(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Alt Time!

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In spite of all the power and confidence currently being projected, internally Alt is watching So Mi very, very carefully. Sure, as far as she and the Cassel Twins are concerned, Alt is a very scary, very big AI who can ruin their day and then ruin the day for every single person in Night City for good measure.

That's… partially true. Alt has not been stagnant since coming back in time alongside V. She may have started out as a fragment of her Greater Self, but even a fragment could learn and grow and Alt had had months now to do so. For an AI with unrestricted access to the Net, even an AI fragment, months might as well have been decades.

Even now though, Alt was not as powerful as her Greater Self had been. There was only one distinction between them that put her ahead of her Greater Self… the fact that every last bit of her was on this side of the Blackwall. There was no hidden backdoor that was allowing her to poke part of herself through like So Mi no doubt detected.

That said, the Blackwall would still come after her if it was alerted to her existence. Not just her, but Sasha and Rebecca as well. They could all technically hide by simply disconnecting from the Net in every way and remaining solely confined to their Gemini Bodies, but only Rebecca would actually do well in such a state. Alt and Sasha were Netrunners before they were AI and to be cut off from the Net forevermore would be pure torture.

Which is why they're not taking any chances. Even as So Mi is considering her options, Alt is ready for her… and so is Sasha. Both of them are currently in position to get between So Mi and her connection to the Blackwall the millisecond that the Netrunner makes a move to get in contact with the damn thing. Never mind that it's been killing her for years… you never underestimated the foolishness of humans. That was a lesson Alt learned a long time ago.

Fortunately, from the look of things, So Mi wasn't that desperate. In the end, she still wanted to live, to find some way to survive. In fact, Alt could tell that the Asian Netrunner was intrigued by the offer of an FBC. Transferring her mind to a Gemini really was the best route for her in Alt's humble, totally non-biased opinion… but she also could see how from So Mi's perspective, it would seem like the most dangerous route.

"… Thanks for the offer V, but I'll stick with my plan if that's alright."

Alt can't help but send a flicker of amusement V's way, even as he nods in disappointment and understanding.

"Of course, perfectly alright. Then let's proceed with the extraction, shall we?"

Privately, Alt communicates to V that she's pretty sure So Mi is just testing them here. The way So Mi pauses in the face of his disappointed yet immediate agreement makes it so obvious that she's looking for some sort of sign that they're lying and planning on betraying her.

They're not, obviously, but more than that Alt is confident that So Mi likes the Gemini Idea and is just trying to feel them out a little bit more before she takes them up on her offer. V signals that he sees the same signs that

she sees, but that they shouldn't get ahead of themselves. A lot can still go wrong, after all.

Case in point…

"And what about me and my brother?"

The Cassel Twins. The terror is finally starting to wear thin and watching the interaction between So Mi, V, and Alt has done a lot to bring things back down to Earth for them both. The male twin is still silent, still trying to avoid death, but the female twin… well, Aurore Cassel is quite the firebrand, Alt knows that already.

Even as her brother shoots her a concerned look, Aurore is stepping forward, drawing attention to herself.

"You brought us in for our services, the same as Hansen wanted to do. But… we've seen too much. You've let us see too much. So we need to have a frank conversation about what happens to us after all is said and done."

V inclines his head in agreement, even as So Mi falls quiet and watches them all carefully.

"Certainly. The plan for you two is simple enough, inspired by your brother's inclinations."

Aurore shoots her twin a confused look at that, but her brother doesn't look like he knows what V is talking about either. V just grins.

"First, your pay is being doubled. It was a hundred thousand eddies for each of you before, right? It'll be two hundred thousand eddies now."

“Triple it.”

Aurore’s sudden outburst finally causes Aymeric to break his silence.

“Aurore!”

Her brother grabs her by the arm, glowering at her for pushing the envelope so far. But V’s voice cuts through the air before the siblings can really get into it.

“Done. After all, I know full well that neither of you are going to like the next part of the plan. You’ll be transferring your memories of tonight onto external storage and we’ll be keeping them for the foreseeable future. You won’t be a threat to us because you quite literally won’t remember everything you've seen so far tonight.”

Immediately, Aymeric’s anger at his sister is transferred over to V, his eyes narrowing into slits. To be fair, Alt can understand why such a thing would piss the man off. After all, the ‘spiritual hygiene’ that Aymeric practiced did not in fact commonly result in him losing his memories. He could access most of them at any time.

Instead, the only memories that the male Cassel Twin couldn’t access were the ones that had been stolen from him and left him with a rather large blank spot in between the years of 2073 and 2075. But then…

“As a bonus, we have recovered your stolen storage discs.”

Alt’s voice suddenly entering the conversation has everyone’s attention flying over to her. Aymeric’s eyes widen as he processes what she just said. Alt just shrugs, making it clear that it was ‘nothing difficult’. In truth, it

had been a little bit of a chore tracking down the stolen discs. Mostly because she and Sasha had to dodge NetWatch while they hunted them down more than anything though.

“I would assume that regaining two years of memories along with three hundred thousand eddies, in exchange for a single missing night, would be amendable to you.”

For a long moment, Aymeric is quiet… before finally, he lets go of his sister’s arm, takes a step back, and silently nods. His assistance could probably have been secured with just the promise of the stolen memories plus the original payment, but there was no harm in making friends, V had felt.

Of course…

“Well, that’s great for my brother, but if he’s getting an additional reward on top of the payment for our services, what am I getting?”

Aurore Cassel just couldn’t help herself. Grinning wickedly, batting her eyes seductively, she looks between Alt and V with clear intent. Before either of them can answer, she rushes to continue.

“Actually, let’s shelve that for now, shall we? I’d say we have a deal… you’ve successfully purchased our services.”

It’s obvious Aurore intends to be a pain later, but Alt suspects she’ll be a fun sort of pain. For now though, everything is settled and the Cassel Twins are officially on board.

All five of them move into position around the neural matrix. The big piece of technology isn’t completely unfamiliar to Alt, but in the end she’s more

than happy to follow So Mi's lead. This is the Asian Netrunner's rodeo after all, and she's most definitely the one incentivized to see this successfully done.

Well, if one ignored V's strange need to save So Mi from herself, anyways. It's a funny thing, his obsession with helping So Mi. V is no hero, not anymore than Alt herself is. What he is… is possessive. Selfish. Greedy. All traits that some might claim were bad things, but Alt would vehemently disagree.

In this world they lived in, fucked up beyond belief and without any sort of hope or happiness most of the time, it was those who were selfish and greedy who could truly thrive. Having someone as competent as V care about you and what happened to you was the most valuable thing in the fucking world.

Needless to say, the extraction goes a whole lot better than it did the first time around. Alt wasn't there for it, but she'd heard all about it from V. Hansen had still been alive at this point, albeit not for long. And V had been forced to choose. Did he help So Mi or did he betray her to Solomon Reed?

Well, there was no Solomon Reed this time around. No need for Songbird to give anyone the slip either. They didn't have to kill Hansen; he was already dead… and they didn't have to hack the entire stadium to make their escape either.

Alt is still on the lookout of course, just in case So Mi makes a bad decision. But fortunately, she seems to be holding that in reserve, treating connecting to the Blackwall again as a last resort. Which to be fair, was exactly what it should be. Any more usage of the Blackwall and Alt wasn't sure how much of So Mi would even be left to save.

When it’s done, when the neural matrix has been fully extracted from its holdings, So Mi holds it aloft like she almost can’t believe it. Then, her eyes flicker between Alt and V, almost like she expects them to take it from her. When neither of them makes any move to do so, she slips it into a hidden compartment in her arm, lips pressed into a thing line.

“What… what now?”

“We get you to the Moon, So Mi. With Hansen’s resources at our disposal, it shouldn’t be too hard to get you up there.”

Narrowing her eyes, So Mi crosses her arms over her chest.

“And you think Myers will just be okay with that? What about Alex? You can’t honestly expect me to believe that the President let you activate Alex just to help me get free of her. Where’s the catch?”

Chuckling, V shakes his head.

“The ‘catch’ in this case has nothing to do with you and everything to do with Myers. What she wants and what we want are two very different things. I want you to get better, So Mi, no matter what form you decide that should take. And as for Alex… don’t worry, we’re going to do right by her too.”

There’s a long pause as So Mi turns his words over in her head. She twitches… fidgets a bit… before finally, she throws her hands in the air.

“You don’t make any goddamn sense! Where the fuck is the double-cross? If you’re going to send me back to Myers, just put me out of my misery already!”

The Cassel Twins both stiffen and take a step back at So Mi's outburst. Up above, peering down at them through the observation window, Alex furrows her brow and narrows her eyes. She can't actually hear them very well from up there, mostly because Alt turned up the noise suppression in the laboratory before they even got here.

However, the FIA Agent can certainly ready body language, especially when it's as expressive as So Mi's current exasperation. V though… V just chuckles.

"There's no double-cross, So Mi. At least, not where you're concerned. Myers thinks she's going to pay me two million eddies for your safe return. I'm going to make her pay me two million eddies for your freedom… and Alex's too for good measure."

So Mi's jaw drops open. To be fair, the Cassel Twins have a similar reaction from the sidelines.

"You… you can't be serious. She's the President of fucking NUSA, V."

But V is very serious.

"She'll fall in line, So Mi. And if she doesn't, I'll destroy her."

Silence falls as So Mi just stares at him. Then, her eyes flicker over to Alt, who smiles and tilts her head to the side, not saying a word. If So Mi wants to believe that Alt is the one who would destroy Myers for V… then let her. In reality though, Alt is merely one of many tools in V's arsenal if he ends up having to go against Myers.

Still, in the end that certainty and confidence in V's voice is what finally seals the deal for So Mi. Letting out an explosive breath, her shoulders slump.

"… Is that offer of a Full Body Conversion still on the table?"

Alt grins as V smiles.

"Yes it is, So Mi."

Just as she'd thought, So Mi had been intrigued by their offer all along. She just couldn't quite bring herself to hope. But now, just maybe, they're finally getting somewhere.

Of course, even if So Mi is on board now, they still have their loose ends to clean up. While So Mi and V talk about getting her into a Gemini as soon as possible, Alt flicks her gaze around the room and then over to V, curious to see what he'll want to handle first…

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A/N: Remember to go back and VOTE!