers for when this run is complete and beam them here for use. I want the pergium and latinum packed and stored in guest quarters 14 on deck 6," she ordered, not bothering to even glance up from her console. "Call for a Space Marine or Predator alien to put them in place."

"Yes, Ma'am," came five voices in unison to her command.

Hmm... speaking of rare and valuable substances, I made a mental note to ask B'Elanna to build 5-10 new personal shield devices. These were incredibly expensive devices to build, hence why Starfleet didn't issue them to all their personnel, despite how many lives it would undoubtedly save, but we had an abundance of materials right now. My crew was going to see combat working for me, and they deserved the best chance to survive it.

Well, it looked like things were well in hand here, so I better get back to work on my new Iron Man armor. I had considered speaking to B'Elanna or at least letting her know that I had come to engineering to check on her progress, but it seemed like she was in the zone and quite happy to be there, so I quietly made my exit from engineering and let her continue having her fun.

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Standing in front of the scanner, I waited patiently as a myriad number of scans and biological samples were taken of me and from me. The process was virtually the same as Carl had had me undergo when I had first arrived in orbit of Minos and taken control of that planet's systems. In this case, the scans were to confirm my identity and grant me entry into a very special room on my ship, my personal vault. No one but myself had access to this vault, or even knew it existed. Should an unauthorized person attempt to gain access to this vault, despite being warned of if they were my crew, the price of failure was death.

After providing my passwords, the heavy blast doors slowly opened to reveal a small room. Prior to coming to Janus VI, this room had remained empty since my new ship had been constructed. Not even my inventory of Collector power cells had merited this level of security and protection, not even Shiva the Destroyer had.

I had originally built this room for anything I came across in my travels that needed to be absolutely protected and kept from the wrong hands, for the things that I didn't even trust my crew with. Before Janus VI, the only thing I could have imagined being put in here was perhaps an Orb of the Prophets, if one of those fell into my hands again, or the dimensional travel technology I had once encountered with T'Maz once upon a time. In fact, both those things had been the inspiration behind creating a personal vault like this. Ironically, I now possessed dimensional travel technology but it had to be out and studied in order for us to get home. Go figure.

What was currently in this room was not something per se dangerous, but it had the potential to be with the right knowledge, as it could greatly empower my foes. It was also the potential key to no longer relying on the found and stolen scraps of Collector technology that I'd taken from slain foes. It was decalithium, a highly rare isotope and element which was a necessary component in making red matter, which I believed was the key and next step to creating my own harnessed singularities for power cores. This substance, if my guesses were right, was a thousand times more valuable to the Romulans than even dilithium as it was likely the key to creating their capital ship's singularity power cores. It could only be found in small, trace amounts near large concentrations of dilithium and pergium, but a little bit went a long way if my databases were to be believed.

Buried in the programming of all my holographic miners on the planet, unbeknownst to anyone else, were priority orders to find and obtain decalithium above all other considerations. When it was found, they were ordered to have it secretly brought into this room by holographic porters during hours when my girls were asleep.

Walking up to what looked like an upright server rack, I pulled one of the suitcase sized sample containers from its slot in the rack and set it gently down on a table. Opening the case, I found a beautiful sight. Blueish red crystals, the size of my hand, were nestled in their own slots, with a foam-like substance custom surrounding each crystal. This was actually the same container technology used to transport and keep safe starship-grade dilithium. I could fire a phaser at full power at one of these containers and it would just shrug it off.

These blueish red crystals were the key to my future in Star Trek. Kardashev was a visionary when he came up with his method of measuring a civilization's level of technological advancement based on the amount of energy it was able to create and use. In the Star Trek dimension, power generation was often the limiter in what was or was not possible. The Collector power cells I had stolen during my first encounter with the Collectors had been the reason so much of my technology and designs were even feasible. Right now, a Collector ship power core, harnessing a large quantum singularity, was powering both my starship and the facilities on my island home. Unfortunately, I had lacked the ability to create any of my own, despite having the knowledge from the Husnock database I'd stolen. It was a hard limiter on what I could ultimately build or accomplish.

While I had a long way to go before I was creating red matter and thus my own singularities, these little crystals were the first step in ending my dependence on stolen Collector technology that would greatly limit my ability to develop in the future.

Though my ship at the moment was filled with a veritable fortune of treasure and riches, these little crystals were, by far, the most valuable substances on the ship to me.

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Flashback to Day 1. Holodeck. *The Flighty Temptress*. On the surface of Janus VI. Alternate Reality.

I couldn't replicate anything permanent here in this facsimile of my island's design lab, but that wasn't important as I was still firmly still in the design phase at the moment. Sure, I could have been helping my crew with the mining on the planet, but frankly I'd probably just get in the way. A good captain knows when to let his crew do their jobs without his interference.

No, while I was excited about the wealth that would be coming from our time spent on Janus VI, conservatively in the range of 7-10 million bricks of latinum, my passion at the moment was in redesigning my armor with the scenes from a movie that I know I had never seen in my native dimension. For whatever reason, my patron or Q or some other god-like entity had shared those scenes with me. Who knows why they had done it. It could be something as silly as an errant thought from me and their whimsy or maybe a desire for more entertainment or something more important and ominous, like if I didn't take the hint and improve my armor, I was going to die soon.

That last idea certainly gave me pause, but you didn't need to twist my arm much to get me to redesign my armor with new ideas as I'd done it many times over the years I'd been in this new dimension.

I've said it many times before, Tony Stark was a genius among geniuses, the kind of creative mind that came around once a millennium. This new armor was revolutionary and from his dialog I was allowed to hear, and my own observations, was based on nanotechnology and thus was always with him, ready to be deployed, could adapt to the situation with new capabilities, and most importantly, could self-repair. As a normal man with no supernatural powers to his name, not having his armor, when he desperately needed it to protect himself or others, was something that I knew he was deathly afraid of in the other movies. He had come up with several innovative solutions over the years to lessen that fear.

I had access to all of the technology of the 24th century in the freaking Star Trek dimension. I had access to the combined knowledge and technology of hundreds of advanced species. I had ultra-advanced alien technology from the Collectors and the Husnock that the rest of the alpha quadrant didn't have. Even with all my advantages, this would be a hell of a difficult job. Tony Stark, on the other hand, was from 21st century Earth and he only had the benefit of learning from alien technology like that of the Chitauri. He was a genius among fucking geniuses being able to understand technology so far beyond his time.

Nanotechnology was not exactly new technology. In my dimension the seeds for the technology were born as early as 1959 on Earth, though the term 'nanotechnology' didn't come into existence until 1974. Bottom line, it wasn't new, and the idea behind it had been around a long, long time. The practical side of it, rather than merely theoretical, started showing up in the early 21st century. Just like many other races had come up with their own versions of energy weapons, many, many other races had come up with their own unique versions of nanotechnology.

It seemed I was psyching myself out here. Why not just start with the three big players and their version of nanotech.

"Scarlett, display an example of basic Federation, Collector, and Husnock nanotechnology," I ordered.

Immediately, three obviously magnified microscopic machines were displayed in midair along with corresponding detailed technical information.

After studying the schematics and technical descriptions closely, I realized that each version, while similar, did something better than the others, or each race had different purposes for them when they were originally designed. The Federation version was much more medically oriented, meant to heal injuries and fight disease from the inside of the body, but it could interact with technology as I'd seen on that one episode of TNG where the *Enterprise* was nearly destroyed by an accidental release of nanites.

The Collector version had been designed to re-write DNA and assist in the creation of their cybernetic upgrades in their overly specialized soldiers, scientists, leaders, etc. As they saw all their people as expendable these nanites weren't really designed to keep the body alive or to heal injuries.

The Husnock version was mostly a way to repair their ships and technology, and had the best chance of mimicking complex technology.

Of course, I wanted all of these capabilities and would need *all* of them in order to reproduce what that crazy genius Stark had accomplished. His suit had an insane fluidity to it and I had seen many different configurations during his fight with Thanos. His suit could form a physical shield capable of stopping a powerful energy blast from his enemy, his arms could turn into energy canons and rifles, and at one point four floating arc-things detached from his suit and produced a huge energy beam weapon. *Wow*. He also used some kind of power assist punch for hand-to-hand combat, enlarged and combined his feet thrusters for greater speed, independent mini-missiles from his back, a halo-style energy sword, sprayed a substance capable of sealing a starship hull breach, and his armor had an insane self-repair capability to deal with any damage it took. The list went on.

It wasn't exactly clear from the movies I had been shown, but was a single, albeit highly upgraded arc reactor in his chest, powering all of this shit?? Man, I was feeling an inferiority complex forming. If I managed to actually recreate this thing, would I be too OP for this dimension? Was there such a thing? Nah. Fuck that. Overkill was my life philosophy and nothing was going to stop me from living that way. I'd rather be considered OP than be dead.

'Calm down, Gothic,' I thought to myself. Unlike Tony I was not practically inventing the entire field of nanotechnology on the freaking fly. I had the collective work and knowledge of hundreds of species and the Collector and Husnock versions which were more advanced than the Federation version of that same technology.

In that one scene where he first deployed the suit, the nano-armor just spreads out to completely encase his body from the area of his arc reactor by his heart. *Where were all those nanites coming from?! Were they self-replicating on the fly?* His suit was completely deployed in probably less than a second, forming directly over his real clothes almost like nanotechnology 3d printing. Is it building itself on the fly every time? Or does he have some kind of spatial storage technology? When he dismisses the suit, what happens to all that nano-printed material? Does it self-destruct? Does it get sucked into some kind of storage or some kind of compacted state? He had his AI helping to run his armor, would my VI be able to do the same? Would it be needed to do the same?

I had a lot of work ahead of me. Even if I could get the nanites to have these capabilities, I'd need to load the design templates for my version of repulsors, the energy weapons, the personal shield technology, sensors, the micro-replicator, everything. In other words I needed to give my nanites the templates of the common forms they'd assume ahead of the time, which wouldn't be terribly hard since I had the technical schematics for all kinds of 24th century tech. But could Tony create new forms on the fly with help from his AI?

Bottom line was that in addition to all the shit I saw in the movies, I wanted my current capabilities to transfer over to my new nano-armor, without the need to have separate physical devices. The armor needed to do it all, like self-shielding, and the camouflage and cloaking tech I'd already worked into my armor. So many issues to overcome.

One way I wanted to go beyond even what I saw in the movie was the medical applications of nanites. The Borg had inspired that idea of all people. As far as I could tell, other than his arc

reactor being inside his body, all his armor's functionality worked on the outside of his body. The Federation designed medical nanites, though, were meant to work inside the body, to heal it. That opened up a whole new world of capabilities if I had billions of nanites saturating my blood, muscles, and bones. They could assist in the repair and enhancement of my already impressive physiology in real time. If a muscle was torn or a bone was broken, they could repair it from the inside out, instantly. If I was stabbed, they could knit the skin back together and apply the equivalent of a dermal regenerator from the inside out. If I was poisoned or exposed to a deadly toxin or disease, the nanites in my body could actively seek it out and destroy it, repairing as it did, like a hunter seeker weapon. They could even enhance my brain function, improving my memory, speed of thought, creativity...

Damn, could I pull a 7 of 9 and change my body's energy field to walk through force fields like 7 did with her Borg nanoprobes in Voyager?!

Well, that gave me chills as I thought of all the possibilities. People were already terrified of me for being an Augment and five times faster and stronger than a baseline human, what could a nanite enhanced Augment do? Man oh man, I'd have to build something in to hide the existence of the nanotechnology in my body from scans or from someone trying to hack them to control me. Maybe even build in some kind of self-destruct if outside my body for more than a second to prevent the technology from being detected or falling into the wrong hands?

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Present Day. Holodeck. *The Flighty Temptress*. On the surface of Janus VI. Alternate Reality.

Over the last 7 days, I'd probably spent 20 hours a day on my ship's holodeck in a recreation of my design lab from the island. It'd been a productive week, at least once I got over the daunting and, at times, demoralizing task that I had set for myself in recreating Tony Stark's most advanced version of his Iron Man armor. *There were a lot of failures before I came up with something that actually worked.* Thankfully, my crew were so fatigued from their own jobs that they barely commented when I crawled into bed with them in my quarters late at night.

"Scarlett, display the mark 37 nanite and internal power core/replicator unit. Ready simulations to show deployment and real time reconfigurations," I ordered aloud to the ship's computer and VI.

Mark 37 was not an homage to the Iron Man comics, this version of the nanite was *literally* the 37th version I'd created over the past week. The previous versions all had some fatal issue I'd detected, being good at one thing, but not at another. As I'd proven time and time again since coming to this dimension, my Augment mind was capable of amazing things if only I kept working at it. My knowledge from all the Star Trek series coupled with the endless creativity found in 21st century Earth movies, TV, games, and comics was another potent source of inspiration when trying to solve 24th century problems.

The Mark 37 nanite was the template for every nanite that would eventually go into my body and comprise my armor. They were an amalgamation of all the nanotechnology known to the

Federation, Collectors, and the Husnock. Each had done something better than the others, the hardest trick of all, though, had been to combine them together.

A single nanite alone was actually a very, very dumb microscopic machine, but when networked and linked to each other, working together in the billions upon billions towards a single, unified purpose, well, that's when *miracles* of synergy could happen and the truly impressive shit was possible. Nanotechnology was a big reason why the Borg had been able to conquer and hold such a large swath of the galaxy.

Like all things high technology, power generation was an issue I'd had to overcome. I had zero idea how to recreate Tony Stark's arc reactor and also had zero desire to even try to recreate that technology from scratch. Nor did I want such a large and detectable piece of technology in my chest that I'd have to physically tap to deploy, a known point of single vulnerability should my shield be penetrated. Hiding both my capabilities and vulnerabilities was the name of the game, the key to success, as it prevented my enemies from developing countermeasures, hence why I'd continue using my pistol, rifle, and sword I'd built a while ago as my primary weapons. While I was in a television show universe, my enemies were not stupid, nor were they incapable of adapting.

No, rather than a piece of fictional technology, I went with what I had already in the Collector micro-singularity power cells. Relying on a single power core struck me as folly, so I used a rifle's power cell and redesigned it into the form of a small circular wafer, 2 inches in diameter and a half inch thick. Working with my beautiful EMH doctors onboard, they had suggested five places in my body where they could surgically graft the tech into my skeleton by removing a corresponding amount of bone and regrowing the bone over it. My sternum, both left and right shoulders, and the left and right side of my pelvis offered ideal locations and would be very easy for them to surgically add and hide the power cells.

I chose all five locations in accordance with my life's philosophy of overkill. Five power cells would provide me with several times more power than I actually needed, according to my simulations, even if I added some insane functions in the future or needed to do something as insane as jump starting a heavy shuttle.

Of course, power was only part of the answer. A nano-replicator unit was needed in order to produce the nanites and a micro-transporter unit pattern buffer for storage. My solution was to create a nanite shell whose sole purpose was to produce new nanites. They were essentially a hard shell of nanites that surrounded the five power cells. When the armor was deployed they'd exit from the many pores in my epidermis, so that no output ports in my body would be needed.

All of the nanites had a bit of my neural interface technology built in so that I and only I could mentally command them to do various things. My VI could do the same when assisting me. To pay homage to Tony Stark, the man who inspired me to build an advanced armor system in the first place all those years ago when I'd first arrived in this universe, I'd given my personal VI, modeled to look and sound like Milla Jovovich, whom I had never truly bonded with, a personality overhaul. My VI was now Jarvis and sounded like the British actor in the film who gave Jarvis his voice, Paul Bettany. Thankfully I was in luck once again and he had lived in this

dimension, doing voice work as well, so a few recordings of his voice had survived to the present day. This was a big departure from my normal modus operandi considering I had surrounded myself with beautiful women. On a whim I made Jarvis gay, so that there would be no shenanigans with my digital daughters. Of course, there were so many issues, implications, and logical inconsistencies in this plan that I purposely packed them all up in a mental box and thrust it to the very back of the closet in my mind, hopefully to never be found again.

"Scarlett, run simulation with the power cores and replicator units already surgically grafted," I ordered.

Immediately a holographic simulation of my nude body was in front of me. I stood from my chair and slowly circled my six-foot five muscled body, paying close attention to my sternum, shoulders, and the pelvis where the technology would be surgically grafted to me.

Nothing. I couldn't see anything out of the ordinary, even with close visual inspection.

"Hmm... Scarlett, run standard medical and investigatory scans in the manner of all known alpha quadrant species, as well as with Husnock, Collector, and Minoasian scanning technology, with both handheld scanners and more advanced bio-bed type scanners. Report any detected anomalies," I ordered.

"No anomalies detected, father," she reported after several minutes of scans in various colorful energy wavelengths, probably as a way for me to see the various races' different technologies at work.

I let out a sigh of relief. You wouldn't believe the number of materials I had attempted to construct the nanites out of before I got this result. It was extremely hard to balance the need for toughness to withstand active combat, under numerous harsh conditions, and the need to hide the nanites from being detected by active scans, medical or engineering in nature. In the end, that had proven to be an impossible in one material and I had eventually given up and had chosen a composite material the Husnock had invented for starship armor with the perfect blend of physical toughness and its resistance to energy weapons.

In the end, there was no miracle material to be had or invented that provided both toughness and imperviousness/resistance to scans. No, the actual solution had been to *cheat like a mother fucker!* The solution had actually been inspired by something from my home dimension. Right before I had been dimensionally displaced, a major car manufacturer from my time had gotten caught falsifying their emissions on their diesel line of vehicles. The innovative way they'd come up with to cheat the testing system was to essentially have the car recognize when the car was being emission tested and then change its operation during that period to pass the test. It had worked for years before they were caught. My nanites would be doing something similar. When they detected a passive or active scan capable of detecting the existence of nanites and technology in my body, they'd immediately emit a false sensor return to show that everything was normal and as expected. If it was a known scanning technology, they'd try to subtly hijack the sensor beams entirely. My EMH hotties were once again extremely useful in programming

what the nanites should return to the scanning technology so that everything would look normal and as expected, even if they conducted multiple scans.

"Deploy armor, 1/1000th actual speed."

The armor slowly deployed over my nude holographic body, just like in the movie, but because it was slowed down to a huge degree it was visible how the nanites flowed like a liquid to cover my body starting with the power/replicator units installed in my sternum, both shoulders, and right and left side of my pelvis. According to the simulations, my entire body should be covered with skin tight armor in less than a tenth of a second at normal speeds.

"Simulate combat and analyze performance and damage, continuous hits with common energy weapons, including Dominion-style, as hypothesized," I ordered. Hypothesized Dominion weapons were required at this point in the Star Trek timeline as I had yet to encounter any Dominion technology, so I was relying on my memory of the shows and some good old fashioned educated guesses.

With that command, several simulated weapons were fired at my doppelganger's armor-clad form from unseen enemies. Several Klingon and Romulan disrupters, then Federation phasers, then Dominion plasma rifles, were fired and struck the armor. The results were mostly the same, regardless of weapon's technology used. On kill power levels, the personal shield the nanites had reproduced absorbed 9-12 hits before it was overwhelmed and allowed penetration. On full power, in other words shots capable of vaporizing bodies, only 6 shots were stopped by the shield before the armor itself took the hits.

With the personal shield now down the Husnock armor material itself was able to absorb another 4 full power shots before the nanites were damaged and self-repair protocols were engaged, but I would mostly likely be dead, so who cared. So, a ton of protection, but against massed enemies all able to shoot me with high power shots, I'd be fucked and the best idea would be to kill them first, or run and start dodging better. Against standard blades and other stabbing weapons the shields and armor were pretty much impenetrable, unless they used exotic technology like my power sword did. Heavy weapons, like those on a shuttlecraft or on a starship in orbit, Prophets forbid, would be very, very bad news too according to the simulations. Best to engage the cloak and get the fuck out of there if a starship was targeting me from orbit.

I wasn't invincible by any means, but my armor offered me a ton of protection from the combat common to this dimension. If I was forced to retreat, the site-to-site transporter technology that had been built into the armor could be used or I could always rocket away using the armor's repulsor/impulse tech, in the air or into space.

"Simulate armor deployment over actual clothes."

The armor, just like in the movie, formed directly over the clothes I was wearing with minimal delay.

"Simulate camouflage in multiple environments,"

With that command, multiple natural and artificial environments were displayed, the camouflage systems either blending in with different color combinations and patterns, or a form of pseudo invisibility.

"Simulate cloaking."

With that, the armor disappeared altogether. This was superior to camouflage, but the power required was much higher and in circumstances where advanced sensors could be brought to bear the chances for detection were actually higher than with camouflage only. Cloaking while on the surface of a planet did not mean I wasn't affecting the nearby environment in a way that couldn't be detected, after all. If I was standing on some grass, for example, the grass would be visibly depressed and I could be detected that way.

"Retract armor."

In the movie, Tony's armor was seemingly sucked into his arc reactor, which made zero sense to me with what I understood about the technology available to him, so I had installed a micro transporter pattern buffer to hold the nanites in transporter suspension until deployed again. The nanite replicator would essentially only be used to create new nanites as needed, like for large scale configurations, or to replace damaged or destroyed nanites for whatever reason. In this case, the nanites were kind of sucked up into the five power cores.

"Deploy armor and cycle through various configurations and activate new equipment."

The armor was deployed again and various changes were made. The boot thrusters activated and combined to form a new super thruster for incredible speed. The arms turned into various weapon configurations, including a phaser canon and pulse rifle. Cutting lasers were activated from various points. Anti-matter mini missiles were deployed and fired. A built-in sword was built with nanites. What I didn't see was the flying arc energy emitters that Tony had built to form that huge energy beam in the movie. Yeah, I was still working on making that one a reality.

These special armor configurations allowed me to do a lot, but there was an acute danger in letting my enemies know that I had these advanced capabilities. Being underestimated could be a superpower of its own and I was very reluctant to give that up. If they thought that I was disarmed and made harmless by taking my rifle and pistol, for example, I'd have a tremendous advantage over them. Bottom line, unless my life was in serious danger and the situation was incredibly dire, the only time I'd use my armor to its fullest would be when I could ensure that no one would remain alive to report back what they'd seen.

"Scarlett, did all these configurations work within expected parameters?"

"Yes, all constructs worked as expected, father, though field testing is highly recommended," Scarlett replied.

"I agree. Though I'm not sure when we'd have the chance with no risk of my capabilities becoming known to my enemies, or even my allies," I answered with a scoff, thinking of Section 31. "Simulate activation of micro-replicator, produce multiple objects."

With that command my holographic doppelganger outstretched his hand at chest height, palm facing up, and spread his fingers. The palm of his hand glowed a familiar white and grenades were produced, then recycled, then a knife, then recycled, then an apple, a cup of steaming hot tea, and so on. A dozen different objects, including some common engineering and medical tools of this era were replicated, even my holo-tool that I had created so long ago that was still being tested by Starfleet Operations, but was likely only still being held up due to prejudice.

Anybody familiar with the replicators of the Federation would recognize the light and sounds of an active replicator, though in this case it was sped up as I had upgraded the Federation replicators with particle synthesis technology. In this case, the nanites encasing my holographic hand were mimicking the energy-to-matter conversion technology found in all replicators. My previous armor had had a micro-replicator in the utility belt, so I had wanted to reproduce that with my new nano-armor. It wouldn't be able to produce objects larger than what a standard in-quarters replicator found on a starship or in a civilian's kitchen could make, at the moment, but it was still incredibly useful and looked crazy fucking cool. Using already produced items stored in my buffer inventory, though, was by far the most energy efficient method of accomplishing something similar, but my inventory, while large, wasn't infinite. It had gotten a significant upgrade when I'd acquired the Vidiian harvester's far more efficient memory storage, transporter, and buffer technology, but it wasn't infinite.

An alternative to the inventory was to have my armor nanotechnology assimilate already existing technology and reform it for my purposes. The Borg had been a huge inspiration to me in that regard. In episode after episode we saw the Borg inject nanoprobes into technology to assimilate it, and those same nanoprobes were capable of changing that technology into Borg technology. This was similar.

"Retract armor to undeployed state. Simulate exposure to vacuum through explosive decompression and travel in vacuum," I ordered, imagining a possible scenario where this would be possible.

Scarlett did just that and the effects were not nice, even in the short time I'd been exposed to vacuum in this simulation, even for someone like me. Thankfully, the nanites present in my blood acted like sensors even when the armor was in an undeployed state, just as I'd designed it, so they had detected the dangerous situation and taken action to preserve my life. In the case of my armor's sensors and/or Jarvis detecting a threat to my life, the armor was set to automatically deploy in the fastest way possible and do whatever was necessary to prevent my severe injury, incapacitation, or death, including automatically beaming me to safety. I was under no illusions that I couldn't be taken by surprise and wanted contingency protocols in place to protect me.

This, in theory, would apply for a myriad number of situations where I wasn't already wearing my armor in a deployed state, like if I was sleeping in my quarters on DS9 and a bomb was left in my quarters or if assassins tried to kill me in my bed or in the shower while I was fucking my girls. If I was injured, the nanites in my blood would automatically work to heal me to my baseline, working alongside my already impressive healing abilities.

Those situations, ones where I wasn't already wearing my armor, for whatever reason, had given me nightmares in the past. An armor, no matter how advanced, is only going to protect you if you were wearing the fucking thing. During the Occupation I pretty much wore my armor at all times, even sleeping in it. Even when having sex with Nerys or Neela or Ro Laren during those crazy times, I'd often only remove my pants. Thanks to Tony Stark's ingenuity, hopefully those fears were a thing of the past. As I'd reminded myself over and over again, I might be a badass superhuman augment in many ways, but I wasn't fucking invincible. I could be killed easily if my enemies had the right amount of creativity and time to prepare. A lack of caution, on my part, would certainly help my enemies to succeed in that endeavor.

"We've done some good work, Scarlett, continue to run simulations on all aspects of the new nano-armor design. Coordinate with the EMH's on the medical simulations to run for the nanites to be present inside my body. Poison and toxin exposure, disease, combat injuries, etc. Whatever they or you can think of."

"Of course, my lord. Over 100 million simulations under different circumstances and variables still need to be conducted. A comprehensive report with suggestions for changes to the base nanite hardware design or attendant programming will be included and sent to you once completed," Scarlett responded from her position next to me, after materializing again in her Black Widow form. I'd like to think that even though she wasn't truly sentient, as I'd intended, she truly cared for me as her Creator and father.

"What is the ETA on the simulation run being complete?" I asked.

"37 hours, 12 minutes, and 36 seconds estimated to completion," Scarlett responded.

"Good, good. Keep me apprised. And let me know immediately when Jarvis is fully compiled and tested."

The creation of the Jarvis VI was a process in itself as Jarvis would be my companion and help control the armor, as well as act as my omni-tool. Saying I'd merely be changing the name of my old omnitool's VI to Jarvis was a gross oversimplification. A VI running on the processing power of a small wearable omni-tool, no matter how upgraded, was nothing in comparison to VIs like Hermione and Scarlett who had the massive computer cores of my island and starship respectively available for processing power. It was like comparing a cheap solar calculator to a supercomputer.

Jarvis, on the other hand, would be running on the processing power of billions upon billions of nanites networked together. So, to use that analogy again, if Hermione and Scarlett are supercomputers, Jarvis would be like a tricked-out gaming desktop. With my neural transceiver and connection to both my island, my ship's, and Minos' systems via quantum entanglement, Jarvis would be able to tap into those processing resources, borrowing what he needed to assist me. Hermione and Scarlett could tap into those resources as well.

With that, I decided it was time to turn in. I had done all the heavy lifting I could for the moment, the rest was tweaking the tech and I really couldn't do that until all the simulations were completed.

Best to get to bed.

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Main Bridge. *The Flighty Temptress*. In orbit of Janus VI. Alternate Reality.

“Status report,” I ordered with my best Captain’s voice, from my captain’s chair on the bridge of my ship. B’Elanna and Neela were on the main viewscreen, reporting in from their positions in main engineering.

“Captain, all dimensional transit calculations have been checked and verified to the best of our abilities and current understanding of the underlying science,” T’Maz reported. “However, there are unknowns to this technology that cannot be removed through simulations alone, especially when based on incomplete data and using hardware this technology had not been purpose designed to utilize.”

I nodded at her answer. I, too, had gone over her calculations after we had spent a good deal of time trying to understand the dimensional transit technology we’d stolen from the Forge. We’d come a long, long way from where we started in terms of understanding it all, that’s for sure, but we also knew that we had a long, long way to go. True understanding would have only been possible if we’d developed this technology from the ground up, but those weren’t the cards that we were dealt.

Along with our nascent understanding of the underlying science, we’d also be working with equipment that had *not* been purposely designed to work hand in hand with this transit technology. Unfortunately, our main deflector and the whole of the ship was alien to this technology’s original design. Since I didn’t have the time or inclination to build some giant alien space station, like the Forge had been, we had had to scale down the technology and use what we had on hand, making unique, untested customizations as we went. That was all kinds of dangerous, but not a danger that could be alleviated by spending more time on the problem. We’d reached an impasse and without a real test and hard data to review, our progress had come to a standstill and would remain there even if we spent weeks or months more on the problem making some pitiful incremental gains. We couldn’t afford that. The longer we stayed here in this dimension, the greater the chances some Federation time cops would show up to kill us.

“Do you still advise that we proceed, T’Maz?” I asked, my voice telling her that I would accept whatever answer she gave.

“Affirmative, Captain. We need additional data.”

“B’Elanna, your report?” I asked.

“All systems are currently operational, Captain. All modifications that you and T’Maz requested have been completed and tested,” she reported. “All repairs that we are capable of making have been made, but even those repairs that require specialized equipment or components should not impact our dimensional transit. I say go.”

“Neela, how is our cargo?” I asked, knowing she had been placed in charge of that aspect of this mission.

“The ship is full, Captain, every available, unoccupied, non-critical space has been filled with valuable material taken from the surface,” she reported with a grin and a twinkle in her eyes. She was someone who recognized the value of money. “Per your orders, even the corridors have been partially filled with storage containers. We’ll still be able to walk them, though it’ll be a tighter fit.”

I smirked at her; there was no way I was going to leave all that wealth on the table if I could help it. My greed had been somewhat tempered as I hadn’t filled vital areas of the ship like the bridge or main engineering, after all, or skimmed on proper storage to prevent the dilithium from fracturing, for example.

“The proper containers have been used for storage and all cargo secured. We could engage in pitched combat and as long as the ship’s hull wasn’t breached, the cargo should be relatively safe,” Neela reported.

“Good, good,” I said quietly, hesitating now that the moment to leave via an untested piece of alien technology was upon us. “Have all traces of our presence on the surface been removed?” I asked, more to delay things than a real question that I didn’t already know the answer to.

“Yes, Captain,” B’Elanna answered. “All evidence of our mining has been carefully removed. Where we carved tunnels or removed material, we’ve collapsed those spaces. If anyone bothers to check in the future, they’ll chalk it up to natural, geological activity. We’ve also swept the area with a coherent energy pulse to remove any non-native energy particles from detection by scanning equipment. Within a few days, the areas we mined will appear the same as any other on the planet, electromagnetically speaking.”

“Good, well, I suppose there is no point in waiting any further. Red alert,” I called out, girding myself for the dangerous challenge ahead. “All crew, take your stations and secure yourself. Prepare for dimensional transit.”

In my mind’s eye, I saw my crew take their seats, their five-point harnesses deploying around them, securing them to their protected stations and independent forcefields springing up to surround them.

“Open the rift, T’Maz,” I ordered in a clear voice, hoping none of them could hear the trepidation I was truly feeling at this moment. This might very well be the biggest risk I’d ever taken in this new life.

Through my connection to the ship, I T’Maz channeling an incredible amount of power to the main deflector, carving an opening in reality, similar, but quite different on several subtle levels, from the slice in space/time we made when we engaged the quantum slipstream drive. If I had to describe the difference, this cut felt much...*deeper*.

“Full impulse ahead, go!”

As soon as we crossed the dimensional barrier the ship's shield was attacked, as if every centimeter of the shield grid was attacked simultaneously with overwhelming power, faced with such an attack, the shields almost instantly fell. A blinding flash of light, an explosion of immense power, and in that terrible moment, I knew no more.

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Opening my eyes, I found myself in an immense white void, with no end in sight no matter how far I turned my head or tried to focus on points in the 'distance.' Where was I?

"Computer, end program," I ordered. "Exit. Arch."

I tried a myriad number of commands, yet nothing worked. When that failed, I tried to tap into my always present connection to the ship and Scarlett, nothing, then I tried Hermione, even Carl. Nothing. It was as if they weren't even there. Suddenly, I felt terribly alone. How else would you feel when you had multiple presences with you, at all times, always ready to help and serve their Creator, and then suddenly you were utterly alone. Was this how the Borg felt when severed from the hive mind, but billions of time worse? I'm amazed 7 of 9 from canon Star Trek: Voyager hadn't gone insane with the loss, having known nothing else since a very, very young child.

I reviewed what I could remember from the moments after we had tried to traverse dimensions. The shields had been attacked. A strange, all-encompassing attack, actually, and the shields had fallen. Had the ship been destroyed? *Had I died?* If the Star Trek dimension was real, was the God of my childhood, my Catholic faith, just as real, even here?

The void around me began to change, suddenly there was a blue sky filled with fluffy, happy clouds forming. A bright beam of brilliant sunlight shone down on me, rich and warm, obscuring a gigantic figure in archaic robes, a figure that was slowly walking towards me, getting closer and closer. For some reason, that sense of loneliness I had been feeling suddenly disappeared, and I only felt a wonderful contentedness gazing on this brilliant being of light.

The figure got closer and closer, and I was still unable to see their face. They came within feet of me and stopped, as if waiting, waiting for something to happen. Were they waiting for me to acknowledge them? To accept them into my heart like those door-to-door Christians were always going on about?

Deciding I had little to lose, I reached out a hand.

"Is that you, God?"

A hand reached out from that bright white blinding light...and promptly 'booped' me on the nose, like a child.

What the fuck?

"Got your nose!" he said, leaning forward and I got a glimpse of who I thought *may* have been God.

“Q?” I asked in a whisper, and the sheer incongruity of the sight of him, in this moment, caused even my impressive brain to blue screen. “What the fuck is going on?”

“I’m sorry, my child, but you *died*,” Q answered magnanimously. The tone and words fit the aesthetic, a loving God comforting his child at the end of their long and fulfilling life, but the mocking, shit eating grin on Q’s face told a very different story. “Dimensional travel is so hard, isn’t it?”

And with that I let out a long, long sigh.

Fuck.