

## Chapter Eleven

### ***Let the Games Begin***

Castle Cor, Planet Albion, Realm

Due to all the special guests coming in for the Symposium and Summit, all the dinners had been formal dress. The family insisted that such was not usually the case. Still there was a level of excitement, though that could just be Abby, as they all came to dinner. The men in their tuxedos, the women resplendent in the latest fashions. The mix of old and new still caught him by surprise. In such a setting he wouldn't have been surprised by hoop dresses or princess gowns. The dress Dani had worn yesterday had been form fitting—he cut the thought off.

The dinners were beyond anything Alex had dealt with in the past but they were merely rehearsals for tonight's affair. Taking a deep breath, he focused on getting dressed.

“Do you think it would be okay if I took a few vids?”

“Of course, sir.” Dale said from the closet.

Alex flipped the tie lengths. *Over, under, wait, that wasn't right. Under, over...*

“Let me do that, sir.”

“You know, Dale, I used to be able to dress myself.”

“*Indeed, sir.*”

Alex raised an eyebrow. Dale's sense of humour was subtle. So what had caused the sarcasm? Alex's lack of 'real' clothes or his choice in what he'd selected?

Finally dressed to Dale's approval, Alex picked up his PC and started recording as he left his room.

“This is the hallway to my room. These are actual oil paintings. I don't know who they are, but most of them look annoyed. Probably took days to paint, long hours stuck in

the same pose. Just thinking about how long they had to wait to use the head, yeah, I'd have an annoyed look too.”

Stepping into the elevator he continued talking as he recorded the fresco painted on its ceiling. “So tonight is the big opening dinner. A gala event. We had a parade this afternoon with horses and gliders and actual biplanes buzzing the field. I bought the vid. Two of them. I’m sending you one. After dinner there is going to be fireworks. Oh, this is the elevator. I know. Here we go.” Still recording he walked out into the main hallway.

“No, this is not some holo program. This is the main hall of Castle Cor.” He continued to the main dining hall and did a closeup of the settings. “There will be 300 of the most important people on Albion here tonight for supper and me. Everyone gets a server, plus there are waiters, cooks, bartenders. The fireworks are going to be through these doors.”

Alex took a wide scan of the back gardens. “Yes, that's a maze. But I haven't had a chance to try it out.”

He walked around the side of the patio till he came to the main balcony overlooking the service entrance a good eight meters below. Standing at the stone railing he showed the parking lot full of vehicles. Just below a line of hover and wheeled trucks were unloading or waiting to unload. “Yes, William, that's two truck loads of real whiskey, not synth. Not a bottle under a hundred years old. I've picked up a case for you. Just say you owe me, *for ever*.”

He filmed the huge barbecues roasting sides of beef and chickens. “You wouldn't believe how fantastic it smells. They've been roasting the beef since before dawn. I keep wondering if there couldn't be a less time consuming way of cooking the meat, because I've been drooling since noon.

Let me say, Aunt Lillian's complaining about fifteen people at her house is nothing.”

He headed back inside. “This room is the parlor, it's for those not interested in staying in the Grand Ballroom. Here there will be three quartets, they're a kind of mini band, rotating through the night.”

Trying to stay out of the way, Alex walked into the Grand Ballroom. Chairs were being set out and couches arranged in more personal arrangements. A stage had been set up and a live band was doing a sound check.

“There will be three bands playing in here tonight.”

“There you are.”

Alex turned. Dani stood wearing a beautiful pant suit of layered silks that looked like gossamer. The sweetheart neck line and form fitting base layer accentuating her hour glass figure. The outer layers flowed about her as she walked toward him.

“Here is my host, Daniella, Professor De La Roche.”

“Let me have that,” Dani said reaching for the PC. “Hand it over.”

Dani laughed at Alex's expression, his eyes filling with dread.

“You hold it-”

“I know how, Alex.” *Blood*, the thing was ancient, but Dani refrained from saying so aloud. She smiled at Alex's image on the screen. Yes, his eyes were definitely his best feature.

“Just be careful, my life's in there.”

“I have noticed how few photos he takes of himself.” Dani smiled. “Alright, smile, Alex. Here he is in his Tux. Alex you need to strike a pose, like in *L.C.*”

“LC?”

The room went still as all the people bustling stopped.

“What?” Everyone went back to what they were doing.

“*Lord Cavalon’s Properly Dressed Man’s Quarterly Magazine*. I will get you a copy.”

Alex raised an eyebrow at her and Dani laughed.

She handed back the PC.

They walked off to the terrace overlooking the gardens. Abigail came galloping up on her horse and Alex videoed her coming to a sliding stop. He turned off the PC, holding it in his hands as he took in the world around him. They leaned against the railing, both silent. Then Dani excused herself.

Coming back in, Alex was surprised. It was as if some enchantment had happened. The rooms once bustling with activity were now bare of people but ready for the gala. That so many could just vanish into the background of the edifice still amazed him. He pulled out his PC and did a quick vid.

“Alex, do you have a few minutes?”

Alex turned. George was standing in the hallway. He’d read that George was eight hundred and fifty-seven years old. He’d married ‘late’ and Abby had been a welcomed gift. Yet the man before him seemed to be somewhere in his early fifties, distinguished in that way that real wealth brings.

“Yes, sir?”

“Quick, before they find us.” George motioned him over. Alex followed George down a side hall and into another elevator, one he hadn’t used before.

“You have yet to see my den. I have had the closet converted,” George said. “We have a few hours before the dinner starts.”

Alex nodded. He followed George down a hall through the man’s den, a huge room of real wood shelves loaded with books, and—“Is that a Bolt Laser gun?”

George looked up from typing in his pass code. “Yes, my great, great grandfather founded the company on York. Not York in the Cluster, mind you, but the first York. Not to be confused with New York, of which I believe there are now four.”

“Yeah,” Alex said looking closely at the gun. “Gee-one.”

“This way,” George said as he walked through the large open door.

Alex tore himself away from the gun. The inside of George’s ‘closet’ was a tech dream. All the interior walls were covered in a continuous flat screen with full photonic display. Alex remembered George calling the room a closet, but it was at least eight meters squared. In the centre sat George’s workstation. It had a photonic display with full interactive capabilities. The ‘geers at any high tech research facility would give their reproductive rights to play with this baby.

A ship, wedge shaped, was displayed.

“Ouroboros class,” Alex said quietly.

“Yes, it is the Carrado. She is scheduled for overhaul.”

“Unauthorised access.” A female computer voice declared.

“Access override.” George said stepping forward. “We have been having trouble with energy field stabilisation.”

“Are you talking an energy shield? I don’t see any projectors. Layered?”

George smiled. “Well, you see...”

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“Now of all times, George!”

Alex jumped. Claudette, George’s valet and Dale were standing in the doorway.

“Ah,” George started, he glanced at his wrist. “Oops. I forgot to set the alarm.”

“This is not the time for—*People are arriving, George.*” Claudette had both hands on her hips. “Alex. You need to get ready, now.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Alex hit save and hurried out the door. Dale was giving him a stern look, then he turned and led the way to a hall Alex recognized. They rode up the elevator in silence.

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Alex couldn't believe that Castle Cor could ever be crowded, but as people continued to pour in he began looking for a corner to hide in. Perhaps Dani sensed his unease as she appeared silently next to him. She led him from one group to another, greeting each person by name. Dale had appeared, looking sleek in his tux. He prompted Alex whenever he forgot a name. Finally, dinner was announced.

Standing on the terrace, Alex took a deep breath of the warm night air. He pulled out his PC and took a vid of the gardens as the little white lights came on. It was better than any scene from a vid. “The meal, well the beef was beyond G1, beyond Wow! It was worth the torture. There was a baked apple pie for after supper. Did I tell you that New Oxford is famous for its apples?”

Putting the PC back in his pocket, Alex entered the Grand Ballroom.

“No sneaking off early,” Dani said as she took his arm. She got him a glass of wine from a waiter walking by. “You’re going to love the fireworks.”

Sipping the rich sweet wine, Alex was introduced to several interesting people. Countess Voluna Spengler, a movie director, asked if he had any acting experience and a Mr. Casimir Lozier, one of the managers of Viridescent, a company that helped terraform new worlds, talked on and

on about oxygen producing bacteria. A young man, Kelvin, made his excuse. Alex nodded to the older gentlemen and followed Kelvin a little ways before sneaking off to a stand of plants. He had a few moments before Dani caught him and introduced him to Lady Black of House Blackthorn. Alex found himself meeting politicians, marketers, museum caretakers, import-export entrepreneurs and many, many more men and women whose names and occupations had become a blur.

Everyone was very polite, but as soon as he could, Alex slipped away from Dani. He had never really missed mess dress dinners.

“Hiding?” Johanna was beside him. Alex smiled.

“Definitely.”

Johanna began introducing him to some of her friends. Then she asked him for a dance. Cheeks going red, he looked to the dance floor where everyone seemed to know what to do. The dance looked complicated.

“I don't dance, Johanne.”

She smiled mischievously. “Oh, I know. Come on.”

The band stopped the tune and everyone clapped. Then they started up with a waltz.

Alex laughed.

“I see,” he said as she led him onto the dance floor.

“Do you think I would let you off that easy?”

“I was hoping.” Alex bowed politely, then stepped forward, holding up his hand for hers.

At the edge of the Grand Ballroom Dani was stepping away from Lord Knighton and the Prime Minister, Dame Fournier. The band was on its fourth waltz, none of which had been on the playlist.

Berg Raine and his sister, Anita, children of the Mayoress of New Oxford were standing by the fireplace,

giving them a direct line of sight of the dance floor. Dani sighed, she needed to keep mingling, but catching a breather with friends was what she wanted right now.

“Hey Dani. So what is the *real* on bringing this outcomer here?” Anita asked.

“Yeah.” Berg added.

“My plans have not changed, he is—*dancing?*” Dani watched as Alex moved gracefully around the floor with Francesca Boneville. *Had he not told her he did not dance?*

“Waltzes.” Anita swallowed her glass of wine. “Johanna discovered it. Apparently all HFSS military personnel have to know how to waltz.”

“The horde has discovered his vulnerability.” Berg said as he motioned for another glass of wine.

“Yup. He will not last long now.” Anita polished off one glass and took another. “I think Chelsea has out maneuvered Debra. Damn it, I have got twenty sovereigns on Rebecca.”

“What do you mean, twenty sovereigns?” Dani looked to where Anita motioned. Chelsea Fenice, a half Vampire rather infamous for her sexual tastes, had grabbed Dr. Hebron’s arm and turned him to the other woman. Manners dictated that Debra had to stop and converse with the doctor. Chelsea was already heading for the dance floor.

“Are you kidding?” Berg looked at Dani, eyes wide in surprise. “The available ladies have been mooning over him since the reception at the Gardens.”

“Those in the know, have it pretty much between Chelsea, Rebecca, Winifred and of course, Francesca of the wandering hands.” Anita finished her glass. “I think they should put Johanna on the list. What do you think? She finally over Marcus?”



Dani felt a stab. *Why was she not on the list? Because of Fredrick, you idiot. Just because you have not been seen together in more than two years, does not mean...That Bitch!* Francesca's hands were indeed wandering, down to Alex's— "That is not how a Lady behaves!"

Anita barked a laugh, but hid it in a fake cough.

"Anita, she is slipping him her comm code." Berg looked at Dani. "I have a sovereign on Francesca."

"Excuse me, please." Dani hurried toward the dancers.

"Maybe someone else should be on that list." Anita said.

"Who?" Berg asked, looking around.

Dani moved quickly across the floor as the waltz wound down. Chelsea looked over and saw her coming. They were practically at a run as Alex bowed to Francesca. Dani noticed an intercept. A man in a tux, his back to her stepped in front of Chelsea.

"Ah, Alex." Dani said stepping into his arms.

"Dani, I mean, Lady De La Roche." Alex was sweating.

This was his fifth waltz, she realized. He was not winded, but even with the fans running, it was just hot on the dance floor. Dani, in her heels was eye to eye with him. Her cheeks flushed, what must they all be thinking about her mad dash.

The music started up and he took her hand. His was warm and his eyes twinkled. His sweat had the muskiness of a healthy man. His body heat glowed in her vision. She could feel his heart beating through his hands, see the pulse at his throat.

Alex continued looking her in the eyes, a faint smile on his face. The silence between them stretched. *The heat is getting to me.* Dani decided that was why her pulse had started racing.

Leading him by the hand, Dani took Alex from the floor. Chelsea was talking to Lord Morgan, who gave her a nod. Blushing, she nodded back as she guided Alex to the balcony overlooking the gardens.

“I need some air.” Dani said, not looking at him. The balcony was filled with others enjoying the evening. Above her the night sky was a field of stars. Below, the small fey lights lit up the gardens spread before them almost mimicking the stars above. From the darkness of the maze she could smell couples hidden in the greenery, their muffled cries of passion bringing more heat to her face.

Next to her Alex leaned on the balcony. She could feel his body heat, smell him. His excitement lingered just below the body wash. Dale had picked well, the scent complimented his natural odor.

Dani turned to face him. Alex was looking at her. He quickly looked away as if she had caught him at something. He gazed toward the gardens below them. Dani could feel her fangs pushing, the glands in her mouth swelling. Then she caught sight of her personal maid, Madeline.

“I hope you are having a wonderful evening, Alex.” Dani said. “I have to...mingle.”

“Yes, its...” Alex started, but she was gone.

Wondering if he'd offended Dani, he wandered back into the Grand Ballroom. Abigail waved enthusiastically at Alex, she and her friends were dressed in splashes of vibrant colour, their styles as varied and sophisticated as the older ladies. He smiled back and nodded his head at the eight young girls all smiling at him. Immediately fangs appeared, but he could still hear the giggles. No matter how many times he saw it, it sent a shiver down his spine.

“And how is your evening going, Alex?”

“Lord Morgan.” Alex gave a small bow. “Just trying to stay out of the way.”

The man’s pale face brightened. “Indeed. I fear Keith is doing likewise. And you must call me Jonathan, as we are friends now. I understand that Lady De La Roche has requested no waltzes until after the fireworks.”

Alex nodded, wishing he didn’t blush so easily. He pushed Francesca’s wandering hands from his thoughts. He felt odd using the first name of Vampire royalty, it was like being in a room full of officers or worse.

He’d been taught that a commoner, especially a flat stock such as himself could never use the first name of an Elite. So far, the Vampires had been more deserving of his respect, than any Elite he’d ever seen. As for Forever’s, how would you know?

“It seems that the young ladies from the academy have their eye on you.” Lord Morgan leaned in, his tone conspiratorial. “I suggest you beware, I hear there’s a pool.”

Alex, not sure what to say, finished his wine as he followed the older man’s gaze to yet another grouping of women. He was sure they were friends of Johanna and Dani. He’d already danced with half of them. Their glances were anything but casual as they took him in. It wasn’t the low necklines of the beautiful dresses that gave his heart a kick, but the flash of fangs in half their smiles. Francesca licked her lips. Alex turned and quickly took a glass of wine from a passing waiter.

“I understand that you and Marcus have been fencing.”

“Yes, sir. He’s my chaperone,” Alex said with a smile. Jonathan chuckled.

“Yes, quite.” Jonathan’s smile showed his cat like canines quite clearly.

“We’ve only had one session, yesterday morning.”

Jonathan smiled politely. “He’s quite impressed with you, perhaps we shall spar one day?”

“I doubt that, sir.” Alex nodded to the gentleman who walked up beside them. As the two men began talking Alex excused himself. The dancing had wound him up and he realized he had too much wine in the last few minutes. *Got to watch yourself, Alex, this stuff isn’t synth.*

With his head starting to buzz, he began to make his way back to the patio doors for some fresh air.

“Mr. Hunter, isn’t it?”

Alex turned at the voice. A tall, dark skinned man, was smiling at him.

“Ah, we met at the port. I’m sorry, I...” Alex took the man’s hand.

“Charlie. Charlie Girard.” Charlie leaned in close to Alex. “My boss had too much to drink last night and they sent me instead.”

“That’s on target.” Alex smiled back.

“Wouldn’t mind a repeat.” Charlie nodded then turned to a passing waiter and snatched two wine glasses. “To friends and expense accounts. Look there’s Wilson.”

Alex smiled and took a sip. He clamped his mouth closed. Blood, *warm blood*. It wasn’t wine, it was blood.

“Are you alright?”

Alex shook his head. His stomach and buzzing head were threatening a revolt. He handed the glass to Charlie.

“Oh, dear Earth! I’m—Quickly, there a washroom right over here.” He cut a line through the people, his hand on Alex’s elbow guiding him to the washroom. Alex tried to turn, convinced there was a closer washroom, but Charlie’s grip was iron.

Alex headed through the door and emptied his mouth into the sink. His stomach started heaving.

“Give me your jacket, quickly.”

Alex slipped it off as Charlie filled a glass with water. Taking the glass, Alex rinsed his mouth out. Pressure built behind his eyes like nothing he'd ever felt before. “I don't feel so—”

Alex just made it to the toilet. He told himself it was the wine making everything pink. The taste of the blood, the warm blood, lingered. He retched for several minutes. The pain in his head had evened out to a pounding right behind his eyes that was threatening to take the top of his head off. With tears starting from the pain, Alex carefully got up and went to the sink. He washed his face.

“I thought you were staying at the Taw River Boarding House?” Charlie asked as he looked with concern at Alex.

“So did I.” Alex rubbed his temples then rested his hands on the counter. Was he having an aneurysm? Then the pain lessened. There was one more sharp stab, he didn't know what else to call it and the pain eased to bearable, then there was a sensation like a hiccup in gravity and everything was back to normal. *By the Black! Had someone tried to scan him?*

Charlie, looking very concerned handed him a wet facecloth.

“Thank you,” Alex said, happy that his voice sounded normal.

“So you're staying here?” Charlie asked.

Alex, with as few words as he could explained Dani's invitation and the mix up.

“It could have been worse.” Charlie chuckled as he handed Alex his coat. “Are you sure you're alright? Not suffering from blood loss, are you?”

Alex grimaced. “No. I stay away from pointy objects.” *That’s right, Alex, he thought to himself, you know your place.*

The door opened and in came the attendant.

“May I help you, gentlemen.”

“We’re just leaving.” Charlie said with a smile.

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Alex stepped into his room thankful that at two a.m. he could finally head to bed. There was no sign of Dale, though there usually wasn’t. He went out onto his balcony and looked down at the lights of New Oxford. The city was beautiful.

*Don’t get used to the view, Alex. Time to smarten up and grow up. This isn’t some holo-vid. No one here is larping and in less than a week you’re out of here. The Jules awaits you. In five weeks you’ll be heading off to the far reaches of the verse, all this but a memory, a dream.* He thought of the feel of Dani through the silk of her dress. She’d smelled of some kind of delicate flower. *It might be a dream, but what a beautiful one.*

The sky above was grey. Far off to the west lightning was dancing under and through the clouds. The pre-rain air was fresh in a living green way. It was also cooling off fast. With a last look he turned and headed into his room.

Still no Dale. He took off his jacket.

“Let me—”

“Where the frack did you come from?” Alex had jumped this time. He tried to catch his breath as he glared at Dale.

“From my room, sir.” Dale motioned toward the sitting area.

Alex looked from Dale to the chairs and reading table. He walked over and there next to the desk and hidden by a bookshelf was a secret door. Actually, it wasn’t that secret

now that it was open. Beyond it was another room about the same size as Alex's room, with its own sitting area and a large bed.

"You live right here?"

"Of course, sir. With my wife. With the children grown there is no reason for us to take up a suite." Dale removed Alex's jacket.

"With your *wife*? You're married, Dale?" Alex stared at the man, dumbfounded.

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Findley and I have been married for over thirty years now. Our son is at uni and our daughter is a sergeant in the military." Dale was fussing with Alex's jacket, he didn't raise an eyebrow at the three cards that had been slipped into Alex's pocket. "I will put these on the desk, sir. Let me get you ready for bed."

Alex could feel heat in his face. *Why should he be embarrassed? He was a guy, and they were women...with excellent dental work.*

"Huh. So each of you have a room next to the guest rooms?" Alex walked back and continued undressing.

"Yes, sir. Shower or bath?"

"Thank you, a shower and sorry, Dale. But you scared the reason out of me."

"Yes, sir." Dale pulled two more cards out of Alex's pant's pocket.

Going to the bed, Alex reminded himself of the *Jules Verne*. He ran over the specs of the Steward Class, P Series deep space vessel in his mind. When sleep finally came, it wasn't the joy of exploration that came to him, but dancing with Dani in his arms.

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Claudette yawned. She had just come out of a hot shower and was heading to bed when she felt her husband's

mental call from his den. She entered the room not surprised that Thomas was there, nor that the man was impeccably dressed. But the presence of Lauren, her personal secretary, did surprise her. Four people, two men and two women were also there, they were not introduced so Claudette did not ask. She gave Minister Tiffany Clarion a nod. She let her eyes linger on the Armorum, Gregor Bowie. He was more than chief of security for the De La Roche House. She took her ex-lover's hands in hers.

"You are well?"

"Yes, my Lady." Gregor nodded, but she could see the pain in his eyes. His skin had paled, his irises had lost their colour giving him an odd washed out appearance. His once thick hair was gone, as were his eyebrows. And his voice. Where once his baritone had sent shivers down her spine, now he was a rough tenor. There would be the other changes but she would not let her mind linger on them. Claudette squeezed Gregor's hands a moment longer then stepped away to stand by her husband.

Thomas clicked the control he was holding and the main screen came to life with security footage from the gala.

"His name on the guest list is Charlie Girard. He is listed as one of the directors of the department of Agri-Terran Studies. His title is given as a Liaison Officer for Section 42."

Thomas let everyone in the room study the man's image before motioning to Lauren.

"It was only a matter of time before we encountered members of their new secret police. We have started calling them *Section 42*." Lauren said to the room. "We all knew that with Clemons and Teng gone the void would need to be filled."

"Is he a Forever?" George asked.



“No, sir.” Thomas clicked another button. “Though he will live to be about five hundred years old, he *is* aging. He has a standard package of tweaks, bone density, muscle strength, vision. No doubt he has other tweaks that we have not uncovered yet. His full name is Chander Xavier Petrovich. He is only seventy-seven years old and he is very good. We know little except that he was involved with taking down Black, and both Moreau and Wu.”

George and Claudette looked at each other.

“So, he has killed Forevers. Mr. Petrovich is someone to watch.” George took a deep breath. This man was dangerous.

“At eleven twenty-five, Mr. Alex Hunter was having a drink. By backtracking we see that Mr. Charlie Girard and his crew of five individuals, three of which we have identified,” the names Brian Liao, Haj Khalof and Karen Holmes appeared under the two men and one women, along with the title ‘Section 42 agents,’ “were watching Mr. Hunter from seven-oh-five p.m., when they caught sight of him. There was a telepathic huddle at ten-oh-six.” The screen split showing five different security camera views. Thomas waited until the significance of his statement hit everyone in the room.

“So one of them is above a level twenty-five?” Minister Clarion said aloud. “We had no one who could deal with that on the floor. What was their target? Is Alex Hunter one of theirs?”

“No, Ma’am.” Gregor’s words were filled with conviction. “As a matter of fact, we believe they were as unaware of Mr. Hunter’s unique *issue* as we were, or he still is.”

“You are telling us that this man is completely unaware that looking into his head is like swimming in wet

concrete?” Lauren stared at Thomas, her mouth slightly open.

“He is flat.” Thomas replied.

“Most people are flat—”

“Not like him.” Thomas took a deep breath. “Alex Hunter has not one tweaked gene in his body.”

“He is a mechanical genius and you are telling us that he is just a natural?” It was George’s turn to stare dumbfounded at Thomas.

“This is a conversation to have with Dr. Kincaid. We need to cover security concerns of which Mr. Hunter, in and of himself, is not one. Unfortunately our attention directed at him has now drawn the awareness of Section 42.” Thomas tapped his control.

“As you can see, Charlie and his crew send off the bathroom attendant, confuse the waiter, and Charlie himself hands Alex, who, is more than somewhat drunk a glass of warm blood.”

They all looked to the screen. Mr. Hunter took the drink, not a large sip, but definitely a sip. His face freezes and his jaw clamps shut. They listen as Charlie directs him to the washroom.

“And here things get interesting. The man leaning on the bathroom door, Brian Liao is their main telepath. The woman staying about fifteen meters away, Karen Holmes, is their back-up telepath.” Thomas tapped his remote and the screen split in three. They watched Alex get sick as the man leaning on the door was clearly struggling. The woman got closer.

“What we see here is their discovery that they could not implant Mr. Hunter. Not to be completely undone, Charlie puts a very advanced spy program onto Mr. Hunter’s PC.

Of course since we already have our own protocols in place, we were able to ghost in on their signal.”

Thomas tapped buttons and another screen opened showing a ship in space floating in the flotilla waiting for the various VIP’s down in New Oxford. “We have been able to get excellent infiltration, there on a ship called the *Dante’s Dipper*.”

“As in the Dante of the Inferno?” Claudette asked.

“No, my Lady. As in Dante Samuka, the famous card shark,” Thomas said.

Claudette gave a blank look.

“Thank you all for the update. But it is three in the morning and I believe we need to sleep on this information.” George said to the room.

“Sir.” Thomas nodded.

George and Claudette said their goodnights. After they were gone, Minister Clarion cleared her throat.

“I have another question regarding Mr. Hunter. You said he was completely genetically flat?”

“Yes, Minister.” Thomas finished tidying up and turned to face the Minister.

“How is that possible?”

“We are looking into it, Minister.” Gregor Bowie spoke as he motioned for the Minister to leave.

“Indeed. Just remember, Armorum, your job is the security of House De La Roche and by extension, all of the Realm. It would take very little for Albion to end up like Avalon. If he has potential, I will not hesitate to hand him over to the Black Guard.”

“Minister.” Gregor’s pale eyes were ice as he looked at Minister Clarion, then he nodded.