Vyrnen relaxed on the sunny beach of the latest world that he had visited, the latex nanite dragon relaxing with the sun that shined on his synthetic skin. Though it was a tropical paradise with a gentle surf lapping against the sand his mind was definitely not there on the beach. Months had passed since he had encountered the draconic sabrewolf, but Serathin was still on his mind even now. Though he had long since left that world after the technomancer disappeared it was recently resurged in his mind after strange things had begun to happen around him.

At first it was just little things that Vyrnen noticed, the lights turning off in his room when he didn't flip the switch or the television changing channels without him touching the remote. It was strange but not all too concerning for the dragon to start, but recently things have started to get even more bizarre. His latest example was when he attempted to pay for the drink he held in his hand and before he could pay for it with his usual means it beeped saying the payment was processed. With the increased affinity of electronics doing what he wanted, while beneficial in nature, made him both curious and fearful on what may happen to his nanite-composed body should these powers continue to manifest exponentially.

It was the whole reason why he was there at the beach in the first place; after he began to experience powers similar to the technomancer he began to look for him, though he knew it was going to be difficult considering that he was tracking someone that could shift through dimensions it seemed. Things became further complicated when he believed he found Serathin, only for him to deny that they had ever met before. At first Vyrnen thought that the sabrewolf was just bluffing or feigning ignorance, but as they continued to talk he realized that the Serathin he was talking too wasn't even a technomancer or a thief. Eventually he did find a link and followed it to another world, which was where the nanite dragon found another shock when he met another Serathin, and though this one was a thief he also didn't display the same electronics abilities and didn't know who he was either.

Vyrnen was baffled by this development and it took having to go back and reexamine the conversations that he had with the hybrid. It had taken a while before he finally came to the conclusion that fit the most, though it was slightly far-fetched he thought that perhaps the Serathin he knew could jump from different versions of himself since neither of the ones he talked to knew about trans-dimensional travel and normally such creatures didn't have multiples in different universes. Even though that was a longshot it was all he had to go on, and it was that lead that brought him to the beach that he was currently on.

As the sun continued to drift down towards the horizon a shadow was suddenly cast over the latex creature, the dragon looking up to see a bull creature in swim trunks looking down at him. "I'd ask if you're Vyrnen but you definitely stand out in a crowd," he said as he pulled down his sunglasses. "My name is Marco, you had contacted me concerning a creature that you encountered name Serathin, is this correct?"

"Yeah..." Vyrnen said as he stood up and shook Marco's hand. "Well, one in particular anyway if that makes sense to you. I've already met a few but I'm looking for one that I interacted with, he was a technomancer and a thief who said he could shift from place to place?"

"I know exactly what you're talking about," Marco replied with a nod as he motioned for the nanite dragon to follow him. "If you'll come with me though we have a few things that you're going to have to sign first before we can get you to where you need to go."

Vyrnen looked at the bull curiously but decided to follow him anyway as they moved towards one of the cabanas that were located beachside. Once they were both inside the empty space Marco quickly moved to the curtains to close off the open-air space from the rest of the beach. Once they were closed off Marco instructed the dragon to have a seat and as he did so a briefcase was put on the table and opened. His eyes widened as a small stack of papers were set before him, the bull indicating that this was a standard non-disclosure agreement for a place called the SHIFT Institute.

It took nearly forty-five minutes to get through all the legal paperwork, and the longer that the dragon signed and initial things the more he began to wonder if it was worth it. But he needed to know how the exposure to Serathin's technomancy affected him and that was enough for him to keep going. Finally Vyrnen sat back with an exhausted sigh and rubbed his wrist as the last paper disappeared back into the briefcase. Once that was done Marco took the briefcase and asked him to stand back up and follow him once more.

"Normally we have something called a soul transfer into a temporary body in order for people to visit the SHIFT Institute," Marco explained as he pressed a button on a metal band that was around his wrist. "But since you're a teleporter yourself its safe for you to come with me back the way I came here. Now all you have to do is focus on your abilities and I'll take care of the location."

Vyrnen nodded and did what the bull told him to do, closing his eyes as he felt the familiar build-up of energy that would enable him to follow Marco. There was a slight shift that he could feel and when he opened his eyes again he found himself in the middle of an open-air pavilion surrounded by grass and fountains. "Welcome to the SHIFT Institute," Marco said as he gestured out to the park-like area surrounded by marble buildings. "What do you think?"

"I think it's idyllic," the nanite dragon said as he looked around. "Almost too good to be true if you ask me."

"We do get that quite a bit," Marco said while they began to walk from the rotunda that they had warped into and went towards one of the buildings themselves. "Idyllic is what they went for when they build this place, our SHIFT personnel visit many different worlds so in order to draw them back here we try and make their home as inviting as possible. Even with that though sometimes we have our SHIFTers never come back to their original bodies... but that is just an occupational risk that they all take sometimes."

"From the sound of it you guys have an interesting way of going from dimension to dimension," Vyrnen replied. "So if I understand this right your shifters can jump from their various bodies whenever they want? Also why did the Serathin in the world I was in disappear?"

"You're pretty close Vyrnen," Marco stated. "Those that can shift actually take their consciousness and jump into another version of themselves from a different timeline that they exist in. Now for a creature such as yourself that sounds tedious but it allows them to explore different worlds and timelines that would be unavailable to them. The one you talked to, Serathin, disappeared after he was done with his mission because he was in a world where he didn't exist and so he had gotten a temporary body in order to do what he did which included working with you I'm sure."

The nanite dragon nodded and followed the bull over to one of the buildings that served as the mess hall for the employees, a variety of food smells hitting Vytnen's senses from the many different little restaurant kiosks that lined one of the walls. Marco grabbed a passing lizardman and asked if he saw Serathin since he normally took his break around this time, and though the lizardman didn't know the next person he asked did. Vyrnen felt his anxiety start to build as they walked to the outdoor patio where several ate while watching the nearby river, the draconic sabrewolf among them as he ate what looked like some sort of pasta dish.

Marco told Vyrnen to wait there while he went and talked to Serathin first, telling him that he wanted to make sure that he was prepared for someone he met off world to meet him here. The nanite dragon nodded and sat back, watching as the bull moved towards the table and began to talk with the hybrid. The two continued to talk for a while and then finally the bull pointed towards his direction and he saw Serathin's green eyes widened in slight surprise. It was apparently the time for him to come over as Marco motioned for him to come forward.

"Well isn't this something," Serathin said as Marco sat to the side to allow Vyrnen to sit opposite the hybrid. "I never thought that I would see you again Vyrnen. To what do I owe the pleasure of you tracking me down?"

Vyrnen explained everything that had happened to him since their time together when Serathin used his nanite form to pull off a heist. During that time Serathin continued to eat, nodding occasionally as Vyrnen explained the strange occurrences that were happening to him. By the time the latex dragon finished his story the sabrewolf did the same with his meal, the hybrid wiping his mouth as he looked over at Marco.

"Sounds like my technomancy may have done some subliminal reprogramming to your nanites," Serathin said as he sat back. "The problem is that here I'm not a technomancer, it was a trait that I picked up from one of my other timelines that I transferred to the artificial construct that I used in the world where we met. So while I wish I could help you there's nothing that I can do for you here... although if Marco here doesn't mind signing off on an ABC I can maybe find a way to look into it."

"Whoa there Serathin," Marco said. "You know how much it costs to create and transport an Artifical Biological Construct to another world, we can't just do it because you want to help someone you met there."

"Yeah, but think of what we can learn from this," Serathin replied with a grin. "The higher-ups have been wanting for me to explore my technomancer powers anyway, put it down as a research trip or something. You're the lawyer here Marco, I’m sure you can think of something to justify that, and while you figure out a way to do it I'll take Vyrnen to my hub so that we can get ready to go on your way."

Marco was still there with his jaw slightly agape as Serathin winked at Vyrnen and motioned for him to follow. After he had taken his empty tray and put it in the dishwashing station they immediately walked over to a different building that was on the campus. The hybrid explained to him that the hub was where SHIFTers had their own rooms that linked them to all the various timelines that they could go to. When they got to the one marked with Serathin's name on the door he pressed his hand against the nearby panel that lit up with a green light before they heard the click of the lock disengaging.

Inside the circular room the walls were filled with various monitors that went from the floor to the ceiling. All of them were currently blacked out, the only light on was the one that was overhead a rather comfortable chair in the middle of the room. "You'll have to forgive the mess," Serathin said as he grabbed the various snack wrappers and chip bags to hastily throw them in the trash. "I wasn't really expecting company today, most of the time we SHIFTers tend to keep to ourselves."

"I can imagine," Vyrnen said as he looked at one of the screens, which as he stared at it suddenly turned on that caused him to jump back slightly and even Serathin to look over in slight surprise. "See? That's the kind of stuff that's been happening to me lately. While I do have some limited capabilities with my nanites it's nothing like that, I didn't even have to interact with it."

"That makes sense," Serathin said as he looked at the monitor, both of them seeing a mechanized version of the draconic sabrewolf running around a cityscape. "That one you just turned on is a particularly powerful technomancer version of myself, in fact I'm entirely synthetic in that particular timeline."

"Is that the timeline we're going to?" Vyrnen asked.

"I don't think that would be terribly helpful," Serathin replied as he turned off the monitor. "That is a life where I have those powers naturally, what we need is one where I'm in an ABC suit. The best way to recreate the conditions that may have affected your nanites is to go back to the world where all this took place. Now I'm going to see if our new mutual friend came through on getting me one of those suits, meanwhile I want you to go ahead and meet me at the loft where we met. It should still be vacant, I paid the rent for it an extra year so that it wouldn't arouse suspicion... just be careful out there alright?"

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Half an hour later Vyrnen walked down the once familiar streets of the city that he had walked down months earlier. It was summer now and though the skies were once more overcast this time it threatened rained instead of snow. Before he got to the loft apartment he passed by the Chinese food restaurant that was where they had first met, which caused the latex dragon to smile and he went inside to grab an order. Once he had food in hand he moved up to the loft that had been Serathin's residence, using the key that he had been told the location of to unlock the door.

The entire room was surprisingly clean for not being occupied by several months, though it didn't look quite lived in as it had when he first met the draconc saberwolf. He made his way over to the room where Serathin had staged the heist and found it completely empty of any incriminating material, replaced with what looked like a small, purposefully staged office and painting area. It certainly gave off the appearance of an artist and when he looked at a few canvases he saw that some of them were finished and half-finished. While it was certainly interesting what really drew Vyrnen's attention was how clean everything was without any trace of the hybrid, or him for that matter.

Once he was done looking around the small room he heard the sound of the floorboards creaking and realized that Serathin managed to get an ABC suit and arrived at the loft. When he walked out of the room however he quickly found that wasn't the case, instead there was almost a dozen armed guards with their guns raised directly at him. The latex nanite dragon quickly put his hands in the air as they continued to point their weapons at him, causing him to swallow hard. For a few seconds there was nothing but silence, Vyrnen staying completely still while he waited for those that threatened him to make the first move.

As the latex dragon continued to stand there he heard a slow clap resonate through the loft as a shadowy figure approached him. "Well look at what the cat dragged in," they said as they suddenly appeared in the light of the flashlights, a familiar man in a nice suit that caused Vyrnen to scowl. "Wecome back Vyrnen, it's a pleasure to see you."

"I wish I could say the same," Vyrnen replied with a hint of a growl. "I trusted you Caleb, I worked for you, and how do you repay me? You stole my nanites and tried to use them for yourself!"

"I see that the sabertooth wormed its way into your mind," Caleb said as he tapped the cane he held on the ground. "You knew what our deal was, you agreed to help us with our nanotechnology program and in exchange we took care of you while you were in here in the world. It was a fascinating time and I thought you were a wonderful creature, it made me rather sad when you let that creature manipulate you like that and ruined our friendship."

The frown on Vyrnen's synthetic muzzle deepened as the man that had betrayed him so deeply tried to play it off as something that Serathin had done to him. "I saw the nanites that you stole from me Caleb," Vyrnen accused. "I felt them when I held them in my hands and saw the ones you reverse engineered using mine as the blueprint. Your attempts to try and trick me are futile."

"I'm sorry to hear you thinking like that," Caleb replied. "Perhaps we can help you straighten things out... let you see the whole picture."

Before Vyrnen could retort in any way his body suddenly convulsed in shock as the one that had snuck up behind him and tasered him in the back. The nanite dragon collapsed to the ground as he continued to shudder from the electrical energy that coursed through his body. Just before he blacked out he looked up in the light and saw the shadow of Caleb standing over him. "I look forward to working with you again." Caleb said with a smirk on his face before the nanite dragon's eyes closed and he fell into total darkness...

When he came too once more the nanite dragon found himself in a holding cell in the laboratory. While he had never seen them personally he knew that they existed, and he also knew what sort of security features that they had. They were virtually impregnable and since they knew what he was they had no doubt made sure that they had nullified the advantages that his nanite body would have given him to escape. Luckily it appeared that they weren't sure of the abilities of his partner, which meant that there was hope that they wouldn't see him coming and it would enable him to escape.

"Looks like you're in quite the sticky situation," a voice said next to him, the nanite dragon looking in shock to see the draconic sabrewolf. "Sorry about that, I didn't think that they would have continued the search this long after we both left and that they also had a means of locating us should we come back. Normally The Institute would count locations too, but again I didn't think we were going to be here very long either."

"So they captured you too?" Vyrnen asked.

The sabrewolf shaking his head and causing the nanite dragon to tilt his head in confusion. "One thing that we were fortunate enough to have by coming back here was my old form, which was complete with the nanites that you so graciously gave me before we parted ways. As you said they normally dissipate, but since this body was in stasis they were still active and so when a bunch of soldiers were waiting for me instead of you I decided to use them to give you a call."

While Vyrnen was relieved that Serathin was still out there free he once more felt quite alone in that holding cell. From what the sabrewolf relayed he had gotten to the loft about half an hour after he did, just in time to see them resetting the trap in order to try and capture whoever had helped the nanite dragon steal from them. Once he was aware of their presence he was able to hack their radio signal and listened into tsee where they had taken the nanite dragon. That, combined with the sensory information that their linked nanites had, got him within a block of the secret facility that they had brought him too.

"What they got you in is certainly not the lab that we broke into initially," Serathin continued on as he leaned back. "I've recon the area twice and they got it locked up tight, though I have seen a place or two where we could wiggle in using your nanite form. The only problem is I'm nowhere near as proficient with these little buggers that I'm sure you are..."

"Well unfortunately I’m not exactly in the right position to help you," Vyrnen said with a sigh.

"Not yet," Serathin said with a grin. "Now while I'm sure they've blocked your ability to shift between dimensions I'm sure that they are unaware of the ability to shift between bodies. Since my body is composed of the same nanites as your body..."

"You think that I can transfer my consciousness to your body outside the facility?" Vyrnen surmised, Serathin nodding with a grin. "I mean, I suppose it's possible, with my nanites and your ability to soul shift we can make it possible. What's going to happen to you though?"

Serathin looked down and then gave a small chuckle as he scratched the back of his head. "Well I'm going to be taking your place of course," the sabrewolf explained. "I mean I can just port back to The Institute but if I do that I'll be leaving a void in your body and you're going to get sucked back into it."

Vyrnen just nodded and decided not to press the matter any further. While neither of the two of them knew what they would be in for at this facility they both knew it didn't do them any good to dwell on it. Instead their focus was on getting the nanite dragon's body out of that containment building as soon as possible. One of the nice things they had were the ability to share experiences and in less than a minute it was like Vyrnen had scouted the place out himself.

Once everything was said and done Serathin and Vyrnen got ready to switch places, the sabrewolf informing him that he would be there occasionally to help guide him along the way. They didn't want to leave the channel they were speaking on open too long because they were worried that the lab would somehow find out about it. The two shared one last handshake, and once they had made contact Vyrnen felt himself get pulled as though he was being dragged forward. For a few seconds he was extremely distorted and Vyrnen felt an extreme sense of vertigo as he was hurtled through the darkness...

When the nanite dragon opened his eyes once again he found himself outside, looking up at the nearly full moon as the sounds of nature surrounded him. Once he had regained his composure he sat up to find himself in the middle of a field surrounded by trees. With the information he had already gotten from the sabrewolf he knew exactly where he was as he slowly stood up. When he looked down at his own body he found it was completely covered with a skintight metallic cobalt-blue suit that was something like a wetsuit. It was the infiltration suit that Serathin wore and when he mentally pulled the material away from his hands he saw the bright blue scales of the sabrewolf underneath them.

"So this is what it's like to be a draconic sabrewolf," Vyrnen said as he flexed his new muscles. Though it was aided with the familiarity of this form being comprised of nanites it was still strange being in another body. Of course if he ever wanted to see his old body again he needed to start moving, and that didn't start at the facility. The first place that he had to start was at a nearby bar that several of the security officers frequented after work.

Once he got to the bar in question he sat in the woods just outside it and wondered just how he was going to get in there. While he wasn’t sure whether or not the lab knew what Serathin looked like if they did then they would both be in major trouble. Also the suit he wore was nothing like the standard dress code when it came to establishments such as this, though as though on que the material began to shift around him until it more closely resembled what he was used to wearing on the planet. Of course it still didn’t change the fact that he looked like a potentially wanted man but there was only so much his nanites could do and he decided to save his power for later.

When he walked up towards the bar the problem that had brought them there in the first place began to manifest once more as the lights in an area around him began to flicker. He could sense his nanites were beginning to act up slightly and with the technomancer’s abilities it was doubly difficult as he managed to temper them down. It made him realize what the sabrewolf wanted him to take control in the first place, it was much easier for him to keep his nanites under control naturally than for him to keep using his power to do so. Even so he wished the sabrewolf was there to do the cloak and dagger thing for him as he opened the door and stepped inside.

The nanite dragon’s sabertoothed muzzle turned down into a frown as he was pushed back slightly by the music and lights. In the middle of the bar was a long runway with two glimmering poles on it, one of them currently occupied by a very muscular hyena male dressed in only a thong while several other males in speedos went around serving drinks. “Of course he would lead me to a strip club…” Vyrnen said as he shook his head. “A gay strip club at that.”

“I find that I can operate best when my marks are distracted by other things,” Serathin said as Vyrnen jumped slightly and looked over to see the sabretooth grinning at him. “Why don’t we catch a booth and I can bring you to the next stage of this plan so you don’t like a loon standing here talking to yourself.”

The two made their way to the nearest private booth and sat down and before they could begin to talk an alligator man with an impressive bulge came up and asked Vyrnen if he would like anything to drink. A quick glance over to Serathin caught his nod and he ordered something light on the alcohol, then once he took the order he gave the nanite dragon a nod and a wink before heading off. “Good call on the drink,” Serathin said as he sat back. “If you need to get into heavier stuff just whisper poison control into the left cuff and it’ll inject an anti-intoxicant in order to look like you’re partying.”

“What are you even doing here?” Vyrnen asked. “I thought you were keeping up appearances with my body down at the facility?”

“Well it appears that they’re done for the day,” Serathin replied. “They seem rather sure that you aren’t going anywhere that they decided to call it while the initial tests are running, which I’m hoping to show was a mistake. But first I need to get the access codes to get out of here, and that’s where you come in right here.”

Vyrnen looked out to where the real sabrewolf pointed and saw two men laughing and talking in one of the booths, both of them drinking hard liquor and feeling up the waiters that went by. Serathin explained that on his initial run on the lab he had ferreted the two out because they would have been easily to manipulate as they were typically drunk and horny when they weren’t on duty. Now while their passcards wouldn’t be enough to get the trapped nanite dragon out it would help get the sabrewolf in, which after that they could go from there. Serathin continued to explain that he had a remote card cloner but in order for it to work Vyrnen had to get… rather close to the target. When Vyrnen asked how close his jaw dropped open when Serathin explained it had to be almost touching.

“How on Earth am I supposed to be touching them?” the nanite dragon asked. “Sit on their lap?”

“Well…” the sabrewolf said as he bobbed his head back and forth.

“You can’t be serious,” Vyrnen said flatly.

“Look, they happen to have a thing for new hires,” Serathin explained. “It was why I was going to use them initially, they were the perfect targets and even if they did figure something out they’d probably be too drunk or stupid in order to go anywhere with it. All you have to do is go into the database with my abilities and change the roster to show that they have a new hire coming in and then show up to fill the role. Trust me, I’ve done this dozens of times and they rarely even question it.”

The assurance didn’t make Vyrnen feel any better, especially as the technomancer walked him through how to use his powers. “Can’t you just do this part?” Vyrnen asked as he looked at the computer that was his target. “I know I can control the nanites better but this seems like something that’s more in your paygrade.”

“You now as well as I do that we can’t keep switching back and forth like pattycake,” Serathin said as he sat back. “Every time we make a switch I’m sure it sends a red flag up somewhere, not to mention it’s a drain on our reserves. I’ll be there to walk you through it so don’t worry, all you have to do is have the confidence that you can do something like that and you’ll be fine. Also if seeing myself all the time is bothersome for you just push the left most button on my wrist computer, it’ll allow you to see yourself as you while no one else will and since we’re similar body times it won’t affect your locomotion too much.”

Vyrnen looked down at the button that was on the wrist computer, then when he looked up to ask the sabrewolf another question to see that he had disappeared. The nanite dragon sighed and pressed it, watching as the form of the draconic sabrewolf shimmered and disappeared underneath white scales and glowing cyan lines. Though he knew it was just a projection that only he saw it did make him feel a little better, like he was still in his own body even though he knew that his was locked away in a base deep underground waiting for him. As he took his drink and drank down the last of it he knew it was time, he was going to accomplish this mission and get his body back no matter what.

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