



A MINOR GLITCH

A science-fiction novel

By

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WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS

THIS FICTION NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF WAR, VIOLENCE AND SEX, AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS THAT ARE UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. WHILE THIS NOVEL DEPICTS MANY HISTORICAL PERSONS AND EVENTS FROM THE PAST, THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION AND WORDS OR DEEDS ATTRIBUTED IN IT TO PERSONS WHO EXISTED DO NOT REFLECT HISTORICAL REALITY.

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CHAPTER 1 – A MINOR GLITCH

08:25 (New York City Time)

October 06, 2624

Corporation headquarters of ‘Lenoir Industries’

Manhattan, New York City

United States of North America (U.S.N.A.)

“Good morning, Miss Lenoir!”

“Good morning to you too, sir!” Replied politely Tasha Lenoir as she kept walking at an energetic pace and passed by the employee who had just spoken to her. Tasha then discreetly spoke from the corner of her mouth to her young executive secretary, Pham Ti Hien, who was walking beside her.

“Who is that man, Hien? He was quite handsome, I must say.”

The graceful and pretty Vietnamese American smiled at that: Tasha Lenoir’s sexual appetite could be quite ferocious...towards members of both sexes. Hien then mentally searched her files on Lenoir Industries employees, which were part of the extensive databank implanted under her skull along with a powerful micro-computer and a multi-channel communications device. She could have used her own eidetic memory, but the man’s face was a new one for her.

“His name is Greg Gunnarsson. He was hired as a general repairman two weeks ago.”

“Hmm, he could fix me any night of the week: I love strong, Nordic types!”

“How about me?” Said with a smirk Johanna Kruger, Tasha’s most trusted senior engineer and technical troubleshooter, who was accompanying her on this trip to Paris with Hien and with Terry Clarkson, Tasha’s personal bodyguard. Tasha turned her head and smiled at the tall, blond, blue-eyed Aryan woman.

“You know that I don’t touch married people, especially when they have kids. I’m all for some good fun, but not at the cost of ruining someone’s marriage. And how is your son doing, by the way?”

“Michael is now fourteen and growing up like crazy. He is going to be one hulk of a man, probably thanks to Peter’s genes.”

Tasha nodded her head in understanding at that. She had met Peter Kruger many times already and the ex-professional football player's physique was nothing less than impressive, even though he had now been retired from the sport for a few years now, having made his millions before settling down as a family man. All the while, the 185 centimeter-tall Terry Clarkson kept following closely Tasha, her eyes scanning continuously the large hallway they were using for any possible threat to her employer and savior. Three years ago, Terry, then a member of an elite military unit, had been severely wounded in a bomb explosion, losing both arms and legs and one eye in that blast, apart from having much of her skin ripped off and both eardrums pierced. She had survived then, thanks to the miracles that the medical science of the 27th Century could do, but the U.S.N.A.'s Department of Defense had refused to pay for the very expensive treatment that could have returned her to a functional state. Terry was little more than a disfigured head attached to a torso with no limbs when Tasha Lenoir had heard about her and had visited her in her hospital. Tasha had then been deeply moved by Terry's plight and had decided to provide her with the best treatment one could pay for. Being a multi-billionaire, thanks to her genius in both physical sciences and business, Tasha was able to have Terry returned to even better than normal, through extensive grafting of cybernetic limbs and parts, which had then been covered by new body skin grown from stem cells. Now, Terry looked exactly as she had been in her best days as an elite commando soldier, while having fantastic new abilities and capabilities. As a mean to thank Tasha for all that, Terry had offered to become her personal bodyguard, an offer that Tasha had happily accepted. Since then, Terry had had no reasons to regret her decision, Tasha Lenoir having proved to be a good employer and a person who cared about others. Yes, the genius physicist, chemist and electronics expert could be quite arrogant at times and could be ruthless if need be, but that was par for any top, ultra-rich business person in the World right now. In truth, life in the U.S.N.A. was often a dog-eat-dog affair, with wide disparities in living standards between both extremes of the social ladder. The U.S.N.A. had not however sunk to the level many other state entities had fallen to, like the Pan-African Federation, a collection of warlords, kleptomaniac governments and tin-pot dictators who couldn't care less what happened to their own citizens.

The group of four women finally arrived at their destination, the transporter room of the corporate headquarters, situated in a heavily-guarded section of the office tower.

The technician on duty there couldn't help admire discreetly his powerful and rich boss when she entered the room. Tasha Lenoir was a 181 centimeter-tall, 34 year-old Eurasian woman of great beauty with long, silky black hair and piercing gray eyes and with the fit body of a sports person. She wore a long black leather coat over her black female business outfit and held the handle of a large anti-gravity travel suitcase that floated one meter above the floor, while a leather briefcase was suspended on her right side by a leather carrying strap. The three women accompanying her were each similarly towing anti-gravity suitcases and carried briefcases, except for Tasha's bodyguard, a very tall, pretty but also fearsome-looking young black woman with coffee-colored skin and hair dyed bluish silver. In Clarkson's case, on top of towing an anti-gravity travel suitcase, she carried a long rectangular rigid carrying case made of nearly indestructible dark gray composites, which was slung across her back. Rumors were that Tasha Lenoir's bodyguard hid a heavy plasma rifle in that carrying case, a powerful weapon that could melt a whole air car in a single shot, plus other weapons. Since that spectacular but failed attempt at kidnapping Tasha Lenoir less than a year ago, nobody dared go against her cybernetic bodyguard, who had utterly destroyed the seven criminals hired by a rival corporation to capture Tasha and force her to reveal her technological secrets.

"The system is ready and set on the coordinates of our Paris branch's headquarters, Miss Lenoir."

"Excellent! Hopefully, I will have a chance to enjoy Paris a bit after I straighten out the mess created by the idiots over there. I might also use this trip to renew my wardrobe."

Her tone clearly announced what would happen to the 'idiots' in question once she would be in Paris: those at fault would be summarily fired and would find it next to impossible afterwards to find new employment, thanks to the scalding letter of termination Tasha was going to put in their online personal dossiers. The technician already felt somewhat sorry for those Paris executives as the four women climbed the few steps to the large transporter pad and stood on it, loosely grouped together with their suitcases. The technician double-checked again the arrival coordinates out of habit, then punched in quickly his personal code number before pushing the 'Send' button.

"Energizing now, Miss Lenoir!"

Tasha didn't respond to that, staying as immobile as possible for the matter transportation process, which she had personally invented nine years ago. That

invention, of which she still held the exclusive rights and patents, had been the source of much of her present fortune. It also had fuelled a lot of thirst for the secrets of the transporter system among rival corporations around the World, something that had been the cause of the recent failed kidnapping attempt against her. She didn't have time to reflect on that before she and her three followers turned into bright translucent shapes, along with their suitcases, before vanishing in a fraction of a second from the transporter pad. The signal containing their transporter signatures was then beamed up to a dedicated satellite in orbit around the Earth, where it was redirected down towards Paris. However, at the precise moment the transportation beam was sent back down, an extremely powerful burst of cosmic charged particles that had originated centuries ago from a bursting supernova star washed over the beam and interacted with it in ways never imagined before.

At the transporter room in the corporate tower of the Lenoir Industries, Dan Coates waited for the call from Paris that would confirm the safe arrival of Tasha Lenoir's group there, as was the protocol for all transporter transits. After waiting for nearly a minute and still not getting a call, Dan started to feel uneasy and decided to call Paris himself. Punching the Paris transporter room number on his control board, he got a female voice to respond to his call within seconds, speaking in French first, then in Americanish, the official language of the U.S.N.A..

"Transporter room of the Paris offices! You wish to announce an incoming transit?"

The last words from the woman in Paris made blood suddenly rush to Dan's brain.

"What do you mean, 'wish to announce an incoming transit'? Miss Lenoir in person, along with three other persons, just dematerialized from my pad in New York. Didn't they arrive at your location?"

It was the turn of the operator in Paris to be silent for a moment before answering, shock in her voice.

"Miss Lenoir transported out of New York to here? But, I had no transits in or out yet this morning."

"Hell! Check the relay satellite, in case the signal was interrupted and stored there. I will do the same from my end."

Working frantically his controls, Dan sent a diagnostic request to the relay satellite, trying not to think about all the awful things that could be caused by a transporter system

failure, especially one involving Tasha Lenoir herself. His heart sank when the relay satellite master computer answered back with a laconic 'signal sent to Paris' response. Never in the eight years since the first test of the transporter system by Tasha Lenoir had there been a single glitch or mishap. However, it would take only one such serious mishap to destroy any public confidence in using the system, something that would impact very severely Lenoir Industries and possibly cause it to go bankrupt. Calling back Paris, Dan only got a similar verdict from there.

"The satellite gave you a 'signal sent' diagnostic as well? Could Miss Lenoir and her team have rematerialized somewhere else in Paris?"

"I suppose so! I hope so!" Replied the Paris operator, sounding deeply shaken. "What should we do now?"

"Start a full diagnostic of your system right now and record the results! I will do the same here. In the meantime, I will advise the Deputy CEO, Mister Vanderbilt, of this. He will be the one to decide what to do next. However, whatever happens, this incident must be kept confidential, until Mister Vanderbilt decides otherwise. You know what any rumor about a transporter malfunction could do."

"Uh, understood! I will start my system diagnosis now."

Dan initiated first his own system diagnostic, then called the right-hand man of Tasha Lenoir, Samuel Vanderbilt. He had to pass through a secretary before getting the Deputy CEO on the line.

"Samuel Vanderbilt!"

"Sir, this is Dan Coates, presently on duty at the transporter room. Miss Lenoir and three of her assistants just teleported out of the room about six minutes ago. However, they never arrived at our Paris offices, their planned destination. I just checked with both Paris and the signal relay satellite and there are no traces of them."

"WHAT?! Who knows about that?"

"Only me and the Paris transporter room operator, sir. I already told the Paris operator to keep this confidential."

"Good! I'm coming at once!"

Vanderbilt then hung up, leaving a suddenly sweating Dan to wonder what was going to happen next.

03:06 (Paris Time)

Reemergence point

Contrary to the smooth landing typical of transporter transits, where the transporter pad's anti-gravity fields cushioned any fall from a few centimeters up, the four women reemerged in solid state only to fall hard by nearly one meter, screaming with surprise and fright. Tasha's athletic constitution helped her absorb the impact of her fall on a concrete floor, while Terry Clarkson's cybernetic legs easily dampened her fall. However, Pham Ti Hien and Johanna Kruger came down quite harder, shouting with pain while ending on their bums.

"HOW! What the hell?" Said Hien before pausing and looking around her. "Hey, why isn't there any light on? It is as dark as an oven in here." Despite her own excellent vision, Tasha also could not see anything in the darkness surrounding her.

"I can't see a thing either. Terry, what can you see?" Her bodyguard, whose right cybernetic eye contained an array of multi-spectral visual sensors, answered her quickly enough.

"I can see nothing in the normal visual and low light range, while I have weak thermal and infrared signatures around me. However, my Lidar¹ system tells me that we are in a sort of workshop, with numerous machine tools and various tables and benches around us. Johanna actually landed on top of a large work bench. I wouldn't move too quickly if I were you, Johanna: one step and you will fall off you bench."

"Uh, right! I am going to slide on my bum until I can get off that bench. Could you find the controls for the local lighting system, Terry? I can't see dick!"

"Sure! Just give me a moment."

As her bodyguard went off in search of a light switch, Tasha started furiously thinking about what could have happened. It was obvious that their transporter transit had gone somewhat wrong. Fortunately, it had apparently not ended in a tragic way and could still prove to be only a minor glitch in the spatial coordinates programming of the transporter system. Still, this was very worrying to her.

"Are you girls alright? Check yourselves at once!"

Tasha did so as well, patting herself down. To her relief, she found nothing wrong with her body and even found out her travel suitcase, which was floating off the ground and close to her.

¹ Lidar : Laser radar. A radar-like sensor using laser beams instead of radar electro-magnetic waves.

"I'm okay, except for a hurt bum." Said Hien, followed soon by Johanna.

"I am okay as well. I am now off that bench and am standing on a concrete floor."

"All my systems are functional." Announced Terry. "I think that I just found a sort of light switch on a wall, near a wooden door. Hold on!"

To the women's collective relief, a ceiling light suddenly came on, lighting up part of a large room made of wood planks and beams. However, the more Tasha looked at the machine tools and other objects around her, the more unsettled she became.

"What are these things? Everything here looks so...primitive. And that ceiling light: it is an incandescent bulb of the sort I saw only in history books. Am I right about that, Johanna?"

"Quite! Incandescent light bulbs were phased out worldwide centuries ago. Maybe we ended up in some sort of museum. I see what looks like parts of a very primitive plane in a corner over there."

All four women walked to the object noted by Johanna and stared at it with a mix of incredulity and skepticism.

"This is supposed to be an airplane?" Said Hien. "It is made of wood and canvas and I can't see a single electronic or even electrical part! What can you say about it, Johanna?"

Johanna Kruger, the chief design engineer for the aeronautics and astronautics departments of the Lenoir Industries, examined critically the assembly of wood and canvas parts for a long minute before answering the young executive secretary.

"Well, if this is meant to be a historical reproduction for an aeronautical museum, then it is being done the right way, using only ancient tools and methods of fabrication. The welds on this, uh, 'aircraft' steel tube framing are quite sloppy and were obviously done manually, rather than by an industrial robot."

"What epoch of aircraft-making would this replica represent, Johanna?" Asked Tasha, making the engineer think for a moment.

"The very first decades of human flight, I would say, which would mean the early years of the 20th Century. You will excuse me if I can't say more: this is very ancient history for me and I was quite busy dealing with modern technology."

"Which was the job you were being paid for, Johanna." Said Tasha in a soft tone. "Let's explore the rest of this workshop, to see if we find some clue of where we are, then we will go see what is outside. Terry, you go with Hien towards that side of the

workshop while I will go with Johanna in the opposite direction. Call me at once if you find anything of interest. We will leave our suitcases here for the moment.”

Seeing a door that seemed to lead inside an office adjacent to the workshop, Tasha elected to go see what was in that office, hoping to find some computer or notepad that could answer her questions. Finding and activating a light switch next to the internal frame of the door, Tasha saw only more primitive furniture, with not a single computer or electronic device in sight.

“Tasha...”

The strangled tone of Johanna’s voice made Tasha turn around in a flash while adopting a combat stance, ready for anything. She then saw that they were still alone in the office, while Johanna was frozen like a statue while fixing a paper calendar hooked to a wall near a work desk. A poor quality black and white picture on the calendar showed a rather plump woman dressed in what she thought to be ridiculous-looking underwear.

“What is it, Johanna?”

“That calendar: it is showing the month of May...of the year 1912.”

At first, Tasha’s brain refused to register that information. Walking quickly to Johanna and leafing through the calendar’s pages, Tasha found that they were all about the months of the year 1912. Furthermore, there were a number of hand-written annotations with an old-fashioned lead pencil on the pages of the calendar, annotations that she took time to read. Everything was in a dated kind of French that she found laborious to decipher, despite the fact that she was fluent in the French spoken in France.

“These words are in a weird kind of French. They are quite hard to read.”

“Tasha, I think that I know where we are, or rather when we are.”

Tasha snapped her head to stare at Johanna, whose face was now as pale as a sheet.

“When we are? What do you mean, Johanna?”

“That...that we may be in Paris, but in the year 1912, more than seven centuries before our time. It would explain all that we saw to date. All this is too detailed to be just a museum recreation.”

Deeply shocked at first by these words, the quantum physics scientist in her then made her consider the merits of Johanna’s stunning statement.

“Well, my transporter system certainly deals with matter-energy conversion and channelization through sub-space, which has a time component in it. However, I can’t

see anything that could have affected a transporter beam in a way that would send it through the past.”

“What if exactly that just happened to us, Tasha? We...”

Johanna’s eyes then opened wide, horror in them.

“MY SON! MY HUSBAND! THIS COULD MEAN THAT I AM NOW SEPARATED FOR GOOD FROM THEM!”

Tasha hurried to Johanna as the chief engineer broke down in near-hysterical crying, taking her gently in her arms and speaking softly to her to console her.

“Don’t worry, Johanna: we will find soon enough where we are. Then, we will find a way home, I promise you.”

Concentrating her thoughts, Tasha then mentally activated the multi-channel communications device implanted under the base of her skull, sending a radio message to Terry and Hien.

“Girls, I will need you to join me and Johanna in the side office we found, quickly! We found something that could be possibly quite disturbing.”

“On our way, Tasha.” Answered her bodyguard. “We also found something that you should see and will bring it along with us.”

Tasha was still holding a sobbing Johanna when Terry and Hien entered the office a minute later. Tasha hurried to explain to them what had happened, then showed them the wall calendar. Terry’s face was hard when she looked back at Tasha while handing her some kind of thin rectangular cardboard piece full of small holes and with hand-written annotations on it.

“This actually jives with what we found at the other end of this workshop, near the main entrance. We found some kind of primitive mechanical clock linked to a punching machine, while a rack hooked to the wall near the clock was full of cardboard cards like this one, with each card bearing the name of a different man. I believe that the whole thing is meant to be some kind of personnel presence-registering system, used for pay accounting purposes. As you must know, such systems disappeared centuries before our time. You will also note that this card, like the other card, bears writing and name initials, with the names being different for each card. If this is only some kind of setup meant to play with our minds, then it is a very convincing setup.”

Tasha took the card and examined it while her mind went into overdrive. Everything that Terry had said made logical sense, even if she didn’t like what the final conclusion of all

this meant for all four of them. Terry suddenly turned around, tensing up, looking through the glass window in the wall separating the office from the workshop.

"Somebody is coming! A man in his forties or fifties, alone."

"Don't pull out a gun...yet! Let's see what he will say. If he asks, we are American travelers who got lost at night."

All four women then concentrated their attention on the approaching man, who wore well worn clothes of outdated cut and fashion. He also wore a rather large and spectacular moustache that would be found to be rather ridiculous-looking in Manhattan.

"Everybody, stay calm and let me do the talking." Said Tasha just before the man threw open the door of the office and looked at the four women with apparent indignation and outrage. The words that he spoke in a very quaint French were hard to understand as he nearly shouted at the women.

"WHAT ARE YOU WOMEN DOING HERE? THIS IS A PRIVATE PROPERTY!" The man then hesitated as he examined the women and their strange clothes and general appearances. Hien's hair, dyed a varying magenta-pink color, made him frown.

"Who the hell are you? You look like circus people!"

"A what?" Couldn't help ask Tasha in her fluent modern French, confused. Her confusion only made the man look more suspiciously at her and her companions.

"You pretend not to know what circus people are? Where are you from, then?"

"We are American travelers. I am afraid that we got quite lost."

The man, who had all the manners of some night security guard, complete with a short truncheon suspended to his leather belt, crossed his arms, apparently amused by Tasha's answer.

"Americans, hey? I knew that Americans were strange, but not that strange. Your accent is certainly thick enough to cut with a knife. However, you will still have to leave, quickly, before I call the police."

"Could you at least tell us where we are, mister?" Pleaded Tasha.

"I suppose that I can at least do that for you, miss: you are in the aircraft workshop of the famous aviator, Monsieur Louis Blériot, on the Avenue de la Porte de Sèvres, in Issy-les-Moulineaux."

"Louis Blériot? I am afraid that his name doesn't ring a bell to me."

The man somehow appeared offended by her reply and nearly glared at her.

“You never heard about Louis Blériot? But, he was the first man to fly across the English Channel, three years ago! How could you not have heard about him? Well, that’s not important now. GET OUT, BEFORE I CALL THE POLICE!”

Tasha was about to try to calm the man down when Hien pulled on the left sleeve of her long coat to attract her attention, then whispered in Americanish in her ear.

“I just made a quick data search for the name Louis Blériot: he is one of the most prominent pioneers of early aviation at the start of the 20th Century and was a rich businessman, on top of being an aviator. Maybe he could help us, if we could get to speak with him.”

“Hum, not a bad idea, actually. It certainly beats having to walk around in the dark in an unknown place.”

Tasha then looked back at the night guardian, smiling to him and speaking softly in her modern French.

“Maybe there could be something else you could do to help us, mister. I believe that, if we could speak with Monsieur Blériot, we could make a deal that could interest him. As you can see from our clothes and jewels, we are not exactly paupers and we certainly didn’t come here to steal anything. If you could call him and inform him that I would like to talk with him, I am sure that we could defuse this situation in a gentlemanly manner.”

Allying gesture with word, Tasha briefly searched inside the belt purse she wore at her waist, under her coat, extracting from it a gold coin that was a standard currency in the U.S.N.A. and throwing it to the man, who caught it in midair before examining it with disbelief.

“Gold? But, this must be worth at least fifty francs!”

“If it’s not enough, I have plenty more such coins with me, mister. So, could you please go call Mister Blériot and tell him that Miss Tasha Lenoir would like to speak with him?”

“This early in the morning? It is only three thirty! Monsieur Blériot would fire me if I disturbed his sleep at such a hour.”

Tasha couldn’t help repress a sigh of frustration then. However, the man was right about waking his employer at such an early hour, only to tell him what would surely sound to him like some farfetched story.

“Alright then! You said that this is his aircraft workshop. I suppose that he visits it often?”

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