

## S. Tech ‘Private’ Public Relations: Drug Bust

MQ-279 stands in her pod. The electricity surges through her. Her systems mostly shut down. The sergal, formally known as Asterol, now only answers to the designation MQ-279. Much of her green and white fur is covered in synthetic armor plates of green and grey. Left arm completely synthetic, the green glow of her power core in the center of her chest barely lit. The back spires hiss softly, while the sergal trapped within her green glass protective dome which not only protected her face from dangers of combat, hiding her identity from the outside world, but also contained the potent atmosphere that she needs now to survive in her cybernetically enhanced form. Her unique long tendrils from her face and back of her tail sway, shift, feeling the vibrations in the air, getting a sense of any movement around her, but she doesn't think of moving. Why should she? She hasn't been commanded to move, not yet at least.

Other MQ units are called forth at times for whatever mission is needed. Over the period of three weeks since her conversion, she's been trained, and perfected, helping hone her skills as a killing machine for the company. Her mind is conditioned to be the best drone she could possibly be. The company had to survive, grow, expand, the company was her everything, and she'll do anything for it.

Slow, steady deep breaths, she is idle. She is ready. The hum of electricity and other machinery fills her ears, sharp hearing catching conversations from down below. None of it relevant to her, not even worth paying attention to, completely ignored. Excess information not worth her time to process. It is simply good to relax, and simmer in the soft hypnosis that caresses her mind. The alterations made directly to her brain, long healed and solidified in her mind, reducing some moral qualms she would have had before. Mortality wasn't going to get in the way of what the company wants, *“Serve the company. Obey the company. I will do anything for the company,”* she thinks, mind idling, only occasionally thinking about parts of her past, with a distant nostalgia. Recognizing that *was* her, but now she's something so much more, part of something greater than herself.

Suddenly text moves across her HUD with a matching synthetic voice whispering into her ear, caressing into her mind, **“MQ-279 you are required to head to interrogation room B.”**

**“Affirmative,”** MQ-279 states, disconnecting from the pod, the flow of energy ending. The unit's body glowing, her synthetic body moving smoothly, tail flicking while, stepping down the steps, looking over the scientists, who are constantly working with other MQ units, checking over their systems. Other labs in other rooms show destroyed MQ units being dissected. Metal plates being removed, separated from their skeletal structure.

The sergal MQ unit, eyes it, drawing her attention ever so slightly, *“I will not fail the company like them.”* she thinks, scientists stepping out of her way, showing a train reaction to an MQ unit walking through that she knows all too well at this point.

She heads down the hall, following the HUD display in her dome, guiding her toward her location within the facility, moving to a small room with a projector. The door behind her

closing, locking shut, isolating her from the rest of the base. The projection booting up as a voice speaks, one that is cold and synthetic as her own but also recognizable as the company CEO, Sheeza Soulscar.

**“Greetings MQ-279. After reviewing your records and trails after your extensive training. We at the company feel it's time you start earning your keep.”**

**“I serve the company. What does the company need from me?”** she asks, her organic voice translated into a synthetic one, losing much of her soft nature, making her sound far colder and harsher than she would otherwise.

**“It is what is expected of you. Your mission is of domestic importance. The government is requiring some ‘charity’ work from the company to ensure that our operations within their borders don't come under scrutiny. This means that your mission is of high importance.”**

**“Affirmative,”** she said with a nod, feeling a small uptick in pleasure, confirming her obedience to the company, her hands twitched, growing eager to receive her commands, so she can be further rewarded for her subservience.

**“You’ll be driven to the location under the guise of part of our S. Tech construction crew. Once you reach your destination three hours from here, you’ll be dropped off here,”** she says, the projection showing an isolated location in the woods, **“From there you’ll follow a forest trail to your final destination, a seemingly abandoned granary processing facility. There is a major drug crime syndicate. Your mission is to subdue all hostile threats, capture any important persons. Once completed and the area secured you will contact the local authorities so they may conduct a massive ‘drug bust’. Completing this mission will go a long way toward our company’s goodwill. Do you understand?”**

**“I do. I have a few questions about this mission, if I may?”** MQ-279 inquires, tail swaying, hands twitching, the idea of ending a drug ring, exciting her outside of her need to obey the company.

**“Permission granted.”**

**“What kind of resistance am I to anticipate?”**

**“Small arms fire at best. The information we’ve been given that a bust done by the government authorities would have too high of a risk to conduct and look good within the public sphere. Their desire for a ‘bloodless’ drug bust is to be utilized to our benefit.”**

**“Understood. Next, what about non-combatants?”**

**“Secondary. Record their faces and send the information to us to hand to the authorities so they can be picked up later. We prefer you remain hidden, but stealth is not a requirement for the mission. Only the neutralizing hostile threats and apprehension of any VIP targets.”**

**“Understood. Lastly, what drugs are being produced there? Cocaine? Heroin? LSD? Death Fairies?”**

**“Police presume it's a major location for the ‘Thumping Rabbit’ also known as the rut drug,”** she says.

The name of the drug made MQ-279 tense, she gasped, taking in that wonderful atmosphere of hers, eyes widening, two moments of her past, bubbling up into the forefront of her mind.

The first is her worried about her friend who has been in a dark place after having lost their job, and broke up with her boyfriend. She remembers calling the anthropomorphic grey female wolf several times but got no answer. Having a spare set of keys she went to check up on her, and found her dead from an overdose of the drug. Her eyes were bloodshot, with blood around her crotch, caused by the drug itself and the excessive use of toys she had at her disposal, using some other oversized objects that wrecked her loins while in an uncontrollable heat, leading to excessive blood loss and death. Finding her like that is something she'd never forget. Filling her with anger, tail stiffening.

**"MQ-279,"** says the female voice, an attempt to draw her mind back to the task at hand, the level of gas within her atmosphere dropping, yet it didn't stop her from getting a knot in her synthetically enhanced stomach, recalling the other time this drug has wrecked someone's life.

Her coworker, an anthropomorphic male ram with beautiful curled horns and white fur. He wanted to spice up his love life with his wife. They had been so busy with their three kids, there was rarely time to "get into the mood" but when they tried the drug, they got far more than they bargained for. When all was said and done he's serving a life sentence in jail and the surviving two kids were, the last she checked still in child protection services.

**"MQ-279, respond,"** she states, the gas within the unit's helmet dropping further, making the sergal's body gasp for breath.

**"Affirmative. That is all I wanted to know."**

**"You are to respond when spoken to. Such disobedience is not to be tolerated. You obey the company. You're a company asset. Remember that."**

**"Understood."**

**"Now go. The truck has been prepared to transport you to your location."**

**"Affirmative,"** MQ-279 responds, feeling the levels of gas steadily returning to only a slightly suboptimal level, leaving her body wanting, *"Addiction,"* she thinks, heading out of the room, moving through the facility to a large unmarked truck. Smooth faceless latex drones open the back. Drones operating equipment in the back as stands in the middle and back of the truck are empty, ready to hold up to six drones like herself.

She steps onto one of the stands, the back closing behind her, the drones starting up the truck engine, driving off toward their destination. With no other objectives to fulfill at the moment, her mind is allowed to wander just a little bit. Her body craves the pleasure the gas gives her. Her systems are designed to feed upon that need, conditioning her mind further to be a good unit for the company. Even now as she looks down at her green glowing parts of her body, her cybernetically enhanced arm and hand, eager to complete her first mission for the company, she can't help but wonder...

*"It's an addiction like any other. I know I am. Yet does it matter? I'm serving the company. And that is what is important. The company must expand and grow. I will do*

*anything for the company. But is this addiction necessary? It could lead to problems. Addiction is never the answer. It's too controlling, forcing people to make poor decisions that no one in their right mind would ever make. I need to have my mind clear, focused. To complete my tasks to the best of my ability for the company. And not do it for some kind of high. But when the systems reduced my reward for my obedience. It was more than addiction. I felt like I was suffocating..."*

The truck hissed, breaking to a stop. The drones do basic monitoring of MQ-279's systems. Two drones monitor the situation, when everything is settled, the voiceless things unlock a security cabinet, pulling out an assault rifle.

MQ-279 looks at it, recognizing the model and design. A specialized rail gun using magnets to propel bullets at amazing speed without the need of gunpowder, making far more 'silent' weapon. This version also came with the ability to switch between two types of magazines built within the rifle. A detailed report within her HUD quickly informs her the first magazine contains forty bullets, while the other contains twenty non-lethal rubber bullets, able to knock someone cold if hit straight in the forehead.

The sergal grabbed the weapon, checking over the signs. The weapon reacts to her grip, activating the advanced weaponry booting up, **"This will do. These drug dealers deserve what is coming to them,"** she states coldly before her synthetic voice even makes it colder.

One of the drones moves to the back of the truck, entering a code to unlock the door, opening it. It turns to MQ-279, saying in a more 'friendly' synthetic voice, "We'll be here for extraction."

**"Affirmative,"** she states, stepping off the truck, which shifts slightly as she gets off. The wind blows through the trees, causing the leaves to rustle. She feels the cool air through her fur, while the air around her head is perfectly still, *"I can still feel some of the wonders of nature,"* she thinks, sprinting into the forest, following the trail that was given to her for the mission, leaving the truck far behind.

Her synthetically enhanced body made the trek relatively easily. What would have tired her out previously only put her slightly out of breath. Her GPS systems informed her when she grew close to the target, and by then it was midafternoon. The warmth of the sun beats over her, warming her synthetic parts, and her fur alike. Slowly, stealthily she approaches the edge of the forest, seeing the large clearing where the abandoned granary processing facility is. The rustic buildings are thirty yards away from the forest edge.

MQ-279 monitors the area from her position, taking note, *"The building was abandoned fifteen years ago. And much of this forest is simply nature reclaiming much of this area. Strange though."*

Her ears twitch, listening to the chirps of birds, the movement of other wildlife through the brush, yet nothing but the whistling of wind through the large building complex, *"I can't hear anything going on there. A large drug operation that requires armed guards for protection would make noise,"* she thinks. She quickly accesses her internal systems, two hatches open up

within her back spires, releasing two round spheres with cameras on them, *“Is this a false lead or?”*

The metal spheres rush toward the facility, floating seemingly like magic in the air, rather silent, seeing them brings flash memories of the spheres that converted her into the wonderful asset of the company, but that thought quickly fades. She looks through her HUD, monitoring the video feed from both the spherical drones, bobbing and weaving through the facility, moving past grain elevators.

**“Activating stealth level two,”** she projects internally, her stealth systems activate, projecting a false image of the terrain behind her, making her invisible to anyone looking in her direction from her target area, but only that. If anyone would come from a steep side angle or from behind, they would easily see her.

Her claws twitch, moving her fingers like she’s holding her fingertips on two separate joysticks, guiding and moving the two drones, overriding their automatic guidance systems. She moves one of the drones into the grain elevator looking inside to see empty tables and ventilation systems, *“Making some of the ingredients of the rut drug can cause very volatile fumes. This must have been the area they made this portion... But all the valuable equipment is gone,”* she thinks, zooming in on the ground, which shows scratch marks and signs of recent movement. The drone goes outside scanning around the cylindrical building, *“Judging by the tracks here, this had to be recent. But how recent? And better yet, where did they go?”*

Meanwhile she guides the other drone into the large rectangular processing facility. There tables and chairs are strewn all over the place. Signs of recent activity are everywhere. Empty packaging and processing equipment that could easily be replaced are there, *“They did relocate... I’ll need to get a closer look to see if there are any clues. I can’t just abandon the mission because the target isn’t here. There has to be evidence there that the company can use to provide good will to the government,”* she thinks, keeping the spheres out, deactivating her level two stealth, the projecting fading away, she rushes to the main set of buildings, the soft glow of her body illuminating some of the shadows, her feet crunching on some dust and small bits of rubble left behind from the emptying of the facility.

Slowly, methodically she moves through the building, scanning for any clues. She moves to an office on the upper floors of the main building. There are emptied cabinets and computer desks with no sign of the computers. A bird lands on the windowsill, before fluttering inside, while she kneels before the desk, checking to see if there’s any hidden compartments, having come up empty on anything substantial in the cabinets. **“The Rut Drug Lab appears to have been abandoned over the last few days. Requisition permission to attempt to follow up and locate their new lab,”** MQ-279 states, sending the report back to the drones which is relayed over a secured network to home base.

Within a few minutes a connection is established a male voice replies, “Processing your request 279. Please standby. You may continue to explore the local area for clues till then.”

**“Affirmative,”** she responds, pulling away from the office building, moving down the halls, taking note of the deplorable sleeping conditions for those who were working here, *“These*

*poor people. Made to produce such a vile addictive drug,*” she thinks, scanning each room, when she gets pinged with a response.

“Your request has been approved. Assigning you an off-site supportive MQ unit that is currently available to provide improved data analysis and information processing.”

“**Affirmative,**” MQ-279 responds.

“Connecting you to MQ-9.”

“**Affirmative.**”

MQ-9, a red and gold anthropomorphic winged dragon stands in his charging stand, waiting for commands, when his HUD lights up, informing him of his new off-site support mission. The unit’s claws twitch, saying, “**I understand. Securing connection to MQ-279.**”

“**Connection established,**” he states to his fellow MQ unit.

“**Connection confirmed,**” MQ-279 replies, getting basic information on the other MQ unit, recognizing that he is above her in the pecking order, “**Preparing data transfer for analysis,**” she says, while slowly moving through another room that appears to have been used for storage. Metal shelving units are toppled over and dented. Containers that used to contain some of the drug’s ingredients lay upon the floor.

“**Data received, analyzing,**” MQ-9 responds.

“**This was a rather large operation and to move it over the past few days should not have gone unnoticed.**”

“**That is, if they moved it all at once.**”

“**The tracks tell me they did.**”

“**The tracks?**” MQ-9 inquired.

“**There is much you can read from the tracks one leaves behind. Judging from the impressions and the degradation of the tracks compared to the weather--**” the unit’s words were cut off, a whiz and a bang, pain shoots through her unarmored leg, blood splattering on the floor, the bullet penetrating into a concrete support beam, where a massive hole is created, a small explosion sends chunks of concrete at her.

Before the concrete even settled, MQ-279 rushed out of the room, pain from her leg suppressed, not slowing down for an instant, finding a place with greater cover, placing herself between a thick support pillar and the direction of the bullet.

“**MQ-279 what was that? I’m getting indications of an injury to your leg,**” MQ-9 responds.

She looks down at her wound, seeing the bullet went clean through her leg, just missing the bone. The bleeding has already stopped thanks to the thin synthetic protective layer right under her skin that seals bullet wounds like a self-sealing fuel tank, “*If that hit my armored leg, that would have exploded within it,*” she thinks, peering past the support beam, looking around in her green tinted world, withdrawing her head slowly when another bullet punctures the building, hitting her domed head, the bullet ricocheting off to the side, hitting the wall, exploding inside of it a moment later.

MQ-279's ears ring from the blow of the impact, staying completely behind the pillar, her HUD becomes static, a hiss fills her ears, the dome cracked, hindering some of her vision. She takes a deep breath, **"Sniper. They are shooting in approximately thirteen degrees to the east from the north from my current location. MQ-9 can you give me any locations that could be useful for a higher-powered armor piercing sniper rifle? I'll be sending the recorded data of the two attacks. But judging from the angle of impact it had to come from a location higher than me. I'm currently on the upper floor of this grain processing facility."**

MQ-9 receives the information, accessing local information, pulling up a picture of the local area from space, as well as basic information about the grain elevator, **"Processing the information,"** he states, looking through the data in the dragon's red domed glass HUD projection. Claws reaching out to move the faux hologram before him, disseminating the information, **"It will take a moment. Remain in a safe location, till a new plan of attack is processed. You are a valuable company asset, and it would be bad for the company if you were lost."**

**"I will not let them get away. They've already damaged company property. If I sit here, I will be only a bigger target. I need to keep moving, keep the sniper occupied, and provide you with information to locate them."**

**"I would not advise it."**

**"You are here to assist me in my mission,"** she responds, rushing deeper into the building, using as much of the reinforced concrete as protection as she can.

MQ-9 processes what is said to him, wings twitch, **"I am. I will do what I can to make your mission a success. But your insubordination to a higher MQ unit will be noted."**

**"Higher MQ unit?"** she inquires, moving through the building when another bullet pierces the building, just missing underneath her tail, forcing her to take cover behind the last reinforced pillar near her before she'd reach the exit back toward the grain elevators.

There is a moment pause, **"Disregard the previous statement."**

**"Affirmative."**

MQ-9 lets out a sigh, which is translated into a synthetic one to anyone who'd walk by, *"MQ-7 would not like me saying that,"* he thinks, resuming his work.

MQ-279 takes a moment to collect herself, looking over the leg wound, seeing the silver-shine of the inner lining that closes the wound off. Her muscles aching from the damage, nanites working to repair the damage, *"Very lucky it missed my armored leg. If that hit my other leg, I'd not have a leg to stand on,"* she thinks, chuckling.

**"What's so funny?"** MQ-9 inquires.

**"I just thought of a funny joke. So far, the sniper is deadly accurate, and they can detect me through the building, but not everywhere. There were many locations where they should have been able to take a shot but didn't. I'm going to send out my eyes in the sky to figure out why. Unfortunately, I'll need to stay in one spot while I look around. Knowing how they are tracking me."**

**“Affirmative. Stream the data, so I may better process the information.”**

**“Affirmative, MQ-9,”** she responds, the two drones which were withdrawn back to her earlier are released once more, one moving to bullet holes in the building, analyzing the area, and the directory of the bullets with greater detail.

*“Perhaps there is a nearby building or tall tree that they are firing from? A platform could easily be built and prepared beforehand. They could have had days to prepare if it was started the time the place was abandoned if not before... Whoever this is they knew I was coming. That’s only assuming if there is one of them there could easily be more...”* she thinks, processing what to do, moving one of the sphere’s outside, hovering above the granary, she looks in the direction of the shots.

She looks over the treetops, noticing a few hills that rise up, giving a few possible locations, and farther back still is a snow-covered mountain, about ten or so miles away, **“There are three to four possible locations for the sniper. Still no clue to how they saw me through the building. I see no internal security cameras that could give away my location,”** she reports.

**“Affirmative. Processing the information. I don’t see any surveillance devices in the granary, and there are no windows that would give any indication of where you are. The sniper is able to detect you through the walls.”**

**“Not through several walls though...”** she replies, when suddenly there’s an explosive pop heard above her. She instinctively looks up in the direction of the noise as one of her spheres cuts out, **“I lost one of my observation spheres.”**

**“I saw that. I’m going over the video feed, now,”** MQ-9 responds, hands moving through the feed, stopping at a moment before the feed was lost, a blur of a bullet caught on it, **“Flak bullet. Whoever you are fighting knows about our technology. Proceed with caution.”**

**“Affirmative. Any suggestions?”** MQ-279 inquires surveying her surroundings, taking a slow deep breath, ears twitching hearing the constant hiss of her dome and the back spires, which are working slightly harder to compensate for the loss. Her long tentacles ‘float’ in the air, the ended feathers, shimmering in the light, feeling the air around her, sensing for any change in pressure.

**“Perhaps they are detecting the electromagnetism of your synthetics. If they can detect that through thin walls, it’s as easy as seeing you clear as day. I recommend shifting to stage one stealth. It will reduce your combat capabilities but will make you harder to detect with the equipment.”**

**“Affirmative,”** she says, taking another moment, to processing everything, **“I’ll test the theory. Level one stealth will shut down my two-way communication with you.”**

**“Affirmative, you’ll only be able to receive information from me in snippets. Anything longer than that might give away your position.”**

**“Affirmative, I don’t think anyone is here with me. I need to keep moving, but first we need to test the theory. And there’s only one way to do it. Initiating stage one stealth.”**



MQ-9 lifts his head, wings twitching, looking over to another MQ unit nearby of a male blue furred multi-tailed fox, then focusing back on the task on hand, taking a slow deep breath, **“What are you going to try to do?”**

Knowing she can't reply, the glow of her lights dim to nothing, the hiss slows on her backside, the air growing heavier, but still manageable, body feeling sluggish she cautiously steps out from behind the pillar to where she was last shot. She zooms in on the bullet hole, muscles tensing, ready to try to move the moment the attack comes, *“There is a noticeable angle from the height of the bullet hole and where the shot ended...”* she turns, looking over to the bullet hole in the floor, the small crater it formed when the explosive part of the armor piercing bullet went off, *“They have to have descent height to do so. The hill feels like a possibility though,”* she thinks, processing the moment, her tentacles bouncing with the subtle movements she makes.

*“Any moment... I'm not moving. A perfect target,”* she thinks, looking back toward the bullet hole, and after several precious seconds she moves back behind the pillar, feeling the tension her muscles fading, the atmosphere she's breathing slower on the uptick, preventing her from being as calm as she'd normally would be.

*“I need to continue moving forward. This sniper has to have connections to the drug cartel. I can't let him escape... no matter what. I can't let any of them escape. The information they have will be invaluable for the company,”* MQ-279 thinks, tail flicking, looking toward the exit, *“I'll still need to be fast,”* she thinks, steeling herself, rushing out of the building, bursting through the granary doors, rushing toward the granary elevator that will block line of sight between her and the sniper.

If she still had a heart it'd be racing, but the flow of blood and nanite fluid through her is smooth, if not quickened. She slides to a stop behind the elevator, a bullet slams into the ground where she is going on the other side of the elevator, a small explosion of dirt kicked up shortly after impact.

*“That was close,”* she thinks, another bullet whizzing by just underneath her chin, having pierced through the grain elevator. She resists the urge to rush out again, leaping toward the elevator. She lowers herself to the ground, waiting for the next bullet... nothing.

*“They are waiting... There could be multiple of them or...”* she looks in the direction of the pocket mark left on the ground, *“There was a second delay between the two shots. That could be the time it takes them to reload,”* she looks over to the granary entrance, *“I'll have to eyeball the distance between here and the elevator...”* she thinks, taking a moment to look over to the spot where she'd been hit if she continued to run and from where she is now to the tree line, *“It's unlikely I could make it without them taking a shot, but I might just make it. The tree line will provide me cover.”*

MQ-279 takes a deep breath, muscles tensing, positioning herself low to the ground, taking a position like an Olympic runner, but instead of running at the sound of the starter gun, she's trying to out run it.

Kicking up a little dust, she's off, making the dash across the wire, each step bringing a level of uncertainty if she'd make it. Slowed by her low power mode, but to what she was before her transformation into an MQ unit she's still amazingly fast.

**"MQ-279 it's not advised you move across such a wide expanse without cover,"** MQ-9 warns.

**"I know the risks!"** she exclaims out of habit, knowing that he can't hear her. She leaps through the air, reaching into the tree line, her body is rocked, jerked to the side, an explosion rocks her body, shrapnel flies everywhere, she lands on her side within the forest.

She gasps for breath, the flow of her atmosphere reduced while she scrambles behind a tree. She takes deep needful breaths, body twitching, aching, feeling as if she's standing on top of a mountain, the air so thin she can barely breathe.

MQ-279 feels parts of her body are damaged. She looks over herself, checking her limbs, *"Those are still intact,"* she thinks, looking ahead of her she catches a piece of one of her back spires, blown clear off from her back, **"That's not good,"** she mutters, looking over to see her right spire is completely destroyed, **"Adjusting power flow to second vent,"** she says, the left spire hissing, the atmosphere levels returning to normal, allowing her to breath freely once more.

**"MQ-279, be careful. This is your first mission and excessive damage will not look good on the balance sheets."**

*"I know that..."* she sighs, cautiously moving to pick up the hunk of metal that used to be part of her spire, *"Best to grab what I can,"* she thinks, activating the disk in the center of her hand, *"It's also good this still works in low power stealth mode,"* she comments forming a liquid rubber drip, which envelops the pieces she's picked up. With relative ease she attaches the small bag to the damaged back spire, **"There we go,"** she mutters, *"I didn't think that trick would come in handy so soon. At least my training has been paying off,"* she thinks, moving in the direction of her attacker.

The synthetically enhanced sergal runs through the forest, ears twitching, trying to catch any noise that might indicate any others nearby. Her tentacles float in the air, waving up and down with each step. She zigzags through the trees, alternating her paths every one to three seconds, occasionally a bullet whizzes by, missing her by less than a foot a few times, the bullet getting lodged in a tree, exploding, causing it to tumble over with a crack, sending animals flying in all directions, or hitting the ground, exploding with a soft thud, kicking up dirt.

*"No respect for nature. I don't blame them, but still,"* she thinks processing over everything that is happening, *"Did they purposely hit my spire or was that happenstance? It had to be by chance. With me down a spire, I have to divert more power to my air filtration systems, increasing my electrical signature, making me easier to track."*

**"You are approaching one of the two most likely locations for the snipers. Be careful,"** MQ-9 says, limiting his communication of the unit, only occasionally pinging her to keep an up to date location.

*"I know that,"* she thinks, letting out a huff, slowing down, staying low to the ground, crawling on all fours, climbing up the hill, ears up, alert, listening for anything that would give

away her target. Birds chirp in the trees, smaller animals scurry about the forest floor. Wind rustling through the trees. Her back spire hissing, the cracked dome doing the same.

MQ-279 keeps her head low, ready to use her rifle, keeping to her rubber bullet ammunition, *“Where are you?”* she thinks, trying to keep as quiet as possible. Slowly she moves through the brush, listening, waiting, the overall silence was unsettling.

*“They aren’t here... where could they be? The other location? It doesn’t seem likely, it’s too far east from where I was recently attacked,”* she thinks.

**“MQ-279, temporarily disable your stealth and send me your current data. I need it to assist you to pin down the location of your attackers,”** MQ-9 commands.

MQ-279 twitches, tensing a little, taking a position before a thick tree before responding, **“Affirmative,”** her core glowing a soft green, feeling a surge of strength through her, quickly transmitting the data.

**“Thank you. Processing. Just another moment, and then return to stealth.”**

**“Affirmative, but to update you, I believe there is only one attacker.”** she responds.

**“Why do you say that?”** he asks.

**“That’s because...”** when there’s a whiz and a crack. A bullet aiming straight toward her power core explodes, spraying her with shell fragments, giving her light cuts across her ears the only exposed part of her soft flesh, her tentacles jutting from her face, also getting a few scratches. A bullet hole visible in the thick tree before her, **“Activating stealth level one.”**

**“Are you okay MQ-279?”**

**“Functioning. Only minor injuries from the last attack,”** she responds, then realizing her communication was already cut off, *“I hate being this limited,”* she thinks, staying low to the ground, using the trees for cover, *“I was lucky that tree was thick enough to set off the shell to explode before reaching me. If that hit me dead on, I’m not sure if I would have made it... but that does confirm that they are still farther up ahead. The question is where?”* she thinks, sliding down to behind the back slope of the hill, buying herself time to process over everything.

MQ-9 works hard on analyzing the data and by the time MQ-279 gets situated in her location, he sends some information to her that he deems useful, **“I’ve narrowed down the possibilities from the data you managed to send me and as unlikely as it is, this sniper is skilled and packing some heavy equipment. Transmitting the information to you now.”**

**“Affirmative... damn it, he can’t hear me,”** she sighs at her own folly, processing the information her eyes widening ever so slightly upon completion of the data transfer, **“They’re at old man mountain? That’s still another ten miles away from here. They’re able to get this accurate of a shot that far? And yet I’m still in one piece at this point... Perhaps there is more to this than just destroying me,”** she mutters, moments later she moves forward, resuming her push toward the mountain, *“Nothing more to do now than to close the distance.”*

**“I recommend you wait for reinforcements. We can get additional MQ units there within half an hour.”**

MQ-279 ignores the statement, running ahead, up and over the hill through the forest, zig zagging, receiving a few more shots along the way, each near misses. Only just managed by

keeping her movements random and sporadic, using the forest to the best of her cover, while hindering the ability of her attacker to track her.

Years of hunting in the forest comes into use, there are moments where she feels she manages to get into the clear, closing the gap mile by mile, before another shot rings out, a close call, *“Whatever tech he’s using to track me needs to be captured. But more importantly any information he has on the drug producers. I can’t let them get away. I can’t let this travesty of an operation to continue a second longer if I can help it!”*

MQ-279’s resolve strengthens, hearing MQ-9 say, **“You should wait. The risk to you and further damage to company property is too great!”**

*“The company will do good to put an end to a major drug ring, especially to the rut drug,”* she thinks. The mountain is called the old man because it has a snow-covered top year round, like an old man with white hair.

The trip was perilous, dodging a few more strikes before it suddenly stopped as she reached the base of the rocky mountain. She used the rocks as cover looking up in the general direction of the shots, having gotten close enough now to hear the origin of the shot, *“They are far up on the mountain... I won’t let them get away,”* she thinks with greater concern the closer she got, muscles tensing, feeling a rush through her, the MQ drone system struggling to compensate with the damages, and her rise of emotions, the machinery having some trouble muting them to make her heartlessly focus on the task. The most recent bullet explodes nearby, impacting into the rock, shattering it, sending deadly shrapnel everywhere, which damages her organic skin, most of it blocked by the protective layer under her organic skin.

*“At least I have a good idea where they’re at. Though I am surprised they haven’t ran off yet,”* she thinks, climbing up the rock face, using her synthetic hand and feet to dig into the rock, while her organic hand attempts to and more often than not finds purchase on the rocky surface.

Progressing up through the mountain taking not the beaten path to avoid the off chance of civilians but most importantly, she wants to avoid places that this person could be watching. Moving with quick gusto she keeps her level one stealth on, unsure of how sensitive and effective the equipment could be. And with each moment of nothing happening, the more concerned her mind becomes.

*“They probably ran off at this point. They haven’t shot at me for over ten minutes. I’m almost to the snow,”* she thinks, leaping from one precarious rock formation to the next, a few random pebbles are dislodged, clattering down a ravine.

She tenses, unsure what is going to happen next. The region between snow and rock shifting over the next hundred or so yards, a pit forms in her stomach that the pleasuring gas can’t overcome. The reaction time of her systems to keep her complacent are slightly dulled, *“They had to have run off by now. There is just no way,”* she thinks, leaping to another cliff face, her synthetic claws slide across the rocky surface, body sliding down a good twelve feet before she stops. Her organic fingers are bleeding, run raw by the constant endless upward

climb. Her rifle hanging from her one functioning back spire, attached via a few rubber straps she formed herself.

**“MQ-279, this is a fool’s venture. MQ-46 and MQ-69 will be arriving in twenty minutes. The preparations took longer than anticipated. The anti-air rounds means they have prepared for an aerial arrival. They are going by land. Await for their arrival. MQ-69 is an expert in this kind of warfare. He’ll know what to do.”**

MQ-279 doesn’t respond, continuing her push forward, wanting to achieve this success, her drive pushing her forward. Climbing up the cliff face higher and higher, the anticipation that she could get a clue toward the ones behind the killer drug, fueling her almost as much as the atmosphere within her dome that keeps her going, *“I will not fail. I cannot fail... the company,”* she thinks.

Bang, boom, snap, a roar of explosions overhead. Large rocks tumbling down toward her. Only moments to react, taking in her surroundings, a small alcove barely big enough for her to fit into. Yeeting herself up into it just as the rockslide happens, one large boulder rushing past her, hitting her back spire, almost dragging her along with it, till her synthetic claws dig deep into the rock, clamping down, but the distinct sound of her rifle clattering down below her, makes a pit form in her stomach, *“I needed that, but no time to stop now. That was a clear trap. This person anticipated this possibility. Whoever they are, they are good, but foolish to go up against me,”* she thinks, her green tinted world, now showing her that it’s clear to move forward. One of her tail base tentacles is snapped, broken, blooded, but still connected, now showing some ungodly and unnerving angle.

MQ-279 muscles through the pain, not deterred, ears twitching, hearing the sound of a snowmobile above her, growing distant, **“No!”** she exclaims, deactivating the stealth systems, her body glowing green once again, strength surging through her, pain reduced, focus returning on the task at hand. She’s taken so much damage, she had to do this, to recoup the company’s losses on repairing her, **“I won’t let you go. I won’t be a liability to the company,”** she says, huffing, quickly pulling herself the last of the way, reaching the top of the snow covered plateau, still far from the mountain peak but clearly the location where her attacker has been staying. She follows the track seeing him quickly running down the mountain path. She gives chase.

*“If only I had something...”* she thinks, hand reaching behind her deactivating the rubber, grabbing thick broken piece of metal from her broken spire. She’s steadily catching up to her assailant, but they’ll be long gone through the mountain passes if she doesn’t give this hail Mary of an attack. With all her might she throws the hunk of metal out toward her target. Not losing a step in her chase, the metal object flies through the air, landing right between the gears of the tracks of the snowmobile.

By some miracle the object gets stuck in there, seizing up the left side of the tracks, causing the brown feathered body, white feathered head anthropomorphic eagle to spin out, and almost toppled over thanks to the massive guns trapped to his back, the barrel a good six feet in length in its unextended form.

MQ-279 analyzes the weaponry, sending the information back to MQ-9, who quickly responds, “**I’ve never seen a weapon like that before. Capture it.**”

“**I’ll be capturing more than the gun,**” she states, rushing toward them. The eagle, face covered by a helmet and a visor, dressed in thick winter clothing that hides most of his form, already knows that there is no use in trying to use the large weapon.

He pulls out a magnum revolver, unleashing several high powered shells at MQ-279, the first two bullets ricochet off her metal armor, unfazed by the attack.

The avian doesn’t flinch adjusting his aim firing at MQ-279’s helmet, one bullet hits ricochets, second bullet hits ricochets but the crack in the helmet grows. Third bullet, hitting the same location penetrates the dome, getting lodged in the reinforced glass, spider cracking across the helmet. The bullet pointing right in front of her left unblinking eye.

“Shit,” he says, spitting off to the side, emptying out his gun smoothly reloading it but by then MQ-279 is on top of him, lashing out at him, knocking the gun out from his hands, sending it flying a dozen yards away lost into a snowbank.

“They told me this was going to be the hunt of my life, they weren’t kidding,” he responds with an excited laugh, the bird pulling out a serrated dagger, rushing into her, catching MQ-279 by surprise, expecting him to make a run for it at this point.

Her body tenses, the blade is pushed forward with super-avian force, far exceeding anything that should be organically possible, the blade penetrating into the sergal’s gut, just missing the left lung.

“Damn missed,” he stated, twisting the blade, hitting a special button on the hilt, which releases the blade from the hilt, leaving a sharp silver metal spike jutting out of MQ-279’s body, trapping the blade within her.

Pain and warning goes through her systems, the cracked and battered HUD barely functional as the avian takes this stunned moment to remove his jacket, revealing that there’s a metal exoskeleton surrounding his winter clothed avian body, a half a dozen daggers without the hilt of blade jingle along his waist, with a surprising elegance he connects the hilt to one of these daggers, while pulling out a second like dagger, “Come here little wedge. Let’s dance.”

MQ-279’s claws twitch, gritting her teeth she charges him, thinking, “*I have to be careful. I’ve already sustained a lot of injuries, and he appears to know a lot about our systems.*”

She claws at his helmet, scratch marks run across his visor, while the avian attempts to drive another dagger into her, aiming for her synthetic arm but she just manages to pull away.

“I’m impressed you managed to get this far. More so seeing what injuries I’ve given you. You’re by far the best hunt I’ve had a long time,” he remarks.

“**Hunt?**” she asks, gritting her teeth, letting out a synthetic sergal grow, she doesn’t give him a chance to answer, going full out attack on him, which he matches blow for blow, using his daggers for great defense and offense, forcing MQ-279 to remain aloof and agile to avoid being stuck with another blade.

The sergal slides back, her back spire hissing,

The avian pants, feathers ruffled, the helmet still on him, “What fun!” he exclaims with a bird trill.

MQ-279 takes this moment to activate her rubber hand generator, molding it around her belly wound which has been painting the ground with red and silver blood. She tightens the rubber around the wound, but the dagger pierces it ruining part of the seal, allowing some of the bleeding to continue, but the rubber still slows it down.

“Well, that does explain that auspicious design, and here I thought they’d be for throwing,” he remarks.

She twitches, hearing MQ-9 speak, **“You’ve sustained serious damage. Based on your current location, they’ll be there in thirty minutes. Fall back, you are too valuable to lose on your first mission.”**

**“I will not lose,”** she responds.

The avian laughs, “Not the first time I’ve heard it, but certainly the first from someone as fucked up as you,” he states, rushing in, using the synthetic enhancements around him to move at neck breaking speeds.

MQ-279 moves to counter but finds a sudden searing pain in her organic leg, she stumbles to the ground, the blade about to be twisted and locked into place but she just manages to pull her leg away leaving a partially twisted open hole, the second skin unable to close the wound affectively. The back spire hisses loudly, her vision limited from the damaged dome. She remains hunched over, activating her rubber, attempting to cover up the wound, *“I’m so glad they taught me this trick,”* she thinks.

The avian pants, turning to face her, seeing her hunched over, blood staining the white snow, “Well, this was fun, but the fun has to come to an end,” he states, rushing in from behind, dagger aiming on the breathing tube that feeds the air from the functioning back spire.

The blade hits its mark, sinking in, gasping for air...

MQ-279 pulled out her hidden blade within her synthetic leg, driving it into the avian’s chest, purposely missing the heart, but piercing his lung, knocking the avian down several pegs. His attack was just out of reach of its intended target.

“I got cocky...” he grunted, spitting up blood within his helmet.

MQ-279 smirks, **“We both did,”** she responds, leaving the blade in his chest as he tumbles back, landing in the cold snow. The sergal pushing herself up to her feet, breathing heavily, going over to the avian, ready to make a move, but he lies there.

“A hunter knows when he’s bested,” he squawks, coughing, “I know you’d have reinforcements by now. I’m not escaping even if I wanted to,” he manages to say, the sergal removing the helmet, revealing the yellowed eyed avian, the sergal scanning his face.

**“With the threat neutralized we’ll be sending a medical aerial evac. It should arrive in twenty-minutes. Keep the target alive, if possible,”** MQ-9 advises.

She huffs, tensing, wincing in pain, the atmosphere she breathes in is unable to be generated in the quantities needed to overcome all of the pain with the desire, need and pleasure that helps sustain her through that fight, **“I made my strike to disable, not kill. As a hunter, I**

know what to do,” she replies, looking over at the bird, “**Any information who he is?**” she asks.

The avian stare sat her with fierce determined eyes despite knowing he’s been defeated, gasping for air, barely able to move, unwilling to touch the blade lodged deep in his chest, just below his heart, “How sporting of...” he coughs, aching, “To keep me alive.”

**“Got the information on him. Artemis Baldivictus. Ties the Aviarium mafia. Known as the ‘headhunter’. It’s rumored he has ties to the “Great Modern Hunters Society” which makes sport of hunting other sentient beings. But it’s all speculation as no one has survived to testify against him,”** MQ-9 explains.

MQ-279 twitches a surge of anger going through her, thoughts of wanting to twist that dagger in his chest fill her. Morals against killing stripped away by the droning process and what followed, the system that is integrated into her functioning enough to catch the problem, *“He’ll be useful for the company. Relax. Obey. You want what is good for the company. You are a good company asset. Eager to help the company. Relax and obey.”*

The amount of the gas within her dome drops, reduced further by the holes in the helmet. Her body twitches, aching, feeling herself suffocating for just a moment before she relaxes, pulled back from the brink, the levels returning.

“My, my, someone is an addict... but of what?” Artemis asks, coughing, wincing, using this moment while she was distracted to hit an auto-destruct on the exoskeleton, frying the circuitry, making it a useless hunk of metal, that now weighs the avian down.

**“You talk to me about addiction? You support those who make the rut drug. You will tell me everything you know about those who make it. Tell me more about the Aviarium mafia.”**

Artemis’ expression doesn’t change, his feathers though rise slightly at the mentioning of the mafia before relaxing, his breathing labored, words short quick, with coughing fits that make him wince in pain, but he doesn’t cry out from it, “Someone is informed yet so wrong. You won’t be getting shit on me about this drug, but I’ll tell you that the Aviarium has nothing to do with it. Drug trade of that sort is beneath them. They fly high above the rest,” he states.

MQ-279 wraps her synthetic claw around his neck, itching to squeeze it, but stops just short of doing so, kicking up some snow in the process, **“Lies. Talk.”**

“I have nothing else to say to a synthetic puppet.”

MQ-9 commands, **“We need him alive. Make sure he can’t further injure himself. Subdue him for the company.”**

**“Affirmative,”** she replies, the disk in her synthetic hand activating, unleashing a flow of liquid rubber that slides across the avian’s face.

“Can’t look me in the eyes when you finish off your prey? Where’s the fun in that?” he lets out an avian cackle before the coughing fit ends it, the rubber enveloping his head, sealing around his neck, the bag inflating and deflating with each breath, till the MQ unit places a breathing disk into the rubber, which hums to life, flooding the avian with a relaxing gas that puts him into a docile state.



**“I’m not going to kill you. You’re too valuable of an asset for the company. Your skills will be put to better use soon enough and then? We’ll get answers,”** she states, falling back, nearly collapsing herself, her tough facade melting away, the back spire whizzing away, working more than twice as hard to compensate for her broken air filtration system. The flow of blood and silver liquid nanite fluid that helps keep her systems running, slows to a twinkle from her rubber coated gut wound.

Eventually the thumping of helicopter blades can be heard. MQ-279 pushes herself back to her feet facing the large medic helicopter that is approaching in the distance, complete with the medical symbol on the side, looking much like a civilian hospital helicopter except for its large size.

Snow is kicked up everywhere as the copper lands nearby, smooth faceless drones pour out of the chopper, picking up the avian, who is still alive just with labored yet relaxed breathing, the rubber hood still over his face.

New orders fill the drone’s mind, **“Get into the chopper,”** for some reason that isn’t in the forefront of MQ-279’s mind; she snerks at the command but follows through with it with mindless obedience.

Inside is a mobile medical facility including a surgical table and enough equipment to provide some level of medical assistance to the drones that need it, including power tools to cut through the heavy armor.

An anthropomorphic female gazelle in a white lab coat is on the helicopter. She looks over to MQ-279 while the drones pull in the seemingly unresponsive yet still very much alive Artemis, **“That’s some first mission,”** she says looking over the damage, **“Is the dagger puncturing a lung?”**

The sergal shakes her head, **“Negative. Just below. Systems indicate nominal blood and synthetic fluid loss, but are within tested parameters. I’m currently in a moderate need of medical assistance and repairs,”** she explains.

**“I was about to say I’ve seen worse. There was one time one of you came in with a collapsed lung, and didn’t even bother to tell me...”** she sighs, the faceless drones placing the avian onto the medical table, the doors to the helicopter are closed and they take off back to base.

**“The target must survive,”** states MQ-279, looking over the gazelle, seeing her name appear in the battered HUD that is barely functional, seeing the name Doctor Girana, with a high rating and value to the company, outlining her in blue.

The anthropomorphic gazelle walks over to Artemis, looking over his injuries, the bird having been removed from his now broken exoskeleton thanks to the drone, his body limp and calm due to the rubber hood over his head. The gazelle whistles, **“My, my, what a nice stab wound you have there, right between the ribs, disabling without causing too much damage. This should be no problem...”** she says looking over to MQ-279, cracking her neck, **“Don’t tell me what to do you hunk of machinery. I know all about what kind of people you drones used to be,”** she states.

“**Affirmative,**” MQ-279 responds, finding it the only appropriate response she can say, moving to the

Doctor Girana grabs her tools, getting to work, removing the blade from the bird’s lung, partially reinflating the lung, stopping the bleeding. She’s still working on the bird by the time the helicopter lands, the avian is carted away in a different direction as MQ-279 is given instructions of where to go next.

“**I want to keep track of them,**” she responds, feeling a sudden decline in the gas that keeps her going.

“***Obey the company. Serve the company. Move to the repair station for repairs.***”

The sergal twitches, the reduction in the gas bringing up the pain she’s in from her injuries, body craving to be returned to that normal stable state of pleasure, the desire to obey growing, “**Confirmed,**” she says, walking toward the facility when a dark blue MQ unit steps out toward them.

The sleek heavily enhanced MQ unit is quickly classified by MQ-279 as a heavy MQ unit, barely anything organic left about her, designation showing up as MQ-8. The heavy sergal unit stops in front of her, reaching up to grab her dome head.

MQ-279 feels a quick surge of concern before her systems override it. The high priority of MQ-8 overriding anything else, even the desire to complete her current command of walking to the repair area, “**How can I help you?**”

MQ-8 remains silent, the dark blue dome sergal looking over her, the golden blue daggers on her tail tip swaying into view when suddenly MQ-8 grabs MQ-279, pulling her into her arms, walking her toward the repair facility.

“**Hey! What are you doing?**” she asks, when a synthetic voice speaks to her from within her helmet like MQ-9 has during her mission, but this time she feels it’s coming from the silent sergal beside her.

“**Relax. Studying.**”

MQ-279 gives her an inquisitive look, feeling the stronger heavily synthetic blue and white furred sergal carry her with relative ease to the repair facility where all the equipment on the helicopter was there a table designed to hold their back spires and tail. Medical and surgical equipment along with high powered cutting equipment. The room itself is clean and sterile. She is placed onto the table, and strapped in, “**Could you explain more?**”

MQ-8 doesn’t respond, only looking over the other synthetic sergal drone’s body, the organic sounding but computer-generated voice of the room says, “Improving field medical techniques. Reducing nanite concentration in the vicinity of MQ-279 to in the field levels... achieved.”

“**Oh, you are testing out MQ unit field repair, for extended missions,**” MQ-279 replies.

MQ-8 looks at her, giving a silent nod. The blue sergal moves down to MQ-279’s leg, peeling back the back rubber that covers the wound, red blood and silver liquid mixed within the wound oozes out the moment the cover is peeled away. She looks at the injury, spreading it,

examining how it's been widened by the knife wound, before sealing it back up with her own rubber palms, "Moderate tissue damage to the unprotected leg," says the female voice that is part of the room.

MQ-279 winces, then relaxes the gas within her helmet compensating, easing her pain, "**Careful with company property,**" she says.

MQ-8 remains quiet, looking at the metal spike that is jutting out of her gut. She removes the latex around it, tearing it away, letting some of the blood that built up within it spill away, the wound slightly oozing at this point.

Also at this moment MQ-279 notices that there are scientists that are watching from an observation room outside of the medical area taking notes, reading something on their holographic pads, as if they are being fed information to read.

*"The tank of an MQ unit is working on me. And one of such high importance to the company. I feel honored, but also so very curious,"* she thinks, tensing, feeling the dagger move within her body.

MQ-8 attempts to grab the dagger, the super thin fine ridges within the pointed hilt of the blade is surprisingly smooth and hard to grip. She gets a little something, pulling up causing MQ-279 to shift in pain, but the twisted blade is lodged deep within her and attempts to twist it to pull out without spreading the wound open wide more, which would involve cutting more into her armored plates have failed, "Recommending leaving the blade in to be digested by the nanites for material. Initiating sphere repairs," says the voice, commanded by MQ-8 but the green sergal clearly knew it was made by her, but was not her voice.

Two of their conversion spheres that MQ-279 vividly recalls back on her conversion into a perfect MQ unit are released from the base of MQ-8's spires. They hover over and direct their light and nanites to mold and repair the green sergal's leg.

The rubber melts into the wound, sealing up, a spot of skin without fur that will eventually grow back is left in the sphere's wake. They float over to the wound in MQ-279's gut, the lights and nanites working to close the wound, the armor plates reconnecting but only thirty seconds in the process they stop, pulling back, MQ-8 walks over to the heavy hardware cutting equipment, designed to cut into an MQ units' armor.

**"What's wrong?"** she asks, noticing the blue sergal's sudden change in action.

"The dagger lodged within you is not being broken down by the nanites. Removal is now necessary," she is told, MQ-8 starts the process of cutting open MQ-279's armor, who tightly grips the table, her toes curl, feeling the pain of having herself cut into, but it's mitigated by her systems, becoming dull to a throbbing ache, body relaxing as the addictive gas is flood into her wheezing cracked dome.

Over the next fifteen minutes MQ-8 cuts open the armor plates, using a set of spreaders, to open the wound wide, breaking the protective second skin underneath, no organic flesh skin remains in this part of MQ-279's body. She watches as the blue sergal digs her fingers mercilessly into her body, gripping the blade itself, pulling it out, revealing the dagger dripping with crimson and silver.

The blue sergal casually places it onto a nearby table, removing the spreaders, directing her spheres to resume to repair and close the wound, her belly still aching and throbbing even once the armor has been fully restored some minutes later.

MQ-8 looks at the green sergal's cracked dome, the bullet still lodged in the reinforced glass. She reaches down, turning MQ-279's head to the side before gripping the bullet, yanking it out. Any loose pieces are slide sidewise within her dome, more of her precious atmosphere lost, but then the spheres move over her head, melting and reforging the dome pieces, removing the cracks and imperfections, making it a solid smooth glass dome that hides her face once again from the outside world.

Her azure eyes were only seen briefly by MQ-8 when she removed the bullet that almost smashed her helmet, or worse pierced her head with it. After several more minutes of working over her body, the green sergal's own back spire being reconstructed, making her look brand spanking new, even her long back tentacle that was broken has been forced back into place, the spheres slip back into MQ-8's back spire, the table releasing MQ-279, allowing her to sit up again.

She looks over herself, booting up her HUD, noting that everything appeared to be in order, **“Functioning nominally. Now what's the status of Artemis?”** she asks, slipping off the table.

MQ-8 says nothing, motioning her to follow it, the command appearing over the green sergal's HUD, **“Follow MQ-8 to interrogate prisoner.”**

**“Affirmative,”** she responds, following the blue sergal through the facility, toward the far end of the building, into a room that was next to the very one where she got turned into a wonderful MQ unit. There, is Artemis, suspended by chains, spread into an X, unable to move, his breathing slow, steady, the rubber hood still on him the small disk in the rubber bag, providing him with the air he needs to survive, but to the drone's bemusement the anthropomorphic bald eagle was sporting a hard on.

MQ-8 moves in front of the eagle, keeping a good three feet away from him, once the door behind them closes, the lights shift only illuminating the eagle, hiding the two drones in darkness, only lit up by the glow of their bodies. She looks at MQ-279, giving a nod.

The command is given to her, explaining to deactivate the rubber from around Artemis' head, **“Confirmed,”** she responds, the rubber melting away the disk that provided the air falls to the ground with a clatter. The eagle appears to be dazed and slightly lucid.

The green sergal looks to her superior, who silently nods to her again, the text appears on her HUD, giving the command, **“Commence interrogation.”**

**“Affirmative,”** she responds, looking to the eagle, her claws twitching, tail swaying, her tentacles shifting in the air, **“Wake up Artemis,”** she says, her cold synthetic words unable to translate the annoyance and anger she has for him. An anger that is just able to be kept in check and heavily muted by her synthetic body and programming, feeling a constant pleasure, wanting to do good for the company.

The eagle shifts and groans, feeling the pain in his chest feathers rising, a soft squawk escaping his beak, eyes dilating, feeling the pleasure of an arousal moving through him, unsure why, but feeling himself spread and kept taught in a middle of a room with only the light overhead, blinding him from those around him except for a glow of blue and green in front of him, taking a moment for his mind to piece everything together, “Huh? I’m still alive?” he grumbles.

**“Because you are too valuable to be wasted on a mountain top. Even if you deserve it,”** MQ-279 states.

“That explains the patch up job,” he says, looking down at his sewn up wound, then looking back into the shadows, “Your hospitality won’t get you anywhere,” he squawks.

**“Where were the drugs taken?!”**

“Which drugs were those again? Sorry tape recorder, I don’t do any.”

**“The rut drug lab? Where did it go,”** she states.

“Don’t know. Don’t care. Not my problem.”

**“Answer!”**

“Yelling isn’t going to get you anywhere.”

**“It’s a drug of nothing but death and heartbreak. Tell me where it is!”**

“There’s nothing you can do to make me talk. You already know a bit about me. You should know. We birds stick together and don’t rat each other out.”

**“So it was the Avarius behind this.”**

“Ha, hardly, you honestly believe that do you? How sad.”

Suddenly text appears before MQ-279’s hud, informing her what question she should now ask. She reads it, trying to resist but the desire to obey the company is too great, **“How did you know I was going to be there?”**

“I was told. What a stupid question.”

**“By whom?”**

“That was even stupid of you to ask. You’d think I’d tell you?”

MQ-279’s claws twitch, panting, taking a deep breath, slowly releasing it, feeling the delightful gas fill her lungs, calming her, pleasing her, kept on the edge, like a toy on the verge of climax, obedience to the company was everything, **“Who gave you the anti MQ-unit weaponry.”**

“Bought it at a hunting goods store,” he responds with a chuckle, before he winches in a little bit of pain, MQ-8 moves through the darkness, pacing around the bird slowly, methodically.

**“You will answer our questions,”** she states, bobbing up into anger before the gas calms her down, returning her to a more docile and controllable state.

“You honestly don’t know how to interrogate, do you? Pathetic. You’re better off just killing me for I won’t be speak--” his words are suddenly cut off, there was a loud whistle in the air, the avian’s body twitches unnaturally so, his eyes widening.

MQ-8 steps out from the shadows from behind him, her blue glow of her dark metal body, stepping toward the avian as he says, “You’ll be saying a lot. You’ll say what I want you to say. Killing you is easy. But we can ruin your life before we do.”

The heavily synthetically enhanced sergal stands beside him, the avian’s eyes looking in her direction, his body jerks suddenly, “You bitch, what did you do?” Artemis asks.

MQ-8 head motions for MQ-279 to step in the light.

“**Affirmative,**” she says doing so, standing face to face with the avian, noticing that several of the other sergal’s tail blades are noticeably missing.

Artemis then twitches again, gasping, his form quivering a little, “I’m puppeting your body. I could do anything I want with you, then remove the blade in the back of your head, the one keeping you alive, to just... end you. You are going to answer this unit’s questions, starting with the rut drug. Everything you know about it... *now.*”

MQ-279 looks to MQ-8, who nods to her, Artemis saying, “I grew up in the slums. I’ve seen what that drug can do. It’s important to the company that we shut down their operations. The other items we can find out after.”

MQ-279 feels a surge of delight within her, nodding, “**Thank you MQ-8,**” she says, focus returning to the bird, “**Where did they take their operations?**”

Artemis tenses, twitches, “Y-you took over my body.”

His body twitches again, writhing in pain, “Yes,” he says.

His form twitches once again like an electrical jolt is going through him, “You bitch!”

“**Answer my question,**” says MQ-279.

Artemis’ body jerks, “Answer her questions, or I’ll give your precious mafia a terrible name, and they won’t only blame you but your family and loved ones. And you know what that would mean for you. And there will be no denying it, after all... you will be the one who did it.”

The avian’s eyes widen, body jerking, taking a deep breath, wincing in the pain, feeling the trickle of blood down his backside, the blades aching along his back, each twitch reinforces the knowledge of just where the blades are, “Its creepy to have someone else to use my body to talk,” he states, clearing his throat, coughing a little, “I don’t know where they took their operation.”

“**Lies!**”

MQ-8 forces uses his body to respond, “He’s telling the truth. I can read his body and I can tell when he lies. But I can’t force him to speak the truth.”

“Quit doing that!” he exclaims, wincing, tugging at the constraints, “I hunted people but never used people like flesh puppets. What is wrong with you people.”

“**Tell us what you do know.**”

“Or we’ll be ruining your reputation, and so much more... using *you,*” MQ-8 says through him.

A shudder runs through him, feet clenching, then relaxing, “Your information network is deplorable. The fact you don’t know Harris Thumperfoot is the major player behind the rut drug in this country.”

MQ-279 twitches, “**Harris Thumperfoot the conglomerate banker?**”

“Bingo.”

She looks at MQ-8, “**Is that true?**”

She nods to her, the green sergal turning her attention back, “**What about my arrival to the former drug base?**”

He sighs, “I don’t know who. I was just given the information when I was hired. These are often anonymous contracts. They knew I was a hunter though.”

“**Why do you say that?**”

“Because they told me it would be one of the best hunts of my life. And they weren’t wrong. The synthetic enhancements are fascinating, and the equipment given to me and the instructions on how to use them was wonderfully helpful. But whoever they are? I don’t know and have no way of knowing. That’s all I have.”

“**Is that true MQ-8?**” she asks, looking to her, hoping deep down there is more to this, but then the blue drone sergal nods, “**Damn.**”

“Life doesn’t work like a novel sweetheart. You were a good hunt. At least it was a fellow hunter who got me,” he smirks, looking over to MQ-8, “I have no other information and you know it. End this charade.”

“**I am no hunter like you,**” she responds, taking a step back into the shadows.

The bird’s body twitches, “We will end this, but not the way you think,” he says, eyes widening, body not given back to him as he’s forced to tilt his head up looking at a hypnotic screen. White noise fills the room, MQ-8 walks beside MQ-279, separate metal conversion spheres pop into the room from the floor, swirling around the avian.

*“He’s already gotten a heavy dose of the gas, that relaxes and arouses him. He should fall to hypnosis quickly,”* MQ-279 thinks, not even thinking about the implications of her own thoughts as the pleasure of serving the company fills her.

The avian is unable to look away from the screen, he tries to close his eyes, but MQ-8 simply forces them open again, the swirls and white noise lulling him into a deep hypnotic trance after several minutes, “**Relax. Keep looking at the screen. Obey the company,**” a cold synthetic hypnotic voice fills the room.

The two sergal drones, watch as the process begins, the transformation process converting feathers into white metal armor plates around his chest. His wing arms, becoming bladed feathers, his yellow claws start to become covered in white metal with golden highlights. The same circles that project the capturing rubber are grafted into his hand while his claws themselves are twisted and changed to a greater degree than MQ-279 had done to her. Distinct hands are turned into winged hands, becoming part of a full-bodied wing design.

Artemis is drawn deeper into the hypnotic trance, the spheres moving along his back, spires growing from the back, tubes snaking along the underside of his head, the bottom half of the white metal drone hood starts to take shape. Tears fill his eyes, the last of his resistance as MQ-8 keeps him alive and in place, as more armor plates cover along his chest. He shudders, gasping, heart twisted and converted, a moment of ‘death’ overcoming him as his heart is turned

into a glowing golden power core that powers the rest of his future systems. Hollow bones converted and twisted, the metal plates being lodged into his form, becoming impossible to remove between bird and machine. The MQ drones iconic back spires growing out of his back, built by the nanites that flow to that area, that hang heavy in the air, combining into exactly what is needed.

MQ-279 watches with some kind of pleasing satisfaction, thinking, *“Turning criminal scum into something better. He’ll be more useful serving the company. And together perhaps we can stop the rut drug production. But Mr. Harris Thumperfoot won’t be easy. I can only hope the company will allow me to continue. It will be good for the company to put an end to him and his underhanded operations.”*

There was a metallic clatter to the floor. The daggers from MQ-8’s tail that she used to puppet control Artemis are forced out of his body, the nanites repair the severed spinal cord connections that were only kept in place by the specialized daggers that the blue sergal drone is known for.

MQ-8 looks at them on the ground covered in blood, then looks back to the avian, watching as his upper thighs are covered in a thin metallic armor plating, his body becoming ‘protected’ but at the same time remaining light, and aloof.

The spheres move down to his crotch, arousal exposed for the world to see but not for long. Metal wires grow and wrap around his length, teasing it, vibrating it, further raising his pleasure, breaking down his will more. Steadily its taken behind a metal crotch plate, the white smooth metal hiding away his eagerness that twitches in delight, perhaps never to get released again. His rear filled and his prostate abused for the same purpose of providing the reward for thinking the way the company wants him to think. To do what the company wants him to do. To train him like a dog wanting a reward.

Artemis’ eyes are glazed over, enthralled by the spirals in the center of the screen there was nothing left for him to do but to slowly give in. The most painful parts of the transformation already having taken place when he was unable to control his own body. Now he’s pulled ever deeper into the words whispering into their ear, echoing into their mind.

**“Obey the company.”**

**“Serve the company.”**

**“The company knows what’s best.”**

**“I am a company asset.”**

**“I exist for the company,”** the thoughts growing within him, his eyelids are cut away, unable to blink a protective layer put over them, a golden dome steadily melds over his head, hiding the avian’s face from the rest of the world. Only 1/3rd of the bird’s original feathers are left untouched and visible, his feet, now white metal clawed, ready to easily grip onto anything with dreadful force.

MQ-279 watches with delight, eagerness, sensing their value to the company rising by having achieved something despite the circumstances. Wonderful gas flows into her mouth, breathing in nice and deep, body shivering pleasantly, the outline of Artemis shifting from the



red of an enemy earlier, to a white neutral to a soft blue, as his mind is broken, body remade into what the company needs him to be.

Eventually his transformation is complete, body glistening, shiny new, ready to be of service, he speaks, voice converted into a monotone synthetic just like MQ-279's, **"MQ-280, ready to be of service to the company."** There is a moment of silence, the avian nods, **"Affirmative."**

MQ-279 suddenly gets orders within her HUD, "Escort MQ-280 to the charge pods, and monitor him while diagnostics are run on him."

**"Affirmative,"** she responds, escorting the new MQ unit through the hallways, heading straight toward the main labs, **"You will be an excellent addition to the company,"** she says.

**"Affirmative. I better understand my purpose. My skills will be valuable for the company. If my hunt with you is any indication... there will be plenty more wonderful hunts to sharpen and hone my skills on,"** he responds, letting out a synthetic chirp.

MQ-279 nods, walking beside him, their steps echoing down the hallway, **"My skills are invaluable to the company. I know yours are too. We are left with many mysteries to solve, but putting an end to the rut drug will buy us much needed goodwill for the government."**

**"So does money,"** he chuckles.

**"S. Tech words to better the world. And we will through not just money but action. That is what the company has taught me. I serve the company. I am one with the company. I obey the company,"** she responds feeling a rush of pleasure.

**"Affirmative. My family was the mafia. But now I find it to be at home here, with S. Tech. No need for lies, or deceit. No need to worry if those I work with are there to kill me, betray me, rat me out. Now I know my place, and where I lie. And I was telling the truth. You were an excellent hunter. I prepared the traps in advance as a rare contingency, I never expected you to make it to me. I was overconfident."**

**"You were skilled. I took a heavy beating. If it wasn't for the company, I would have perished,"** she says, walking into the labs, the scientists taking note of the new unit, but one shark remarks.

**"A-another one already? T-they aren't cheap to make."**

**"We'll make returns on the investment,"** says MQ-280, moving past her, turning his attention to MQ-279, **"Your enhancements only leveled the playing field with the tools at my disposal. One hit in your armored body would have been the end of you."**

**"I know, but the distance from where I was and you made it extremely difficult, yet you managed to blow off one of my spires."**

**"I was aiming for your torso, but at such a great distance, it makes landing a shot difficult, and I never fired the weapon before till then,"** he explains, approaching the pods.

MQ-279 and MQ-280 both get orders to charge in the nearby pods till further notice.

**"Affirmative,"** they respond, turning around, stepping back into the alcoves.

MQ-280 says, before he relaxes into an idle state, **“Given my experience with you, and seeing your skill MQ-279. You have entrapped me. None other has gotten me like you. I willingly serve the company with you.”**

**“I don’t like what you did, but you will pay off your debt to society. But I will be pleased to work with you to put an end to the rut drug once and for all,”** she says, relaxing in her pod. Both to have diagnostics run over them, the new unit, and one, one mission in. Both eager to serve the company, and they will be put to great effect to further S. Tech’s interests...