

Stripper with a System

(Chapters 15-17)

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Chapter 15 – New Recruits

Rylia tried not to fidget as she waited alongside Momo and Dr. Aova Dalisir. Dr. Dalisir was the reason for that instinct to fidget, which originated purely from original Rylia's instincts, rather than the amalgam that she'd become. Asari tended to have a culturally ingrained 'respect for your elders' mindset.

Rebellious Maidens might not do that in all cases, of course, just like rebellious human teenagers wouldn't. But they still defaulted to it with those elders whom they actually *respected*, and Dr. Dalisir was almost as much a genius as Rylia herself. Yet was also, relevant to the point, a Matron instead of a Maiden. She was *young* for a Matron, at only a 287, but she *was* still a Matron, and cultural/social instincts were not easily overcome. Despite the fact that, you know, Rylia was the other woman's *boss*, as well as technically having the Asari PhD equivalent of her own.

Thankfully, the Doctor was an easy going sort, and didn't take any issue with working for a Maiden. Something which had honestly been a bit of a problem in hiring for higher-level positions like the one Dalisir was filling. In her case, specifically, Dr. Dalisir was the head researcher for *Maiden's Mercy's*, the R&D company that they'd set up to handle their medical projects. Momo was the CEO of both companies for now, since *Maiden's Mercy* was still small and agile. But Rylia *owned* both companies, which made her the ultimate boss, since they weren't publicly traded and didn't have anything as idiotic as a Board to answer to.

Which was a bit of a problem when it came to recruiting older Asari, as it happened.

Matriarchs were right out, of course. At least for anything beyond investment. They are almost universally power brokers. The youngest are typically at least six hundred, with their own networks, investments, and goals. They were generally done with the concept of working for *someone else*. Even Matrons, however, often had *issues* with working under Maidens. For, it had to be said, admittedly good reasons. *Most* Maidens were flighty enough

that it was difficult to rely on them for the stability Matrons were looking for in life. Getting involved in some start up, just for that start up to collapse or be sold off due to the Maiden that made it getting bored with the idea, wasn't attractive to them.

That said, there *were* exceptions. Specifically with younger Matrons who were only just transitioning in mindset. *They* were often the backbone of new initiatives, as well as the bulk of mid-tier leadership in Asari companies. They were still somewhat inclined to take minor risks, while overall being more stable than a Maiden. Rylia and Momo had hired quite a few of them to fill out both companies, and Aova Dalisir was possibly the absolute best of the lot. She *wasn't* one of the precious few Asari innovators like Rylia herself, but she *was* gifted. Exactly the sort of Asari you could hand a scientific breakthrough to and expect her to be fully capable of *running with it*.

Now, if only Rylia's cultural baggage would *shut up* about wanting her to instinctively differ to the older woman. Thankfully, the majority of her that was *Hazel* could suppress that instinct. Even more thankfully, the Doctor seemed fully okay with it, and occasionally even a bit amused by the moments where Rylia's instincts overrode her actions. Better yet, she worked extremely well with Momo, apparently having dealt with a lot of races that matured faster than Asari in the past.

It made moments where there was no *action* to be taken just yet super awkward for Rylia, though. Thankfully, they'd only been waiting a few minutes when Momo nodded and keyed her intercom.

"You can send Ms. Lawson in now, Ava."

Ava was the secretary that Momo had taken to using the most often, a Maiden who was about Rylia's age and a fair bit steadier than the average. A bit of a nerd, honestly, who'd signed a 20-year indenture contract with *Erotic Delights* as the most 'exciting' new company on Nevos. Not every Maiden became a stripper or merc. The more 'average' Maiden tended to just look for the most 'interesting' job they could find.

Working for a brand-new sex toy manufacturer that was making super cool new toys? Who gave copies of such toys (which were still hard to get!) as a signing bonus?! Such an opportunity fit the concept of 'interesting' nicely. Which, combined with how generous Rylia had made her employment packages, meant they were at least getting the absolute cream of the Maiden indenture pool. In Ava's particular case, the fact she was from a 'super boring' mining world, and Nevos was mostly a *resort* planet with a lot of fun things to explore? That had just made the choice all the easier for the girl.

As for why they'd been waiting silently several minutes past the specific time of Miranda's interview? Well, that was apparently just a *thing*, according to Momo. Something

about establishing dynamics without making a *big* deal out of making Miranda wait. The subtleties of it were frankly beyond Rylia. Particularly given that Miranda had actually been on Nevos for two weeks already.

They *hadn't* kept her waiting that long, thankfully. They'd had a brief holo-only meeting with her when she'd first arrived, explaining their chosen version of 'why we are helping you' and setting the stage for *this* meeting. Miranda Lawson and her sister were going to be helped one way or another, but they'd given Miranda two weeks to 'figure out how to convince us we should hire you as more than an office worker.'

Effectively, they'd told her outright that they'd hide her from her father and provide her *basic* employment sufficient to provide for herself and her sister. Purely to satisfy 'Miss Yaoyorozu's grudge against her father and Cerberus.' But they'd also informed her that, if she wanted to be *more* than a basic office drone, she needed to sell them on the idea. Frankly, Miranda wasn't the type to accept less, and they were expecting her to pull this off, but didn't know quite how she'd go about it.

The entire point was that, doing it *this way*, should make Miranda more likely to believe there wasn't some trick or trap here. She was likely going to be paranoid until she got to know them. Understandably so, given the situation she'd escape from...and *technically* kidnapped her sister from as well. The fact that a random *Asari* company had reached out to help, even if it was a human *within* that company that was the face of the offer, wasn't likely to help the situation. Nor was the fact that the primary company under their umbrella was in the *sex industry*. Given that Miranda was barely eighteen and '*created*' to be '*perfect*,' it would have been weirder if she *wasn't* a little suspicious.

Just half a minute after Momo's use of the intercom, the door opened and a young Miranda Lawson came through.

She was just as gorgeous in person as Rylia had expected, even if not *quite* to the level of the femme fatale that she might still become in a decade or so. There were still signs of youth present in her at eighteen. A little more roundness to her face that hadn't quite faded away into maturity yet, and a little less 'plushness' to certain other parts of her body. She also didn't have the gravitas of her screen counterpart just yet. She was doing a solid job of *projecting* confidence, but Rylia was good enough at reading people to spot nervousness and a bit of stress. Understandable, given that *this* Miranda Lawson was just barely a legal adult had recently been on the run, taking care of her younger sister in far from ideal circumstances.

Momo took the lead, as the CEO present.

“Ms. Lawson, a pleasure to meet you at last. I’m Momo Yaoyorozu, CEO of both *Erotic Delights* and *Maiden’s Mercy*. With me today are Dr. Rylia T’naai, the owner and Chief Engineer/Scientist of both companies, and Dr. Aova Dalisir, the head of R & D for *Maiden’s Mercy*. Please, take a seat.”

Miranda seemed *relieved* that she was offered a seat. Yeah, her dad seemed like the dickish type of businessman that might deliberately not even have more chairs in his C-suite, so that people had to stand while he relaxed. Neither Momo nor Rylia believed in that sort of thing. In fact, *this* C-suite was an Asari design. It *did* have a nice, imposing ‘I’m a VIP’ desk...but it *also* had a side area with what amounted to a conversation nook with high-end leather seats, holoprojector, and wet bar. Which is where she, Momo, and Dr. Dalisir were seated.

Asari were *very* social. That couldn’t be emphasized enough. The design was meant to allow visitors to the office to socialize over drinks while talking business. Normally, it would be used more for those who were at the same ‘social level’ as the hosting Asari, which Miranda certainly wasn’t. In this case, it simply made a better fit for the fact there were *three* people interviewing Miranda. She looked *slightly* lost about the arrangement, but took a seat across from them at Momo’s gesture.

“Now, when I spoke to you briefly before, we covered my reasons for offering you a position. Rest assured, the good Doctors don’t need to know that side of things. All they are here for is for your promised opportunity to pitch yourself to their expertise. Convince them you’ll be a good investment, as it were, and you might be granted a serious research position instead of a middling office job.”

Miranda nodded at that, just a tiny bit jerkily, and took a subtle deep breath to brace herself before speaking.

“Thank you for the opportunity. I believe I have something to offer for such a research position. Technically, for either company, though I would personally prefer to work on Medical Research for Maiden’s Mercy. It is somewhat more...in line with what I was studying for.”

Momo nodded, smiling pleasantly.

“Yes. We have all seen your transcript, of course. Your education has been *exceptional* for your age. Which is part of why we are giving you this opportunity in the first place. Now, impress us if you can. Feel free to use the holo-terminal if you need to show any files.”

Miranda would do her absolute best to pitch herself for the next forty-five minutes. As half-expected, she succeed wildly enough that Dr. Dalisir ended up offering her a position as her own personal Research Assistant. Somehow, despite how little information Miranda had possessed to work with, she'd come up with *several* possible uses for the Nerve Repair and Manipulation technology Dr. Dalisir was primarily working with. At least one of which *hadn't* occurred to Dr. Dalisir's entire team, and which the Matron thought might very well be legitimately viable...

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Rylia bit her lip in concentration as she used her biotics to telekinetically thread, or rethread really, a series of wires through the stealth probe they were working on. Most Asari didn't actually have this level of fine control over their biotics, but the part of her that was Rylia had realized *decades* ago that it was *worth it* for the amount of time it saved her when working on engineering projects. The fact that the extreme control exercises required to reach this level of precision had *also* helped her bioti-ball game hadn't hurt. Nor had the fact that playing with them in class had been a way to get through boring-as-fuck lectures on general ed topics she could have done practically in her sleep.

She actually *could* do some of the general math she'd been forced to take while cumming her brains out. She'd tried once in Uni on a dare. Giving the controller to the toy involved to one of her wilder bioti-ball teammates had probably been a mistake, even if it had been a fun one. Given she'd managed to answer the question she'd been called on for correctly, the Matron who had obviously realized what was happening hadn't even punished her! Honestly, she'd just looked amused...

Shaking off that memory with a grin, she made the connections with care. The whole reason she'd ended up needing to do this at all was that their *first* wiring job must have had either a loose connection or a bad wire. Whichever it had been, the whole thing had short-circuited, and only Kara's quick reaction had kept it from *bursting into flames*. Thankfully, after assessing the problem with upgraded scanners Kara had made for their omni-tools, they'd realized it was theoretically fixable without *disassembling* and *reassembling* the whole probe. Which would have taken *most of a day*.

Of course, it was only fixable because of Rylia's precise control of her biotics, but that was the whole reason a younger, lazier Rylia had put in the effort. Being able to do this sort of thing and save herself *hours* when wiring went wrong had been a more efficient solution to the original her. Partially because biotics, like everything else, had come pretty easily for her. It was objectively a ridiculously over-the-top way to be lazy, but the current

her was grateful her original had been willing to put in a *lot* of short-term effort in order to be long-term lazy.

Feeling the last connector snap in and lock tightly, she sighed in relief, letting go her telekinetic grip and backing off.

“There! That should do it, Kara. Give it juice again and hope nothing shorts out this time!”

The blonde shot her a thumbs up and a grin from where she was standing, behind the control terminal for testing the probe. A moment later she powered up the probe and started typing commands. Merely powering it up hadn’t been the problem the first time, so Rylia kept a wary eye on the skeletal oblong shape of the probe, roughly four and a half times her own size. It powered on quietly, a mass effect field forming as it lifted off the ground to a shallow hover. Then came the moment of truth as Kara reinput the command that had caused the short. They both held their breath...

...and the probe *faded from view*. Causing Rylia to cheer and Kara to pump her fist in victory.

The invisibility wasn’t *quite* perfect, but it was good enough that you’d only spot the thing if it was either in rapid motion or right on top of you. Better yet, they’d accessed data on stealth systems from other realities and found extremely good solutions for sensor baffling. Including hiding heat emissions with something similar to the Normandy’s heat sinks...only better. The system *they’d* employed used some mildly exotic tech to convert the heat back into electricity. It wasn’t a *perfect* loop, but it was good enough that the system could be used for prolonged periods instead of mere hours.

At least with a probe. Temps got a bit too hot for anything *living* to have handled it. At least at the small scale of the probe. Fitting it to a larger ship would spread out the heat more, which might make it viable. They had yet to model viability of that idea just yet. Either way, it was completely fine for their current use case, given this was an unmanned recon probe.

“That seems to have done it! Hold on, activating heat control and running full spectrum analysis with the mil-spec sensors.”

Rylia nodded, moving over to stand behind Kara as the blonde tapped in more commands. They’d gotten top-of-the-line current military-grade sensors from a *Salarian STG* scout ship via the Omniversal Marketplace. That had been somewhat expensive, but they’d gotten away with it by selling some of the production line of brand-new RT-1 labor droids to the Marketplace. That had been Kara’s idea, since they couldn’t actually use the

full number of units Rylia's little production line was steadily spitting out, and it had worked out quite well. She'd even gotten a one-time 'bonus' payment from the Marketplace for introducing a 'New Design,' that fit within tech base limitations of the Mass Effect universe.

Such bonuses were something she hadn't even known were a *thing*. She'd ended up getting a couple of more modest bonuses by feeding it the three ME-tech-base sex toys she'd made as well. Attempting to sell the modified lastech she'd come up with had been refused by the system, as it *wasn't* pure ME tech, with Rylia having made the tools to make the tools, to make the parts from another tech base entirely. Apparently, she could only barter or auction those, as the Marketplace counted them as 'mixed tech base' designs.

Between selling some of the excess droids and the bonuses, they'd been able to buy what they needed from the Marketplace. Though they were going to need a better solution to that in the long term. Something that Rylia had sicced Momo on solving. For the moment, that wasn't the focus though, as she watched the advanced Salarian STG Sensor Suite attempt to find their recon probe...and fail. She immediately hugged Kara from behind, surprising her second minion for a moment. Kara didn't seem to *mind* that Rylia was touchy-feely, but clearly wasn't used to it yet.

"Yes! Now all we have left are the space flight and FTL tests!"

Rylia was genuinely surprised how *fast* the probe had come together, given that it had a Kryptonian FTL drive in it. Honestly, their version of FTL wasn't actually that amazing speed wise, with the technology having been actively suppressed by their government for a long time. The one major advantage it *did* have was the lack of any significant range limitation. Which made it perfect for a stealth probe they could start launching everywhere and anywhere *without* needing a Relay.

It would take a while, weeks at least, to get results from most of them. But the chances of them being spotted were virtually zero, and they could start gathering some critical data for their future plans. All while the entire project had only taken a little over a month from start to end. Seriously, sci-fi rapid prototyping and droid-intelligence design assistance was a cheat that Rylia was absolutely in love with!

Kara was nodding, speaking up now that she'd recovered from the hug surprise.

"Assuming those tests go well, which I'm confident they will, we can move onto the Assault Shuttle design next. As well as finishing touches on the commando mechs you were working on. The combination will let us start making some serious moves with the information the probes gather."

Rylia grinned and squeezed Kara again. The blonde had *absolutely* proven herself to be a good choice. She'd slotted in well with Rylia as they worked on various projects, helping her prioritize and start designing bigger chunks of hardware. Momo was handling the still-expanding companies, and Miranda was settling in well and already proving to be useful to the medical research group.

With just a *bit* more time, they could hopefully start tackling Cerberus and the Shadow Broker. The latter of which, if they pulled it off, would give them a *lot* more reach. Even if they were going to need to summon another contracted 'Help' that they could trust to handle his network. Which meant earning more Karma was also needed, though thankfully her helpful new channels on her still-expanding stream were bringing in a decent amount of it semi-passively.

There was still much to do, but they were making progress!

Chapter 16 – Relations

-Lemon Starts Here-

Momo moaned. It was an unabashedly lewd sound that Rylia had come to adore since their first few 'encounters' together. This time was special, though, as it came not at the tip of a toy or Momo's own efforts, but at the movements of Rylia's fingers and lips as she caressed Momo's folds and gently sucked a nipple.

Getting here had taken time. Mostly, Rylia thought, as Momo had felt the need to satisfy some level of propriety. It had been silly in a way, given how quickly they'd fallen into mutual masturbation sessions, which had in turn given way to experimenting with the *Erotic Delights* toy line even before they'd started dating. Even so, while the original Rylia might not quite have understood, Hazel got it enough that she'd never pressured Momo for more than she was ready to give.

Flirted outrageously? Absolutely.

Tempted mercilessly? Of course.

But she'd never *pressured* Momo, letting the other woman give ground only at her own pace. That pace had still been...fast. By non-Asari standards at least. Yet it had been a steady series of escalations, not a single deep plunge, and that seemed to be enough for Momo. Enough, at least, that *she'd* been the first one to break the rule about 'touching' that had been silently established by Rylia. She had, in the middle of a makeout session,

hesitated for an instant before working her hand *under* Rylia's pants and exploring her own folds.

The action had taken Rylia by surprise, but it had never been *her* that slowed their advance, and after she'd gotten over nearly cumming from the action, had initiated her own slow assault. One that, as she'd slowly stripped Momo's clothes and worked steadily over every inch of her body *except* her most sensitive bits, had given the human woman more than enough time to pump the breaks.

Momo hadn't done so, and now Rylia stopped caressing and *plunged* into moist heat with her fingers. Momo's back arched and her hips practically left the bed as the long buildup resulted in her cumming just from that single rough thrust. Grinning and already knowing from their toy sessions that Momo was very close to truly multi-orgasmic, Rylia nipped a nipple and used her thumb to gently circle Momo's clit. Aftershocks shook her lover, and Momo's hands reflexively went from the back of Rylia's head to gripping the bedsheets.

Rylia had no intention whatsoever of letting up, giving Momo only a few seconds to recover before she replaced her lips with her free hand and began kissing and nibbling her way down Momo's tight abs. She was going to make *absolutely certain* that the girl wanted to come back again...and again...and *again*, now that she'd gotten a first taste...

-Lemon Ends Here-

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"This seems like a...questionable...form of exercise."

Rylia giggled at the expression and blush on Kara's face, even as she idly spun around one of the poles she'd had installed in the private gym. She was fully clothed and wasn't running through one of her stripping routines, but her gym clothes were admittedly rather provocative by human standards. Nor was it *really* possible to 'pole dance' without it looking a bit sensual. Well, not with a body like Rylia's, anyway.

Still, it actually *was* a legitimate form of exercise. Even among *humans*, let alone for Asari. The basics were a super-common Asari exercise, almost like Tai Chi for humans, only a fair bit more mainstream. Which, come to think of it, probably explained a bit about how so many Asari became strippers. Not that the *exercise* version was particularly lewd, focusing on a solid balance of moves that legitimately worked *amazingly* well as a full-body workout that built strength, flexibility, endurance, and coordination. The truth was that only swimming was better general exercise for Asari...which was an actual *fact* that had let Rylia lure in Momo and Kara.

“Oh, come on, Kara. What I’m going to show you is *literally* something Asari children are taught. It really is a great general-fitness routine. Which you agreed you needed to keep up! Besides, its *fun*. Of course, if you *want* to learn the sexy version, I’ll happily teach it to you after you get the basic exercise version down!”

Kara blushed even deeper and rapidly shook her head ‘no.’

“Pity, you’d look *amazing* doing some of my routines! Still, we’ll stick to the exercise version! Now come on, you two, grab a pole and I’ll walk you through the basics!”

Momo didn’t hesitate to move forward and take the pole to the left of Rylia, causing Kara to more reluctantly move to take the one on the right. Rylia grinned but refrained from teasing. She genuinely wanted Kara to *enjoy* this, not regret agreeing to try it.

“Alright! So, basics of basics! Stand to one side of the pole and grab it with your dominant hand, whichever that is for you. Now, to do even the most basic spins, you start up on your toes to get the most height possible...”

Despite some initial embarrassment, Kara would come back for more, after realizing that it actually *was* a fairly fun way to exercise and gave a solid full-body workout. Momo, on the other hand, would ask for some private sessions to learn the ‘sexy’ version, which Rylia was positively thrilled about!

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Rylia was seriously nervous. In fact, she was mentally working through some anti-anxiety tricks from her Hazel self. Reasonably, she personally thought, as she waited in the spaceport lounge. After all, she was about to physically meet with the original Rylia’s mother. Telefia T’aani was hardly a scary woman, and Rylia *had* spoken to her a couple of times over the extranet since the merger of Hazel and Rylia had happened. The truth was, though, that she’d felt like a guilty imposter every time she did so.

She *knew* it wasn’t quite true. Despite the ‘dominant’ mind winning out being Hazel’s, everything that Rylia had been was *still here*. It had been a true *merging*, not a hostile takeover, to the point that she still had many of Rylia’s habits and idiosyncrasies alongside Hazel’s. When it came to Rylia’s *mother*, though...it was complicated. Half of her felt nothing but affection for a mother who’d genuinely been a *great* parent. The other half, unfortunately, completely rejected any notion that this *was* her mother. Hazel’s human mom had been just as awesome as Telefia was, after all.

Perhaps that wouldn’t have been *too* big an issue, really.

If, you know, not for the fact that Asari were touch telepaths and family members regularly did shallow melds.

Fuck. She was making it worse.

Forcing herself to calm down wasn't a winning strategy! She needed to *actually* calm down. Worse, she knew she was being stupid. Rylia was old enough that they hardly melded every time they met, and it would be easy to avoid it. At least at first. Hopefully, by the time it happened, she would have readjusted. She just *really* wished that her 'mother' hadn't decided to surprise her with a visit out of the blue.

A little warning would have been nice!

Sighing, she was surprised when her body instinctively relaxed upon spotting her 'mother' coming out of a shuttle. Well, if the reflexes were still there, maybe this wouldn't be so bad after all? She just had to remember that she was still Rylia! Just...Rylia plus! Yeah, that was the way to think of it. She'd just gotten a kickass upgrade!

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"Oh! You must be Momo! My darling daughter has had a lot to say about you! You're just as beautiful as she described!"

Momo blinked as she found herself wrapped up in a hug, lifted slightly, then swung out at arm's length to be examined. The teasing smile on Telefia T'aani's face was so *familiar* that Momo was abruptly certain where at least *part* of Rylia's personality had come from. Still, she'd gotten used to Rylia already, so this wasn't enough to throw her off.

"Yes, that's me. You must be Rylia's mother. Would you prefer Telefia? Or Ms. T'aani?"

Telefia finally let her go and smiled broadly.

"Telefia is fine, dear! You've been making my Rylia happy, so be as familiar as you want! Imagine, my daughter managing to land herself a human! I'm so proud! Even more so than I am of the new toys! Even if I do so love the premium models Rylia sent me!"

That threw Momo for a momentary loop. Yes, she'd gotten *somewhat* used to the idea that Asari were more...sexually open...as a species. But the idea that Rylia had *sent her mother sex toys* was just a bit too mind boggling for her to compute for a moment. It must have shown on her face, as Telefia laughed.

“Oh my, that’s nearly the same expression my dear Sulilus gave me from time to time! Though a much more expressive version! Turian flanges aren’t quite as mobile as human faces, even if you can still read a lot from them!”

Momo’s brain stuttered back into gear, even as the older Asari spun toward a wide-eyed Kara. Right, Rylia’s father had apparently been a Turian, one who’d died a good few decades ago. Turians had similar lifespans to humans. A slight bit shorter on average in fact. So that had been a bit inevitable. Though humans, at least, were going to be in for a bit of a shock to their collective system in the near future. Rylia had already pulled medical tech from some reality she’d called ‘Cyberpunk’ that could extend a human lifespan for several centuries...and had offered to give Momo some sort of super soldier serum from yet another reality that would slow her aging to roughly Asari levels.

Momo hadn’t accepted yet, though she *had* gone through a round of the Cyberpunk version, and had to admit that she felt better. She might only be twenty-five, but Hero work tended to be rough on the body, and the ‘advanced biosculpting’ that was part of the Cyberpunk rejuvenation treatments had fixed quite a few old injuries. Nothing major, but enough to be noticeable when she exercised. That and the reduced back pain from modifying a few select muscles with additional cloned tissue. Which is what had convinced her to try it in the first place. She liked her boobs, but even as fit as she was, they’d caused their own issues...

Ah. Kara looked like she needed rescuing. She was rather red in the face from hints about ‘harems’ or ‘if Rylia wasn’t to Kara’s taste, might she’d prefer an *older* Asari?’ Telefia, Momo had a feeling, was going to end up being a bit of an *experience*...

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“Oh, that’s a nice design element! You’ve got the equation a little off for the ME field though. See here? You changed the Eezo ratio but didn’t propagate that change into the field equation.”

Even if the Hazel part of her found it *really bizarre* that her mother was helping her refine a new sex toy design, Rylia still found herself relaxing and enjoying her mother being around. After a couple of days, her nerves had faded as Telefia simply bulldozed through every situation, seemingly unaware that anything had changed. Well, no. Not unaware so much as uncaring. So long as Rylia was happy, she seemed to accept that the changes were just the result of the normal ‘Maiden’s Path’ to finding oneself.

“Ah. *That’s* why it was exploding after three minutes. I’d completely forgotten I had to shift the ratio to account for power output. The initial alloy produced too strong a result. Less ‘fun tingles’ and more ‘*holy shit someone set my Azure on fire.*’”

Telefia grinned at Rylia's deadpan delivery of that statement, even as she kept looking over the design work. Rylia had known, or at least part of her had, that her mother was almost as much of a statistical outlier as Rylia herself was. Original Rylia, of course, not current her. Said original had *very much* inherited her genius from her mother, as well as her love of engineering.

Telefia T'aani was a skilled and in-demand engineer who specialized in ship systems. She had, in fact, even been on the initial design team who'd worked on the Destiny Ascension. Not the lead designer or anything so grand, but she'd spent a good couple of decades helping design some of its internal systems. She was brilliant and, more oddly yet for a Matron, remarkably high-energy and active.

Rylia was actually her only daughter, which was a bit unusual for a Matron approaching five hundred, though hardly unheard of. While outsiders thought of the 'Matron' stage as being where Asari had kids/families, and that was *generally* true, it wasn't even close to universal. More accurately, Matrons settled down into *stability*. Often, that did mean having kids and making a family. Just as much, however, it was the period of an Asari's life where they really buckled down into serious jobs in whatever career interested them.

Maidenhood was when they went out and tried *everything*. Matronhood was when they'd finally figured out what they wanted to do, by having tried it all, and settled in to make a career out of whatever they'd found. Matriachhood was when they got bored of whatever that thing had been, usually hitting near the top of their field by dint of experience, and started telling *other people* how to do their jobs better. To the point of dipping into politics so they could tell *everyone* how to do shit 'better.'

"Well, this one looks good! I demand a test model when it stops exploding! Now, where are we going for dinner? You said you invested in some small company bringing in human foods right? Something about a thing called pizza?"

Rylia grinned at the excitement in her mother's voice. It wasn't *only* Maidens who were interested in new things.

"Yep! Since I'm employing some humans now, I was able to quiz them about the best foods to import! Not the fancy stuff, but the tasty stuff for regular people! Pizza has been a huge hit here on Nevos! So have something called *tacos*. Apparently Tacos are best on Tuesdays though, even if I'm not really sure why. So we'll get some of those tomorrow! For now, I can share the glories of pizza with you! Oh, we'll grab Momo and Kara, too. They both love pizza and can answer questions about it!"

Feeling silly in pretending pizza was super exciting, she nevertheless towed her mother after her. It had actually been Momo who'd suggested they start up a 'human food' chain on Nevos, pointing out that the tasty, unhealthy stuff would be loved by the vacation goers at the resorts. She'd been right, too, with the resorts even giving them a kickback as their new human-food chain was drawing in more tourists than usual.

Honestly, Rylia was doubly glad Momo had suggested it, since it was a bit of a crime to do engineering projects without pizza and too much caffeine helping fuel you...

... ..

Telefia T'aani hummed in thought as she boarded the shuttle to leave the planet of Nevos. She wasn't quite sure what was up with her daughter. It was her daughter, she was certain of that much at least, despite the radical changes in her since the last time they'd met. Even if there had been an underlying nervousness the only time they'd melded, just before she left, it was more a thing of furtively hiding details. Nothing dangerous to Rylia, as far as she could tell. More likely, based on a few bits she'd put together, her daughter was planning something a bit...bolder...than just selling sex toys and doing medical research.

As in, big and bold enough to possibly put her in the sights of dangerous people.

That was admittedly an odd turn around, even more so than her sudden decision to delve into making a major business. Rylia wasn't precisely *risk-adverse*, but she wasn't the type of Maiden to rush into combat with a sense of immortality either. Yet, there were clear signs in how she moved that she'd refreshed and improved upon the basic self-defense training that Telefia had put her through. Which didn't even cover that CEO girl. Momo was genuinely sweet, and seemed seriously sweet on her daughter too. Yet she also moved in a way that said she had *serious* training.

As in, Telefia was damn sure the woman had killed people before. Possibly with her bare hands.

All of which, added up, was why she was more than a little uncertain just what was going on with her kiddo. She was doing her mother proud, and Rylia wasn't the type to get up to serious mayhem without a very good reason. Meaning that, whatever this was, Rylia felt she *did* have a very good reason. Well, Telefia could be patient a bit longer. A year or two, at least. Though she should probably contact a few old friends who owe her minor favors. One or two of them should be willing to take a lucrative job that would let them keep an eye on...and a trained gun covering for...her daughter.

Rylia was thankfully showing good instincts in keeping some dangerous people close. But that could backfire if you weren't dangerous yourself. Making sure someone she

fully trusted was protecting her little girl would make Telefia feel better. Besides, now that she was approaching five hundred herself, maybe it was time to start properly condensing her network? It would likely be another century before she cared to bother poking her way into the Matriarchs council. But she *had* been getting a bit bored just fiddling around with some interesting human designs, like those disruptor torpedoes of theirs that actually made fighters potentially viable again.

Hmmm, maybe she'd even start a business of her own to build up toward becoming a matriarch? It wouldn't be anything as exciting as her daughter's fantastic new toys, but she had enough contacts in the various shipbuilding groups that she could put together a company to R & D a new gen of military hardware. The Republics would probably be wanting to do a token update in the next few decades, at least. Which would give her some soft power if one of her designs was chosen.

Nodding at that thought as she considered who to contact, Telefia put the oddities with her daughter aside for now. She'd find someone to keep an eye on her dear Rylia, then wait until they gathered a bit more information for her to work with...

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"So, my mother didn't *completely* scare you off, eh?"

Kara jumped, clearly not having noticed Rylia entering the lounge. She'd bought the entire floor of luxury apartments below her penthouse early on, both for security reasons and figuring she'd want them for employees of some flavor eventually. Currently, the only two that were occupied were a unit each for Momo and Kara, though Momo slept in Rylia's penthouse increasingly often.

Like most Asari-built buildings, the floor of apartments had included a communal area to socialize in with the basic design. Which Rylia had then revamped and updated with some acquisitions of her own, like bookshelves, a pool table, and a well-stocked snack area. Prior to Hurricane Telefia coming through and temporarily using one of the other apartments, the lounge had been a meeting place for the three of them to hang out. A little less 'intimate' than one of their apartments, while still being 'away from work.'

"U-um...your mother was...nice...it's just..."

After just two encounters with Telefia, Kara had obviously become overwhelmed by the older Asari and retreated mostly to her apartment and work. Frankly, Rylia got it. More accurately, *Hazel* got it. Kara wasn't quite a true introvert, but she certainly leant more towards introversion than extroversion. The result, from what Rylia had gathered via dropped hints here and there, of having been somewhat socially isolated for various

reasons in her old reality. As a *true* introvert, the part of her that was Hazel could very clearly understand that Telefia would be a bit...much.

Honestly, her mother was pretty typical of Asari in that respect, with it being *Rylia* who was now the outlier. Not all Asari were extroverts, but the majority were, and even Asari *introverts* tended to be more touchy-feely than their equivalents in other races. Again, very much a societal and cultural thing, with a hefty helping of genetic predisposition, given the whole ‘touch telepath’ thing.

“Way too little respect for your personal space? Too prone to random hugs when she’s a stranger? A bit too forward with offering to set up a nice Asari orgy for you since you’re single?”

Kara blushed, but nodded, having at least gotten used to Rylia’s own flavor of teasing. Rylia giggled and sat down across from Kara, making sure to leave her plenty of space.

“Sorry about that, really. I’m sure I’ve mentioned it’s a bit of a cultural/societal thing. Most Asari that deal with aliens at least *try* to respect the differences we know exist, but mom is a bit...willfully herself? *Unapologetically* herself might be a better way of saying it, I guess? The fact that her force of personality generally leaves anyone bothered by it feeling a bit confused and concussed means she never really got use to the concept of personal space.”

Kara snorted at that description, voice drier than the average desert when she responded.

“I could tell.”

Rylia giggled again...but then offered up an olive branch.

“Well, for your pain and suffering, how about I treat you to something nice and nerdy on her? Specifically, she arranged a chance for a crash course in Mass Effect shuttle craft. Apparently, the daughter of one her old friends works on the ships for one of the major Nevos resorts, and she got her to say she’d let us work with her for a few weeks. Given we were just talking about needing to get a bit more hands on with the local ship tech, to make better sense of the data uploads...”

Kara had brightened immediately, eagerly nodding her head.

“That would be *perfect*. I’ve been playing with possible shuttle designs, but I *really* need to get hands on with one to help understand it better, I think. We could, and probably

should, acquire one to play with. But getting a crash course from an expert would help a lot...”

Rylia nodded.

“I had much of the same thought, as well as thinking we could prod said expert about the best models and features. Get some valuable opinions from someone whose gotten their hands dirty working on them. You’re up for it then?”

Kara jumping to her feet and asking how soon they could go certainly answered that question quickly enough...

Chapter 17 – Projects

Rylia, Kara and Momo stared out over the salvage dock, taking it in. Unlike the scrapyards that Rylia had purchased and cleaned out on Nevos, *this* was an orbital reclamation yard, meant for breaking down large ships. It was in rough shape, including one entire dock being offline due to damages caused when an idiot had fucked up while guiding a wreck in for salvage. Which, as it happened, explained how Momo had been able to purchase the sprawling ship breaking facility at all.

The owner had defaulted on loans, and Momo had worked various backroom deals to get her hands on the station for a fraction of its theoretical value. Of course, she hadn’t had to fight *too* hard or burn *too* many favors, given that it would take a lot of money to get it fully operational again. Or, well, it normally would at least. Momo had run the math and worked out that this was the best way to get consistent *large* chunks of credits for the Omniversal Marketplace.

Using that very Marketplace, they could get the parts needed to repair this place *at cost*. Which, when combined with the various models of labor droids they had access to, would cut repair costs for the station down significantly. More importantly, Rylia would be able to strip out and sell major components of large merchant ships, frigates, and possibly even the occasional *cruiser*. Listing those parts as ‘damaged’ and ‘unsalvageable’ wouldn’t cause any flags to raise...and many of them were worth a *lot* compared to most of what she’d sold to the Marketplace before now.

Already, she’d sold the majority of the hulk that had damaged the station (and been left behind as too hard to remove for a sell off) to her System. Its drive core had sadly been a bust, being worth little more than the refined eezo in it. Several other major systems had been saleable as ‘used components’ though, including one entire engine and most of the

ship's kinetic barrier generators. Consoles, diagnostic systems, energy runs, atmospheric control systems. Etcetera and so on.

By the time she'd worked her way down to bare hull and sold it too as scarp metals, she'd racked up well over five and a half million in Marketplace credits. It was the second largest amount she'd ever had, surpassed by a mere three quarters of a million from when she'd emptied the *entire scrapyards* she'd bought on Nevos. Of course, she'd promptly spent a little over half of it to provide materials and components for the labor and repair droids to repair the two docks that were still functional up to a better standard. They would deal with the third, more heavily damaged dock, later.

Shaking her head, Rylia threw an arm around Momo.

"This was a brilliant call, Momoest! Even if, after this, we can only pull a percentage of the components from each wreck without someone eventually thinking something is off, it's still going to give us a sizable working income for the Marketplace. Enough to push some of our projects into high gear."

Momo shot her a happy smile at the praise...after rolling her eyes at the newest in a long series of nicknames. Kara nodded and spoke up with her own agreement a moment later.

"Rylia's right. This is perfect, particularly since it will still turn a profit with our reduced need for real people. Though we'll have to vet the handful we station here *carefully*. Quarrians, probably. They'll both be good at the work and are less likely to rat us out about the mechs, given how poorly most of the Citadel Races treat them. Though that will mean not letting any of the smarter droids work here."

Rylia grimaced at that. Kara was right that Quarrians would be perfect for the work, tending to know a lot about old ships and how to strip or maintain them as a matter of course. She was also, unfortunately, right about the droids. Anything that smacked of A.I. tended to freak Quarrians out, for admittedly good reasons. Thankfully, her own RT-1 design used *purely* in-universe VIs. Good quality ones, but ones that any Quarrian worth their salt would identify as a VI after even a cursory inspection.

Less fortunately, it meant they wouldn't be able to leave any of the more advanced repair droids here, let alone something like an R-series or a JN-66. Both *were* at least seedling AIs pretty much out of the proverbial box. Jen, the JN-66 that assisted Rylia directly and never got wiped, was starting to show enough personality that she probably shouldn't be using it in public any longer. Likewise, the R3s that ran her Slicer Pool were all showing signs of personalities, as she'd refrained from wiping them either. *That* particular droid

series got amazingly more effective as they developed into proper AIs, and she liked the little guys just as much as many of their owners in that galaxy far far away did.

Thankfully, Momo had her eyes firmly on the prize.

“I’ve run the numbers multiple times. Even just the RT-1s will cut the labor costs down enough to still turn a profit, despite generous compensation for any employees and a chunk of the best profits being eaten by the Marketplace. Which is all we really need. So long as the facility isn’t showing a loss, it will look like just another investment. Much like the ‘human food’ restaurants on Nevos. The diversity of business types even helps us in the long-term, as fewer people will be surprised when we pivot into random fields here or there.”

Deciding to trust her expert to know what she was talking about there, Rylia turned her mind to what they could *do* with the influx of Marketplace credits.

“Well, some of the funds in the Marketplace need to go toward the Assault Shuttle project, obviously. But there should be plenty left over, since we’re entirely buying knowledge packs, not hardware. Sure, the info on making Slipstream Drives will chew up a million credits on its own, but that’s the only really big ticket item we need. Aside from that project’s needs, I was thinking we might want to grab some things to account for future expansion of the Medical R&D team?”

With that, Kara and Momo were both instantly engaged, helping Rylia figure out just what sort of medical tech would suit their goals, both public and private, the most...

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Momo was pleased as she looked over the report that Dr. Dalisir had just given her. It had been eight months since she was first summoned now, and six since they’d gotten the *Maiden’s Mercy* Medical Think-Tank rolling. Being presented with not one, not two, but *three* viable new treatments that had made it through cloned-organ stage testing was *amazing* for such a short period of time.

Two of the three were for somewhat rare Asari medical conditions that affected the nervous system. Such things were legitimately *rare* for Asari since, as Rylia was fond of saying, Asari had ‘Bullshit Nervous Systems of Doom.’ A statement which, admittedly, Momo kinda had to agree with. Between how robust their nervous systems were and their cellular regeneration, it was really only rare *mutations* that caused nervous system issues with Asari.

Of course, that very rarity also meant they were rarely researched, so presenting treatments for those two diseases was going to draw positive attention. Particularly as one

of them was a reproductive health issue which Asari took *very* seriously. Assuming Asari-testing stages went well, both treatments, one of which was an outright *cure*, would raise the visibility of *Maiden's Mercy* in a big way.

Even better, the *third* disease was a well-known *human* disease. Specifically, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, more commonly known as just ALC or Lou Gehrig's disease. Momo hadn't actually realized it was still around in this version of humanity, as her own had resolved it. Mainly by use of Quirks that could affect nerves allowing better mapping and routes to finding a fix. The local version of humanity had made serious progress as well, having long since at least identified the causes and found decent treatments.

They hadn't found an outright *cure*, though, and there was one potentially sitting on Momo's desk. Curtesy, as it happened, of Miranda Lawson's contributions and ideas. The young woman had needed a lot of help taking her ideas to *completion*, but Dr. Dalisir had made a firm point of attributing Miranda as the primary driving force behind it.

"This is *exceptional* work, Dr. Dalisir. How confident are you that these will hold up in Asari and Human testing?"

The good doctor was smiling broadly as she replied.

"Virtually one hundred percent that they work at least partially, Miss. Since we're working with *direct manipulation and regeneration* of the nerves, there isn't nearly as much inaccuracy as something like a drug-based treatment. This is closer to a surgery, but one that's far more precise and less traumatic than that usually implies. I'm confident we'll be able to breeze through standard testing, as there just flat out isn't a lot that can go wrong that we wouldn't have seen in the cloned tissue."

Momo nodded acknowledgement to that, pleased as she filed the information away.

"Excellent, doctor. For even getting this far, I'm issuing a fifteen percent bonus to your entire department. If or when the treatments get fully through testing, I'll provide *another* fifteen percent as well for each treatment. This is *exactly* the sort of outcome Rylia was hoping for by providing her breakthroughs to experts such as yourself."

The Matron blinked in surprise. Her team was already *fantastically* well paid for their levels of experience, the potential for as much as a sixty percent bonus on top of that? That level of incentive was nearly unheard of. Even as she was trying to process that, Momo moved on.

"Moreover, I believe this proves your team is ready for more. Rylia has been holding on to some other possibilities that are a bit more complex, waiting to see how well your team performed. Frankly, I think you are ready for them now. Keep on top of your current

projects. But expect to see both a budget increase that will allow you to triple the size of your team at your own discretion, and a data dump with some additional experimental breakthroughs to follow up on.”

For some reason that Momo couldn’t quite put her finger on, Dr. Dalisir seemed just a little frazzled when she congratulated her again and sent her on her way...

... ..

“Helllooo minions! I’ve got a special stream for you today! I have a guest with me! Let me introduce you all to my favorite fellow engineer, Kara Danvers! She’s not only almost as hot as me, she’s just as brilliant too!”

Kara blushed at Rylia’s trailing comment, but since she’d somehow gotten suckered into wearing one of the formfitting bodysuits Asari loved, there wasn’t any hiding that it was true. To any human, she’d be the very image of a classic blonde beauty. Despite not having powers, she still had the full measure of advantages given by thousands of years of Kryptonian gene editing. Which meant looking improbably gorgeous with barely a hint of makeup used. As for the name, it was one of several she’d used in the human world before, and they’d settled on it as being ‘mundane’ enough not to cause too much tongue wagging.

“Now, we’ve got a major treat for you today, as I’ve been toying around with my own mechs! Yes, yes, I *have* stuck a strapon on a couple of them, no need to ask! But you’re in the tech sub-channel right now, so we’re focusing on the mechs themselves today!”

Hands having come up to hide her face at the strapon comment, Kara made a sort of muffled-keening noise, causing Rylia to grin and take pity on her.

“As you can see, Kara is shyer than I am! So I’ll stop teasing her...for now~. I need her brain not to overheat, since she’s part of the secret to my new mech models! I’m pretty decent with a wrench, as you all know, but Kara here has a positive *gift* for working with robotics. When I managed to recruit her, I knew I was onto something special! So, let’s take a look!”

Gesturing for the camera to follow, the droid operating floating drone easily acting as their cameraman, Rylia looped an arm into Kara’s and towed her along. The workshop that came into view had two models of mech present, her own RT-1 and a new RK-1 model that Kara really *had* helped her with. It wasn’t even the slightest bit of a fib that Kara was a genius with robotics, and the new model was a serious improvement over the RT-1. With considerably better fine motor control and a superior VI.

“Now, on the left you’ll see my own attempt to make a mech. I was making some pretty good progress, you know! I even have a small production line set up for them, using

them for some general dumb labor in the *Erotic Delights* factories. But they weren't *really* all that special, only worth using because of my struggles in expanding fast enough to keep up with demand! Then Kara here came along, though, and the RK-1 model made some real breakthroughs!"

Entirely true, and much of the point of this stream. It would be interesting for the viewers, for course. But the real reason to rope Kara into the stream with her was to establish *Kara* as the reason they would be expanding into 'industrial mechs' in the not-so-distant future. Matriarchs keeping an eye on her businesses might even have already noticed the RT-1s being used at their reclamation station, though Rylia thought it unlikely for now.

They *would* be noticed eventually, though. So establishing the mechs as another line of business, even pretending that part of the reason they'd acquired the orbital salvage yard in the first place was to test them? That was just future proofing. Kara, as a 'robotics genius,' would serve as a visible source for why they'd expanded in this direction. Not to mention Rylia's whole 'I'm a Maiden' thing would help them write off how erratic seeming the choices of which fields she expanded into would seem on the surface. Show someone an obvious explanation, to keep them from looking any deeper.

"Now, Kara, why don't you tell us a bit about how these mechs differ from the janky piles of shit that most people think of when they think 'labor mechs?'"

Kara had, thankfully, recovered from her embarrassment enough to give it a go.

"Well, a big part of it is improved VI, of course. But an even bigger part is what we've done with the frames. You'll notice it in the hands, in particular, but we've managed a far finer degree of delicate control in both models-"

The stream would go on for over two hours, as they talked about the mechs, even stripping them down to show off some of the improvements. If the camera just so happened to occasionally linger on Kara or Rylia's bodies a bit? Well, that was just to help keep her simps interested...

... ..

"Okay, so that's Engine 2 checked out. Everything looks clean to me, you?"

Kara was looking over her own duplicate checks of the test run and follow up complete tear down they'd just finished of a new shuttle engine. After a few more seconds, she nodded sharply.

“Looks good to me, too. I have to admit, this is going smoother than I expected when we decided to jump straight into glueing multiple tech bases together like this. Even with all the time we spent modeling how they would interact, I sort of assumed we’d have more issues.”

Rylia snorted, throwing a half-hearted glare toward her companion.

“Don’t jinx it, Kara! The components and systems might all be working in workshop conditions, but eventually we have to *fly* this thing. *In space*. I’d rather things go wrong *down here* than when we are doing that!”

Kara looked sheepish at that, brushing a strand of hair back in a habitual nervous gesture.

“That is...a very good point. Don’t humans say something about a bad rehearsal being the sign of a good show? I don’t quite get it, since Kryptonians tended to model and simulate things half to death before ever doing even this much live testing. Though, the hands on approach is absolutely faster, I have to admit.”

Rylia nodded at that. No matter how much technical information you had crammed in your head, practical assembly always helped things *click* in a way that they wouldn’t otherwise. It had been true for Hazel as a human and was apparently just as true for Asari and Kryptonians. The three weeks they’d spent getting that crash course in *everything* shuttle related from Eri Te’leen, the young Asari Matron that her mother had arranged time with, had been *invaluable* in solidifying basic principles for shuttlecraft. Even if they weren’t making a pure Mass Effect tech shuttle.

As had acquiring their own for company use and studying it closely, to be fair. After a complete disassembly and reassembling of that shuttle, one of the best Asari models on the consumer market, they’d nixed the idea of bothering to make a pure ME tech shuttle. Instead, as Kara’s comment had indicated, they’d dipped into multiple other universes tech bases for their first small craft.

Not that it was honestly all that *small*, being a good 28 meters from nose to tail. It was, without question, an *Assault Shuttle*, rather than anything more peaceful. The oversized design (for a shuttle) had been required to combine the compact slipstream drive they’d taken from the Halo universe with other components. Namely, the scaled-up lastech weapons from Warhammer and shield technology from Star Wars. Plus, of course, the cloaking tech they were already using on the probes they’d deployed to check numerous locations.

The result, assuming the entire thing didn't explode or vanish into a slipspace rupture, should be worth it. In pure spite of the fact it had already taken over two months and they weren't even close to finished yet. After all, the shuttle would be able to easily transport twenty people reasonably comfortably, or double that number of the combat mechs they were still perfecting. All while being both capable of stealth *and* capable of long-distance FTL travel *without* a Relay.

The slipstream drive they'd managed to create would be slower than the near-instant point-to-point transit of a Relay. Yet, that was only for the Relays. It would be a fair bit faster than the non-Relay FTL that ships used to move within the radius of systems *around* a Relay. Overall, most travel times would average out to about the same, excepting only where you would otherwise be making only single jumps between systems that both had Relays. The benefit, of course, was that you could both travel to places the Relays *didn't go* and not travel along known and observed routes.

Overall, it was a better drive technology than the Kryptonian hyperdrive they'd put into the probes. Though, unfortunately, the shuttle they were making was about as small as they could realistically shrink a slipstream drive to. Meaning the Kryptonian hyperdrive tech still has some significant value in and of itself.

"Well, the engine testing is done, the hyper-fusion core hybrid is solid, and the weapons tests need to wait until we aren't on the planet. That just leaves the stealth, sensor, shield, and atmospheric systems, really. Atmospheric systems next, you think?"

Kara hummed at the question, then nodded.

"Yes, that makes the most sense. All three of the others can be moved around on the exterior as needed. But the life support can't be adjusted as easily later. Let's knock it out, then the stealth systems so we can start basic flight testing."

Rylia nodded along. At the rate they were going, it would probably be another month at least before they could fully test the prototype. Still, by meshing so much together *now*, it would be much faster when they started building bigger ships. Not to mention that, once they had a stealth shuttle or two available, they could move against the Shadow Broker. The probes had already found his ship, and they'd all agreed it was a good move...

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