

MASS EFFECT: AGE OF DECADENCE

By Zaftig Industries

CW: Overeating, mild weight gain, corruption, burps, burp kink, fat asari in seductively tight clothing.

PART 1: THE SECRET



Shiza W'Lode was on the trail of something big. She felt it in her bones--that tingling feeling, the almost prescient feeling that a major discovery was just beyond the horizon, just around the next corner.

Patience had never been Shiza's strong suit. Still enjoying the Maiden stage of her long lifespan, she was a mere hundred and fifty-one years old, but she had crammed a lot of living into that time. She'd worked as a research assistant on Thessia, a bartender on Earth, and even a diplomatic intern on the Citadel. Beneath her flighty nature and short attention span, however, there was a brilliant intellect at work. She'd accumulated several degrees in her brief career, and was already working on a doctorate thesis: "Cultural Impacts of Discovering the Citadel." Like most things in life, it was a work in progress.

Her doctorate research had taken her from the gleaming halls of Hyetania, to the slums of Omega, and beyond. And now, she'd come to Illium, following a trail of information that seemed to have a mysterious hole at its center.

Something was off, in the asari's historical records, right around the discovery of the Citadel--the enormous space station built by Protheans, near the center of the Milky Way galaxy. Shiza had expected the research to be easy, cut-and-dry, but she was running into problems: Dates and decades didn't line up. Prominent figures of the pre-Citadel age suddenly vanished, in the post-Citadel records.

At first, Shiza had thought this was due to the confusion of the time--after all, that era of asari history was fraught with confusion and chaos. Between frantically negotiating with Salarians and struggling to puzzle out the mystery of the Citadel, maybe Thessia's historians had

let a few details slip. But as the inconsistencies mounted, Shiza began to suspect something stranger was at work here--something that went beyond mere sloppy record-keeping.

And then her mother, who she'd shared her research with, disappeared. And she'd begun to suspect a conspiracy.

Her mother had been a renowned journalist, sharing a passion for research and the truth with her daughter. After reading Shiza's research, she'd gone out into the galaxy to gather more intel... and vanished. Leaving Shiza to pick up the pieces.

It was time to get out of the library, and start asking questions.

After two thousand years of history, few asari survived from the original period of the Citadel discovery, so there was no one for Shiza to interview, no leads to chase down--at least, no one who had been there. But, asari had long memories, and a few Matriarch historians remained who were specialists on that era. Oddly, most of these had disappeared or retired to obscurity over the years... a fact Shiza found suspicious, and very familiar. Had her mother somehow angered the controllers of this conspiracy, this blackout? Had the vanished researchers done the same?

Luckily, a few names survived on the old scholar rolls, from that time long ago. One of the Citadel Age historians was a Matriarch named Aethyta, who had worked briefly as an archivist for the Council, way back before the Rachni Wars. After a brief but promising career in politics, Aethyta had dropped off the map--there was nothing in the Citadel records about her past that point, just a few scraps of her old college theses. So Shiza began to dig.

Her findings led her to Illium, a corporate-owned asari planet. Across the galaxy, it was renowned as a famous den of backdoor dealings. Nearly anything could be bought and sold on Illium--including, to Shiza's disgust, other asari. Indentured servitude was not ubiquitous on Illium

Recent records indicated Aethyta lived near the spaceport--or at least, someone matching her description did. Truth be told, this was a threadbare lead. Shyza had briefly considered not going, maybe writing her research article on something else. But her curiosity could not be suppressed: she needed answers. Why were there so few records about the Citadel's discovery, and the asari cultural response to that discovery?

It made no sense. The Citadel had been a massive find, a paradigm shift for the asari as a species. With a discovery *that* big, there should have been countless cultural artifacts surrounding it--books, documentaries, Holonet records. The arrival of asari on the Citadel should

have been commemorated with monuments and festivals, maybe even revered as part of the religious rites of Justicars.

And yet... there was nothing.

A gaping hole in the paper trail, as if a deep-space singularity had gobbled up all the information. She was compelled to fill that gap, solve that puzzle... because if she did, she might find out why it existed in the first place. Why the biggest event in asari history was a cultural dead-zone.

All she had to do was navigate the biggest hive of deception and cruelty in all of the asari Republic.

Steeling herself as she got off the shuttle, Shiza inhaled the strange new sights, smells and sounds of Ilium's heavily populated surface. Skyscrapers towered over the landscape, cast in gold by the rays of Ilium's oversized sun. Like many asari settlements, Ilium seemed a bastion of sophistication and technology... but appearances could be deceiving.

Putting her reservations aside, Shiza hailed a taxi for the Eternity Lounge. The Lounge was a place of ill repute, an open-air bar where shady stock-traders and pharmaceutical executives talked shop and sipped expensive drinks. In other words, it was just the right place to meet an informant. Passing through the crowd, she cozied up to the bar, repeatedly checking her omni-tool. Yes, this was the place... but how could she draw her mysterious .

“Hey. You. What're you having?”

The gravelly voice of the bartender shook Shiza out of her reverie. Glancing up from her omni-tool's research notes, Shiza looked up to see a stern-faced Matriarch nodding at her from the end of the bar. The asari's form-fitting, dark clothing was scuffed with the wear and tear of a hard day's work.

“Uh... Actually, I was wondering if you'd seen someone... Do you know a Matriarch named Aethyta?”

“Who's asking?”

The Matriarch's eyes danced up and down Shiza's slim form, and the young asari shivered as she felt like a piece of meat being dangled in front of an alpha Varren. She'd been checked out by other asari, of course--but never so *openly*. It was unnerving.

“I... I’m Shiza W’Lode. I wanted to interview Aethyta for... um, for a research article I’m working on.”

The Matriarch sighed, and glanced around--Shiza was her only customer at the moment, it seemed--and leaned against the bar, her body language relaxing.

“Well, aren’t you just a curious little thing. I could charge you for the intel, but it doesn’t look like you’ve got many credits to spare... I’m Aethyta. What d’you want?”

Shiza perked up immediately, and scrambled for her omni-tool, preparing to take notes. She hadn’t expected to find her mystery scholar so quickly!

“Uh... You worked in the Archives of Thessia for a while, right? And as an assistant professor of history, on Hyetiana?”

Aethyta raised an eyebrow, her expression hardening.

“You’ve certainly done your homework. I haven’t stepped foot on those worlds for centuries. How’d you find that out?”

Shiza swallowed, fumbling with her tool--she couldn’t seem to open the notes app. Goddess, this was going *terribly!* If she alienated her only source of information on the “Dark Years,” her whole mission would fall apart.

“Like you said. I do my homework. Your name shows up in a few records--a few research papers. But... Then you quit academia for good, and joined up with the Commandos, fighting the Krogan Rebellions. Right?”

Aethyta crossed her arms, impressed.

“Sounds like you could recite my entire life story for me. If you know so much about me already, what’s left to know? Why come all the way out here?”

Shiza took a deep breath.

Here goes nothing...

“I want to know why there’s a gap in Thessia’s records, around the discovery of the Citadel. Somebody’s hiding something--and I think *you* know why. Your research centered around cults and religions, heretics who worshipped the Protheans and the Citadel--but after a

few papers on them, you stopped. And you ran off to fight in the Rebellions. What were you running from? What spooked you bad enough to send you to the front-lines?”

Aethyta’s mouth opened... and then she leaned in, glancing around to make sure those lingering outside the bar couldn’t hear.

“Kid. You’re messing with things you don’t understand. Are you sure you wanna go down this road? Because... Trust me, you won’t like what you find.”

Shiza steeled herself, looking the Matriarch in the eye.

“My mother was a journalist working for the Thessian Chronicle, and she was drummed out of a job, because she tried to expose inside trading by members of the Council. I had to pay for my tuition, using stripper credits... I supported Mom and my sister for years. We were ostracized because my mother wanted to be truthful with the public. Because she believed the truth *matters*. And now that I’ve shared this research with her... She’s gone. I want to know why.”

Shiza’s jaw tightened as she recalled the painful memories.

“Whether I like the truth or not, that part doesn’t matter. I need to find it.”

Aethyta rubbed her temples.

“Damn, kid... Look, I’m sorry about your mom. But this isn’t something we can discuss here. Meet me at the warehouse, behind the stock exchange, tonight. I’ll tell you what you want to know. And... Shiza, was it?”

“Yes?”

“Don’t be late.”



Shiza shivered in the cold of the storage facility, flinching every time she heard a robotic arm shift a package somewhere in the building. The place was staffed entirely by ‘bots--it wasn’t

exactly made to be comfortable, for living beings. There was frost on the windows, and the whole warehouse was dark and gloomy, shadows filling every corner.

Aethyta arrived on time, just like she'd said--and she brought company.

An asari diplomat in a Consort's dress followed Aethyta out of the darkness. The woman was short, a full head shorter than Shiza... but she more than made up for that, in *width*.

Purple-skinned and rosy-cheeked, she wore a close-fitting dress made of alternating white and black nano-fabrics. The dress was stretched to its limit by an enormous, bulging belly, broad hefty hips, and an impressive bust, which threatened to draw Shiza's eye every time it jiggled and quivered. She had to be over three hundred standard Citadel pounds, her bulky frame wobbling as she approached in a way that simultaneously fascinated and shocked Shiza.

The woman looked Matriarch age. But unlike Aethyta, she wore her years with grace. Her round, freckled cheeks and soft double chin gave her an ethereal, cherubic look. Her eyes were watchful, full of quiet wisdom.

Aethyta cleared her throat, introducing the newcomer.

"Shiza, this is Consort Makima L'fete. I met her when I was digging into the old Citadel records. She showed me... well, the truth. To be honest, she saved my life--if I'd kept digging, I might not be standing here today."

Shiza bowed to Makima, who returned the gesture... with difficulty, as her massive belly stopped her from bending over very far.

Shiza was trying not to judge the asari by her size, but it did beg certain questions--how had she gotten a Consort position, looking like *that*? For that matter, how had she gotten so *huge* in the first place? Obesity was mostly a thing of the past, in asari society--her people were generally an active, fitness-loving species, not inclined to sit on the couch and eat, like humans or Volus might do in their spare time.

Shiza sighed, trying to figure out where to begin.

"Consort. Why all this secrecy? What's so dangerous that we have to meet like this? What's at stake here--military secrets, maybe espionage? Why the cloak-and-dagger routine?"

Makima and Aethyta shared a significant glance.

“It is... difficult to explain,” said Makima, fidgeting.

“When she told me,” said Aethyta, “I didn’t believe her. I asked for proof. So she showed me... through a Meld. Makima, could you do that? For Shiza?”

Shiza blushed, suddenly feeling put on the spot.

“Woah, hold on. I’ve never actually... I haven’t Melded with anyone. At least not since I left the homeworld...”

Makima approached her, the edge of her sizeable gut nearly pressing against Shiza’s waist as she reached out, cupping Shiza’s cheeks. The woman’s hands were soft and plump, but she had a surprisingly firm grip.

“It’s okay... As a Consort, I’m an expert at melding. We don’t need to merge completely--I can simply show you what you need to know. Alright?”

Still nervous, Shiza nodded. She was so close to *real* answers, she felt she couldn’t turn back now.

“Okay. Let’s do it.”

Makima nodded, and her eyes went dark, body thrumming with biotic energy.

“Embrace eternity...”

Shiza felt their senses merging, a tingling passing between them... and suddenly she was looking at *herself*, through Makima’s eyes.

And then she was falling, falling through a dark void crackling with biotic sparks... an entire life flashed in front of her, moments that were not her own... She’d heard of this technique. Makima was taking her to some point in the past, a memory buried deep within her psyche, beneath a long, long lifetime of experience.

As she fell, moments of Makima’s life flickering past her at the speed of thought, Shiza couldn’t help but be afraid. There was something dark, at the bottom of this rabbit-hole... Something dangerous.

She only hoped she was ready for it.



“By the Goddess... We’ve done it. Project Beacon is complete! The Citadel is powering up!”

Across the bridge of the asari research vesse *Benevolent Intent*, there were cheers of exultation. Dozens of asari scientists--all exhausted from weeks of work--rejoiced as the Citadel came to life below them, its empty buildings and streets lighting up.

Atmosphere condensers churned and ancient engines hummed to life. Once dusty and abandoned, the Citadel was now active... and fit for asari habitation. Even now, the particle shields of the station’s inner “shell” were collecting oxygen and nitrogen from the atmosphere generators, making the interior almost a planet in its own right.

Makima was just as joyful as the rest of her peers--she had been working within the Keeper Initiative, the group within Project Stellar Lift responsible for studying the Citadel’s odd, insect-like inhabitants.

Getting the Keepers to awaken from dormancy and return to their duties had been difficult, but now that it was complete, the Citadel no longer needed constant influxes of power and asari workers--it was self-sustaining once again, just as it had been designed, hundreds of thousands of years ago.

Someone threw an arm over her shoulder, offering her a bottle of Thessian champagne. It was Supervisor Tevura--her friend and superior, and head of the Keeper project.

“Hey there, why so glum? Have a drink, Makima! You’ve earned it. All of us have!”

Makima adjusted her research goggles, laughing as Tevura swigged straight from the bottle. Tevura was usually very uptight--it was surprising to see her let loose, like this.

“I, um. I don’t really drink much...”

“Oh, come on now--the mission is complete, we can finally *relax!* Have a glass.”

Tevura grabbed a champagne flute from a passing researcher who was handing them out, pouring Makima an overflowing cup.

“If we work hard, we should play hard, right? Besides, the new project starts tomorrow--we’ve been assigned to Life Support. We’re going to be *plenty* busy, once the Citadel’s streets start filling up with asari!”

Makima shrugged, tossing her lab coat over a nearby chair and sipping from the glass.

Maybe she *should* have a few drinks... Just to be polite. They deserved to have a little fun--after all, they were going to be in the history books. The asari team responsible for ushering in a new era of galactic politics, science, exploration... More than just a simple space station or port, the Prothean stronghold of the Citadel would become a place for new science, new learning, the advancement of culture. And Makima had helped to make it happen.

After a few glasses of Thessian booze, she was soon feeling “the blessing of the Goddess,” as the saying went. The blood of a spritely young Maiden asari pounded in her veins, she felt her passions stir as music pulsed around them... and Tevura got up to dance on a nearby table, to the approving hoots and whoops of the more drunken researchers.

Someone had put on a recent Omega album--”Meld Up My Body,” by the Azurians. The lighting was low, the mood relaxed... even a little romantic.

Makima saw several of her peers kissing in dark corners, slender hands exploring each others’ bodies. The sight made her blush... But then again, was it really so unexpected? They’d all been cooped up on this ship for *months*... She couldn’t blame people for letting off a little steam.

And Makima wasn’t immune to such urges--she could feel the call of long-buried lusts burning inside her, rising to the surface.

When Tevura clambered off the table, drunkenly staggering towards the impromptu bar they’d constructed, Makima rose and joined her, “accidentally” letting her hand fall on Tevura’s hip as she fumbled for a bottle.

“Oh, excuse me,” purred Makima, leaning on her superior--her curvaceous, shapely, well-toned superior--and laying a hand on her shoulder.

“I may have had a few true... *Too* many glasses. How I wish I had a big, strong asari girlfriend to carry me home, in my inebriated state...”

Tevura's eyes flashed, picking up immediately on Makima's clumsy flirting. She slipped an arm around Makima, dark-blue lips parting as she leaned in to whisper in Makima's ear.

“If by ‘carr you home’ you mean ‘carry you to my chambers,’ that can certainly be arranged...”

A short time later they were in bed together, a tangle of clothes hurled into the far corners of the room, caught in a passionate embrace together. Makima liked to think of herself as a competent lover, but Tevura showed her the true meaning of pleasure that night--teasing and enticing her in strange, exotic new ways. Melding with her at the moments of greatest ecstasy, so that they could drink deeply of each other's thoughts and sensations.

The next morning brought a hangover, but the fun wasn't quite over yet--Makima found a message waiting on her omni-tool, when she got back to her bunk.

I had a wonderful time, last night... Maybe drinks next weekend? You really bring out the party girl in me, what can I say.

-- Tevura.

Flattered by her superior's attention, Makima found herself enthusiastically agreeing... And just like that, their courtship had begun.

In a better galaxy, a less insane galaxy, maybe they might have retired happily together. Maybe Tevura wouldn't have changed... maybe darkness wouldn't have fallen over their love. But as it was, their passion was soon to be thrown off course... twisted and perverted, by a terrible force neither of them could imagine.

A force, even now, quietly slumbering in the depths of the Citadel...



The next few weeks were a whirlwind of hard work, making sure every Keeper colony and network was fully restored. Life support was the next task on Makima's list, now that the Citadel had been brought online. She'd been assigned to work with Tevura on the food and oxygen systems of the Citadel, making sure everything was clean and properly functioning.

This job took them into the darkest, most secluded depths of the Citadel... and gave them *ample* time alone together. This was how Makima found herself pinned against a wall by her lover, in the tunnels below the streets of the Citadel, their equipment scattered all around, forgotten.

“Mmm... Tevura, s-stop, we’ve got to get back to *work*...”

“Oh yeah? Why the hurry, little one? I think I can find plenty of work to do, right here...”

Tevura was a full half-head taller than Makima, and had taken on the more dominant role in their relationship almost immediately, teasing and tormenting Makima and ravishing her at every opportunity. Makima certainly enjoyed the attention--back on the homeworld, she’d been nothing but a lonely bookworm, but out here she’d found a lover who *clearly* couldn’t get enough of her. It was flattering... if a little intimidating. And *very* distracting.

Makima bit back a moan as Tevura’s lips traced up the inside of her neck, the older asari’s kisses drawing a line from her clavicle to the bottom of her chin. The maiden asari squirmed with delight as Tevura’s hands explored her, delving under her form-fitting environment suit...

In their fumbling passion, the two of them fell sideways onto an unsteady part of the tunnel wall--and it promptly collapsed, dumping the pair into an eerie, green-lit room full of strange tubes and machinery.

“*Oof!*”

“Ow! Shit, sorry--I didn’t mean to--”

“It’s okay, I’m fine! Just a little dusty...”

Makima stood, helping her partner up, and dusted herself off. Glancing around, she noticed she couldn’t even see the far walls of the chamber they were in--this place was enormous. Its features simply stretched away into shadow on all sides, a vast emptiness that--according to their scans--should not have been here at all.

On the Citadel’s records, this area was supposed to be a mass of conduits, not hollow and filled with... stuff. Makima saw peculiar, cylindrical containers scattered throughout the huge space, difficult to make out in the gloom.

“What is this place? This isn’t on the maps...”

“Maybe some kind of storage facility?”

Tevura frowned, examining the strange canisters, wiping the dust off one of them.

“Prothean runes... I can't quite make them out. Something about sustenance... Makima, come take a look. You're better at deciphering syntax than I am.”

Makima leaned over the strange metal object, peering at the glyphs etched in its surface.

“Something about... ‘Food, sufficient to sustain... Many worlds.’ And then there's a set of instructions.”

Always curious, she began pressing the runes according to the instructions, each rune lighting up as she did so. Tevura stepped back as the whole room began to hum and churn around them.

“Woah, maybe don't do that! It's thousands of years old, we have no idea what that machine will do.”

“Don't worry. I've got this--I've been working with systems like these for years.”

The young engineer crouched beside the cylinder, watching in fascination as it hummed, rattled and pulsed with strange lights. Finally, a slot opened at the bottom... and a small plate with strange gelatin on it popped out, the gelatin wobbling as Makima picked it up.

“This is... a Prothean dish. Some kind of protein substitute, for their worker castes--I've read about it. And this machine... this is something they refer to as a ‘Cibus Drive’ in the old tablets. A machine that can generate food on command, by converting local anti-matter into matter. I always assumed this technology was lost--we've never found a trace of it, on any Prothean world. And here... Dozens of Drives! It's a treasure trove!”

Tevura took the dish, examining it.

“Anti-matter? But... If they could generate food anywhere, doesn't that mean...”

Makima nodded slowly, staring around in wonder at the countless cylinders around them.

“They were truly a *post-scarcity* society. The Protheans were a Type Two civilization, maybe even Type Three! This is revolutionary--we have to tell the research team!!”

“Hold on.” Tevura held up a hand. “If they can make *any* food on command... do you think they could make asari foods?”

Makima pulled up some research logs on her omni-tool, delving into old texts and translations.

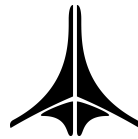
“Theoretically, it’s possible, yes...”

Tevura put a hand on Makima’s shoulder.

“Makima, do you realize what this means? If these things work... They could erase food scarcity across the *galaxy*. This isn’t just an archeological find--with these drives, our people would be free from want, from need, *forever!* No more dependence on supply lines, to colonize our planets... The applications are infinite!”

Makima felt the weight of history settling on her shoulders.

“Well then, we’ve got a lot of work to do. Go grab my equipment--let’s get these Drives up and running!”



Shiza, riding inside Makima’s consciousness, watched the days and weeks slide by in a colorful blur, Makima and Tevura tinkering with the machines, testing them... Then she heard Makima’s voice in her mind: quiet, tinged with sadness.

“We thought the Drives would be our salvation. The harbingers of a new age for the asari, a tool to erase inequality, bring peace to the stars. How wrong we were...”

Shiza saw the pair, sweaty and disheveled from hard work, sitting in front of a modified Cibus Drive, holding hands. The machine buzzed and hummed... and dispensed a humble asari wheat-cake, a meal known as “Janiri cake” in reference to the asari deity of harvests. A simple gift—but even Shiza, an amateur techie, could tell how valuable the tiny offering was. The food had been generated from molecular conversion and antimatter—a literal miracle, making something out of nothing.

Makima's voice filled with grief as she continued.

“I was so young, back then. So innocent. I believed in Tevura... I loved her with all my heart, even though she could be... Excessive, sometime. I always believed in our mission. I had no idea the kind of greed and selfishness she was capable of...”

In the hazy memory, Shiza saw Tevura take a bite of the steaming cake... and nod, swallowing. By the look on her face, the food wasn't just good--it was *delicious*. Tevura gobbled down half the cake before finally sharing with her partner, and Makima seemed just as delighted, shoveling handfuls of it into her mouth in an uncharacteristically greedy fashion. After discussing the molecular build of the food, the two turned back to the machine... and keyed in the sequence to generate another cake.

And another. And another...

Shiza heard Makima sigh woefully, the ancient asari's mind filling with a sense of grief.

“We were such fools... Accepting a gift from the gods, without checking the fine print. We had no idea what kind of evil we'd unleashed...”



The next memory, Shiza saw was a resplendent gala aboard the *Benevolent Intent*. asari diplomats, politicians, and senior officials mingled with the *Intent's* research team, all of them looked excited and full of pride. A buzz of excitement passed through the crowd, as Tevura stepped up to a large, white podium.

Camera drones buzzed around her, snapping photos and broadcasting her image onto countless screens throughout the ship.

Shiza saw Makima in the back of the crowd, looking nervous. The young asari was gazing worshipfully up at her lover--this was clearly a big night for both of them.

But... Something was off, about both of them. Up on the stage, Tevura looked *different*, after weeks of “testing” the Cibus Drives. To put it bluntly, she'd gained weight.

The tall, stately asari woman had grown wider in the hips, and her sleek, toned midsection had softened considerably. Her shoulders, arms and cheeks were softer, well-fed. She wasn't *fat*, not quite, but she was noticeably plump--especially compared to all the asari around her.

Makima glanced at her own reflection, in a nearby chrome bulkhead--and Shiza felt her surprise as the young asari realized she, too, had grown soft and plump. But unlike the wide-hipped, hourglass-shaped Tevura, Makima had put on weight in the middle, a tubby potbelly sagging off her midsection.

Memories of "testing" the Drives flooded through her--bite after bite, meal after meal. Tevura had insisted they try everything... test every possible recipe... and the inevitable results had come home to roost, in the end.

Up on the podium, Tevura began her speech, spreading a pair of plump arms beneath the spotlights.

"My fellow scientists... Council affiliates... Planetary governors... Thank you all for coming. Our team has some big news to share with you. We've made a huge discovery on the Citadel, something that will change the foundation of our society, lead us into a new age of prosperity!"

Makima listened with mounting concern, as her boss and lover described the Cibus Drives in detail--emphasizing their usefulness in commerce, colonization efforts, and trade with the Salaris, a recently discovered sentient species on the galaxy's outer rim.

As murmurs passed through the room, Tevura had a Cibus Drive brought onstage... and used it to generate a bottle of fine Thessian wine, pouring herself a glass and sipping from it to the astonishment of the onlookers.

After fielding questions from the press, Tevura retired to her quarters. Fighting off questions from curious reporters and asari scientists alike, Makima hurried off the ship's bridge and followed her lover there, knocking on the door.

"Come on, open up..."

If she was honest with herself... Makima was worried about Tevura. The older asari had been distant in the past few days, secretive... and like Makima, she'd been indulging constantly in Cibus Drive food, claiming it was all "for the good of science."

Possibilities raced through Makima's mind. What if Tevura had been withdrawn and quiet because of an illness, or some kind of reaction to the food? They hadn't fully analyzed the structure of the antimatter drives--what if the material had reacted badly with Tevura's cells, somehow? There had been traces of Element Zero in the scans, after all...

But when she entered the program director's quarters, she found Tevura happy and healthy... although her cabin's cleanliness left a little to be desired.

Nearly every open surface in Tevura's room was covered by empty or half-empty plates and glasses, bottles of Thessian wine crowding for space with freshly "printed" delicacies gifted to her by the Drives.

Tevura herself lay on the bed--the same humble crewman's cot she and Makima had cuddled on, dozens of times. But now it was covered with empty plates, asari Republic credit chits, and empty champagne bottles. Tevura lounged against silken pillows, watching footage of her own speech from earlier on a holoscreen over the bed as she fished pieces of candy from a silver bowl, popping it into her mouth.

"Oh, hey, Makima." She belched softly, wiping her mouth. "*Urrrp*... 'Scuze me. It's good to see you, babe. That was pretty stressful, huh? I think it went well, though... Get your ass over here, we should 'celebrate' together..."

Makima gestured at the mess all over the room.

"Tevura... What is all this?"

The drunken asari looked up from her slovenly nest, raising an eyebrow.

"Just testing the Drive's production limits, y'know, so we can accrue more--*urrrp*--data on that. Want some snacks?"

Makima opened her mouth to say 'no'... and then her stomach, always the traitor, audibly growled under her dress. She clutched at it, embarrassed--she'd just eaten twenty minutes ago. How could she be hungry?

"Uh, sure, I could have... maybe a bite or two..."

Before long, she was lounging on Tevura's couch, shoveling candy into her mouth by the handful. She wanted to stop, but she was very nervous tonight, and being nervous apparently

made her ravenous. It wasn't until she'd emptied the entire bowl that she asked Tevura the big question, the one she'd come here to ask.

“Where have you been the past few days? I was worried sick about you...”

Tevura waved a hand dismissively, her eyes never leaving the screen.

“Preparing for the unveiling, of course--testing the merchandise, reverse-engineering the tech. And I think the results are hard to argue with. What did you think?”

Makima fumbled for words... and the Drive next to her dispensed another bowl of candy. Without thinking, she took it and started eating again, fingers stained with sugary residue.

“The results... *mmlph, glph*... are exactly what I'm worried about. Don't you think this food has been making us a little... slothful? People keep staring at me in the hallways, commenting on my figure...”

Tevura snorted, reaching for a fresh bottle of champagne... and drinking right from the bottle, the alcohol dribbling down her softened chin and into her cleavage.

“Oh, they're just jealous of our new curves. Pay no attention to them--we look great.”

Tevura chuckled, eyeing Makima's bulging midsection.

“At least, *you* certainly do. Prosperity looks good on you, Makima... Come over here, share some of that 'prosperity' with me, huh? I've missed you these past few days...”

Makima hesitated. With her stomach gorged on candy and her mind dizzy from the events of the past few weeks, she couldn't articulate what she was feeling.

A low, buzzing anxiety lurked underneath her exterior--there was something *wrong* about the way Tevura was acting. So slovenly, so sexually aggressive. So unlike the hard-working, adventurous asari Makima had fallen in love with.

But what authority did *she* have to lecture Tevura about laziness? She herself was feeling so swollen, heavy... overfed. If Tevura was being a little lazy, so was Makima--and she'd gained even more weight than her partner.

Still nervous, but hungry for intimacy, Makima pulled off her dress, and crawled into bed with Tevura.

The taller asari purred with satisfaction, pulling her in for a wine-drenched kiss. Makima's back arched under Tevura's questing fingers, as she felt the pull of their mutual passion for the first time in weeks...

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed something odd. Piled into the storage lockers in the corner were a series of luxurious items--a collection of history books, a personal service android in "dormant" mode, a V.I. research assist module. All of them bore floating holographic tags, marking who had sent them. Admiral Hassia, Councilwoman He'fayre ...

Those are some of the richest asari in the galaxy. What's been going on in here?

"Tevura... What is all that stuff?"

"Hmm?"

Pulling her lips away from Makima's, the purple asari glanced over at her collection of luxuries.

"Oh yes, those were personal favors from some new... Friends of mine."

"Friends? What friends?" Then it clicked for her. "Tevura, did you... did you exchange some of our Prothean artifacts... for *bribes*?"

Tevura sat up straight, her stomach bunching into several plump, sweat-slicked purple rolls of fat. She scowled at Makima, setting aside her bottle of champagne.

"Bribes? Don't be childish. The rich and powerful among our society were always going to get their hands on this Protean tech--but right now, I control the distribution. I can roll out the technology slowly, prevent it from disrupting the economy, manufacture duplicates... And if I get a few perks on the side from doing that, what's the harm?"

Makima pulled away from her lover, horrified.

"You just gave away ancient Prothean technology--for *this*? Those Drives were priceless--and maybe dangerous! We still don't know what they're capable of, at full power!"

The older asari crossed her arms, as if Makima's concerns were the whinings of a petulant child.

“I don’t see why this is such a big deal. We’ve done all the hard work of repairing this station--why shouldn’t we reap the fruits of our labors? The plan was always to distribute the Drives, right? I thought we agreed on that....”

“Not like this! Not for cheap thrills and... are those *Ilium cigars*? What the hell, Tevura?”

Makima climbed out of bed. Her plump, dangling stomach wobbled as she began obsessively cleaning up Tevura’s quarters--grabbing piles of dishes and tossing them into the miniature mess-hall, on one end of the room.

“Makima, hold on. Let’s talk this over...”

“We don’t even know the long-term effects of eating this Prothean food! And you just *gave away* the ability to create more of it! If anyone gets hurt, as a result of eating this stuff...”

“We’ve been eating it for weeks with no negative effects,” said Tevura, exasperated. “Except for the high calorie content, it’s harmless!”

Makima rounded on Tevura, shaking a furious finger at her.

“That food *isn’t* harmless--we confirmed it’s got a high amount of Element Zero in it, which could overcharge biotic powers, even lead to personality changes! That’s the very definition of *not harmless!*”

Tevura shrugged.

“So it might enhance our natural abilities... Why is that a problem? If anything, that just makes the Drives even *more* valuable...”

“*Tevura!*”

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry. Alright? Maybe I wasn’t... thinking very straight. It’s been a long few weeks.”

Tevura climbed out of bed, reaching for Makima’s hand and squeezing it.

“But I promise, it wasn’t out of self-interest. I did this for *us*, Makima--for you. No more scraping for official recognition, no more tinkering with Prothean plumbing while our superiors take all the credit for our work. We’re now the number-one experts in post-scarcity technology!

We're going to have book deals, speaking tours--we can finally put down our greasy tools, and live in *luxury* for a change! Don't you realize this is good for us?"

Makima pulled her hand away. In Tevura's eyes, she saw love... but she also saw a frightening, raw ambition. A hunger for glory and riches, that she'd never seen before.

Was this new? Or had that same, blithe arrogance and ambition been under the surface all along, just waiting for a moment to emerge?

Makima gestured at the mess around her.

"Well, it doesn't *feel* good. I think... I need some time. Away from the ship--away from us. And all of... this."

Tevura pulled away, her jaw clenched.

"I *need* you along for this, Makima. You know I can't read Prothean like you--we have to do this together."

Makima sighed, pulling on her dress and picking her omni-tool up off the couch.

"Just... Let me think about it, okay? I need some air. And I need to run more tests. Make sure the food is safe--that we haven't made a mistake. Just give me a few weeks, and for the Goddess' sake, don't touch the rest of the drives, okay? We only have a limited amount, and if we lose them..."

Tevura nodded.

"Of course. I promise--no more back-room deals. Just... Stay in touch, okay?"

Makima's heart fluttered at the sight of her crush looking so defeated. She pulled Tevura's head down for one last kiss, running her hand along the older asari's ample hips.

"I will. And don't *you* go anywhere. Once my tests are done, you and I have some 'catching up' to do."

Tevura's hips pressed against hers, Makima's belly oozing up against the taller asari's broad thighs.

"I like the sound of that..."

“See you in a week--I’ll be down in the life-support decks of the Citadel, if you need me.”

The two kissed again, and Makima departed, satisfied with her lover’s apology.

But as soon as the door closed, Tevura flopped back on the bed, activating her personal Drive. The machine vibrated as it generated a fine Thessian steak, still simmering. Tevura used her omni-tool to cut it and then grabbed the chunks of rich meat with her bare hands, gobbling them down.

“Mmm yes, come to Mama... *Mmf, chmp, gulp. BLLLCH.*”

With easy access to such formerly expensive luxuries, Tevura felt like a queen... a queen set on expanding her empire. Dialling a number on her omni-tool, she wiped sauce off her lips, droplets of it landing on her plump belly.

“Hey, Braxa? Yeah, this is Tevura. The next shipment of Drives will be on schedule... Just make sure that Red Sand shows up on time, okay? I’ve been dry all day, and it sucks.”

Outside in the hallway, Makima closed her omnitool, her face grim. She’d been eavesdropping using a special audio program... Because she wanted to trust Tevura, she really did. But her doubts wouldn’t go away. And now, she had proof that those doubts were justified. Tevura was falling down a rabbit hole of corruption, selling her soul for the material pleasures the Drives provided.

There was only one path left: Makima had to report her to the authorities. But corruption and graft cases like this were hard to prove--she would need to gather more evidence than just a single recorded mention of Red Sand, the powerful narcotic Tevura was apparently getting in exchange for her Drives.

And while she built her case against Tevura, those Drives would still be out there, spreading potentially tainted food. Tainted with *what*, she didn’t know... but judging by Tevura’s behavior, the food might be addictive. Even mind-altering.

She had to act fast... or this technology might rip asari society to pieces.

~ ~ ~



END OF PART 1

MASS EFFECT: AGE OF DECADENCE

By Zaftig Industries

CW: Overeating, weight gain, corruption, burps, flatulence, mind-meld eroticism.

PART 2: THE BETRAYAL



“What do you mean, you don’t have those records?”

The short, squat asari behind the Galactic Customs desk steepled her fingers, leaning back in her chair. She eyed Makima with clear and obvious suspicion.

“All the shipping records are sealed, ma’am. I’m afraid I can’t help you.”

“Sealed by whom?”

The customs official tapped at her console, skimming through dozens of shipping manifests.

“By the order of the Sian Republic.”

Makima cursed softly, pacing in front of the Customs desk.

Of course that’s who she sold the Drives to... May the Goddess curse you, Tevura!

Of all the Thessian city-states making up the asari Republics, the Sian Republic was by far the most corrupt. If the Drives had mostly been sold to Sian, there was little chance of recovering them--they would already be passing through the hands of dozens of black-market dealers. She would have to find another way to expose Tevura, and quickly.

Already, the Drives were undergoing “stress testing” in laboratories all across the Citadel, with a few already in public use. Seeing the monetary and PR applications of near-infinite food replication, the asari government had taken all the remaining Drives out of Makima’s hands. Her research project had been mothballed, all her fellow researchers re-assigned to other areas of the Citadel. By all accounts, the Citadel’s government was already reverse-engineering them, learning to make new Drives of their own.

And although she couldn’t prove it, Makima sensed Tevura’s hand in this. The two hadn’t spoken in weeks, after a furious argument over the phone where Makima had asked Tevura to stop taking bribes... and Tevura had refused.

And now, the sudden use of Drives by the civilian populace... Makima’s devious partner had clearly made friends in high places, and now she was moving to protect her “investment,” locking Makima out of every laboratory with a functioning Drive. And there were rumors of a “public food program” supported by use of the Drives... a program that had been approved for field testing by the Republic Council itself.

The worst part was, Makima could understand why the government was rushing to exploit Drive technology--importing food to the Citadel was absurdly expensive, and yet the Council wanted the Citadel “fully populated” within a year. The Drives had given them a way to fast-track that process... but at what cost? The food was clearly not good for you, on some level--the calorie count was impossibly high, somehow, not to mention the Eezo in the molecular makeup.

But every complaint she’d made to the Council had been ignored. Her requests for appointments with government officials had been politely declined, her objections lost in a sea of red tape. And of course, Tevura wasn’t returning her calls anymore--on top of the Drive crisis, she had the emotions of being “ghosted” to deal with, as well.

She’d considered going to the press with her info, but there wasn’t enough proof to bring Tevura down--at least, not yet. Her studies had confirmed the Drive food stimulated biotic powers, but beyond that, she had very little to go on. But her instincts told her she was right, that the Drives were dangerous.

After all, Tevura had begun acting strangely after “testing” the food, which couldn’t be a coincidence. Even Makima herself had noticed strange changes in her own mood and behavior, after eating food made by the Drives.

She’d found herself snacking relentlessly, always hungry even when she’d just eaten. She was irritable, overly emotional... and her libido had skyrocketed, something that both confused and embarrassed her. Previously, her experience with Tevura had been the most erotic experience of her life, but now she was scrolling the Holonet looking for deviant smut every night.

She couldn’t help it--her body’s needs were all escaping her control, and she couldn’t help but think that it was related to the Drives somehow.

And that wasn’t all that was escaping from her. Her waistline had continued to balloon, her stomach bulging out of every new set of clothes she purchased. She didn’t have access to Drive food anymore, but she was constantly gorging on ordinary snacks, and couldn’t resist ordering delivery each night. It was frightening--her body’s bizarre hunger was startling, almost like she was transforming on a cellular level. Mutating, somehow...

Things were escalating, and she needed help. But from whom? Tevura had already bribed or bought off the government officials newly appointed to the Citadel, and Makima’s attempts to contact Thessian officials had gone nowhere. No, the standard routes wouldn’t work to resolve this--she needed to think outside the box.

And that was how Makima found herself getting coffee with a Justicar.

They were sitting across from each other at a small cafe on the Citadel, one of the new restaurants that had cropped up overnight as the asari moved into the ancient structure, making it their own.

The cafe was trendy, upscale... and to Makima’s concern, there was already a Cibus Drive behind the counter, churning out pastries and breakfast foods by the dozen, its power cables pulsing with energy.

“So... You’re telling me there’s a conspiracy underway to spread these ‘Drives’ across the galaxy, for profit and criminal gain. Do you have any *proof* of this?”

Makima squirmed, conscious of the woman’s eyes on her body.

The Justicar's name was Fayte; she was a deep rich violet, the same shade as Tevura. In the crowded cafe, Fayte stood out like a sore thumb in her gleaming red armor--but not as much as Makima did.

Easily a hundred pounds heavier than any other asari in the room, Makima was painfully conscious of every curious eye and stifled chuckle around her... and there were plenty. At nearly two hundred standard Citadel pounds, Makima was one of the plumpest asari on the Citadel, a curious sight wherever she went in a culture filled with athletes and warriors.

"I don't have *conclusive* proof, no. But all my research indicates the Cibus Drives are unstable and dangerous--not only does it affect biotic energy, I've also found traces of *nanotechnology* in the food, perhaps left over by faulty Drive components. The nanotech might be causing an addictive feedback loop, perhaps a shift in mitochondrial--"

Fayte held up a hand.

"Enough, enough. It sounds like you've done your homework. But if these Drives are so dangerous... Why is no one else sounding the alarm?"

"I told you. My girlfr--er, my former colleague Tevura, she's sabotaging all my attempts to tell people. And the content of the food isn't the only problem. I'm also worried about certain... Cultural effects."

"Cultural? What do you mean?"

Makima nodded at the asari patrons around them, enjoying coffee or breakfast before their morning shifts on the Citadel.

"These Drives have spread across the entire Citadel by now. They've been plugged into the station's power conduits. They're already becoming a part of daily asari life... and they've only been exposed to the public for a *few weeks*. And yet, already..."

She nodded at one asari girl in the corner, a rather plump young woman who was enjoying a heaping platter of wheat-cakes, slathered in a syrupy concoction.

"Things are changing. It happened to myself and Tevura as well--this food induces a hunger you can't quite satisfy, no matter how much you eat. Trust me... I've tried to fill that void. But I can't."

Fayte nodded, her eyes running up and down Makima's portly body.

“I can see proof of *that*, at least.”

Makima blushed, her pride stinging, but she pushed the insult aside. This Justicar was her only hope--if she couldn't convince Fayte that Tevura was violating the ethics of the Justicar Code, this whole meeting would be a waste of time. So she persisted, even in the face of the Justicar's humiliating gaze.

“I'm being serious. Tell me, what is the average main street like on Thessia? What kind of businesses do you usually see?”

Fayte shrugged.

“Omnitool shops, clothing stores, a holo-vid theater or two. Maybe a temple. Why?”

Makima pointed at the street outside the tiny, cramped cafe.

“This street has pastry shop, a cafe, a bar, *two* bistros, and down at the end, something called an ‘all-you-can-eat’ buffet. Notice any *trends* here?”

Fayte squinted at the hovering, neon holo-signs of the businesses outside.

“So... Our first arrivals to the Citadel wanted a taste of home. I don't see the danger in that...”

Makima threw up her hands. To her humiliation, she could feel her own arm-fat jiggling, while she gestured at station blueprints on her omni-tool.

“It's just like this on the next street. And the next. And the one after that... I've checked the public records, Fayte. Over *eighty percent* of the Citadel's new business applications are for eateries, or bars, or even hookah lounges. And it makes sense--if you can get ahold of a Cibus Drive, you can generate any food or beverage you want, all with zero overhead for your business! And Tevura is giving them out like *candy!*”

“What are you saying?”

“What I'm saying is, this station will become a deep-space pleasure cruise soon, if we don't get the Drives banned. Our society isn't ready for this kind of excess--we aren't prepared to live in a post-scarcity galaxy. The Drives must be banned before they can damage our culture... And our waistlines, any further.”

Over at the next table, the asari woman with the wheat-cakes had finished her meal, wiping her mouth and belching loudly. The two of them watched in horror as she opened her omni-tool... and immediately ordered more breakfast, her eyes wide and glassy with bliss.

Fayte winced as the woman began plucking crumbs off the swollen dome of her belly, and devouring them eagerly, sucking on her fingers like an overgrown, spoiled child.

“I think... I see your point,” said Fayte, grimacing. “I will aid you in this quest. But you must make a vow of fealty, and aid me in my mission. This path is treacherous, and I will need your help.”

Makima was overjoyed--at last, someone finally believed her. But the Justicar’s next words took the wind out of her sails.

“We’ll have to get your armor custom-made, of course...”

“Armor? What *armor*?”

“Your Justicar Squire armor. Every Justicar who takes a Squire on her journey towards justice must attire them properly--haven’t you read your history books?”

Makima glanced down at herself, wincing. The newfound softness of her frame would not be easily stuffed into a suit of armor like Fayte’s.

“If... If I must, I suppose. Although... I also have a favor to ask.”

“Speak.”

Makima steeled herself, her bitterness filling her, chubby fists clenched on the table.

“If we catch Tevura... *When* we catch her, don’t harm her. I want to look her in the eye and ask her why she’s doing this. Why she thinks money and fame are worth betraying her people... and betraying *me*.”

Fayte nodded slowly.

“So be it. I had not planned to hurt her--she has not done anything to merit death under the Code, as of yet. We will deliver her to the authorities, and you will get your justice. That, I can promise you.”

Makima felt tears coming to her eyes. Reaching across the table, she clasped Fayette's hand, her soft digits shrouding the Justicar's scarred knuckles.

"Thank you, Fayette. This means... Everything, to me."

At the next table over, the pancake-gorged asari they'd noticed earlier was hitting a food coma. She belched, slumping in her chair... and wearily ordered another round of breakfast. Fayette shuddered, watching the woman struggle to sit up in her chair, her swollen gut weighing her down.

"If you're right, Makima... we need to hurry. Before this problem gets too big to stop."



Shiza felt her consciousness detach from Makima's, returning to the present.

Rising, floating past other "bubbles" of memory crowded with images, she glimpsed strange sights: vast seas of bluish flesh, crackling biotic energy, the looming hulls of asari fleets floating in the void...

And then she was herself again--Shiza W'lode, investigative historian and amateur sleuth, in search of her vanished mother. The Merge was over. But her surroundings were... unfamiliar. They had moved during the Merge, perhaps walked somewhere else. She'd never heard of such a thing, but it wasn't impossible--when two asari's neural systems became one, strange things occasionally happened.

It was a restaurant--an all-night 'greasy spoon,' from the looks of it. Aethyta was nowhere to be seen.

Across from Shiza, in their narrow restaurant booth, Makima was digging into an enormous burger, a Human delicacy dripping with grease and half-melted cheese. Several empty plates sat in front of her... and to Shiza's concern, she *too* was surrounded by several demolished meals. And she felt full. Very, *very* full.

"What... *urrrp*... Makima, what are we doing here? What is this place?"

Makima took a moment to answer, setting down her burger and sucking the dribbled juices and grease off her fingers one by one. She seemed lost in a haze of greed, only gradually coming back to herself.

“Oh... I’m sorry. Sometimes when I’m stressed while Melding, I tend to overeat during my trance... and I occasionally bring anyone in the Meld trance along with me. It’s sort of like sleepwalking, in a way. I’m so sorry—I thought I had it more *urrrp*, under control.”

“I see...”

Shiza shifted in her seat, stifling another belch.

Inside her body she could feel the heaviness of at *least* two or three meals digesting. She was stuffed to the gills, absolutely glutted. And yet... somehow, she still wanted more.

Wait... Those aren't my desires. They're Makima's.

The Merge had left a lingering bond between them. Even now, flickers of biotic energy passed between the two of them. Like a completed electrical circuit, they were passing thoughts and impressions back and forth. It was an unsettling sensation... But not unpleasant.

Shiza felt her new friend’s anxiety, but also the joy of her binge-eating, the almost sensual satisfaction of a full stomach. And this helped to ease her own discomfort, to a small degree. Although there were some embarrassments not even a Merge could alleviate.

Pfrrrumptf.

Shiza blushed as her body let loose a burst of sudden, rank flatulence. She’d always had a delicate stomach, and now that it was loaded with unfamiliar food, her digestive tract was announcing its annoyance. Loudly.

“Er, excuse me... I have a touch of, ah, irritability, it seems...”

FRRAPPPT.

Makima smirked as she dabbed her lips with a napkin. Even though the Merge was fading, Shiza could sense her amusement... and her admiration.

The plump Consort liked Shiza, admired her for her determination. And Shiza found herself returning that respect. They were sharing a bizarre and somewhat frightening experience together... but like all Consorts, Makima was a gentle and patient teacher.

“Don’t apologize--it’s fine, I tend to have similar problems, myself. On Hanar planets, that’s a compliment to the chef, you know...”

“If you say so...”

Shiza scanned the room, recovering her bearings. According to her omni-tool, it had been several hours since she’d first merged with Makima. Had they just been... Eating, that entire time?

If this happens every time we Merge, this investigation is going to be hell on my insides. Not to mention, my waistline...

And yet, she couldn’t simply stop here, not this close to the truth. She was getting an insider’s scoop on the first weeks of Citadel settlement--and the corruption and chaos that had ensued. Already, she was starting to see why the asari government might not want these events widely known...

Trying to maintain professional composure despite her swollen stomach, Shiza pulled up her research notes on her omni-tool.

“I think I’m starting to understand. So your lover, Tevura...”

“Ex-lover.”

“Your ex-lover, she sold these Drives to the highest bidders she could find. And soon they found their way into public use. Meaning this tainted, addictive Prothean food became widespread across the Citadel--and elsewhere.”

“Yes. That’s correct.”

Makima adjusted herself in the booth, her enormous belly oozing over the table. Shiza found herself fascinated by the asari’s bulk--she was much bigger than she appeared in the old memories they’d explored together. At some point over the centuries, Makima had *really* let herself go. Shiza allowed herself a moment of ‘schadenfreude’ as she watched the obese Consort pick up fallen chunks of burger-beef and pop them into her mouth.

*Addictive Prothean food or not... I could never let myself get **that** fat. Poor thing--I almost feel sorry for her...*

“You pity me, don’t you? I can feel it.”

Startled, Shiza composed herself--she’d forgotten the Merge was still sharing thoughts between them.

“I... I’m sorry. That was cruel of me. You’ve been through a lot--it’s not for me to judge how you deal with it, or how you look.”

Makima shrugged one meaty shoulder.

“Some of it is stress weight, yes. But some of it... Well. Temptation is a powerful thing. And I am only mortal.”

She took another massive bite of her burger, eyes flaring with biotic energy, and Shiza actually *felt* her pleasure as the fat asari chewed and swallowed.

The sensual, almost erotic bliss she took, in eating as much as she could... It was a strange sensation, like riding in someone else’s head as a voyeur. Shiza felt her cheeks grow hot as she saw Makima smiling at her.

“You can feel it, can’t you? The hunger. Your whole life has been spent in a repressed, restrained society. But under the surface... We all hunger. All of us, the asari.”

She hiccuped softly, using her forearm to wipe a smear of grease off her cheek.

“For all our talk about being open-minded and accepting, we asari are... **URRP**, still very buttoned up. We hide our ravenous desires behind a facade of high-minded civilization, but deep down... We’re just like every other spacefaring species. Animals with fancy tools, not very distant from our animal nature...”

She took another bite, bigger this time, and Shiza’s whole body shivered as the overweight Consort chewed... swallowed... belched, and licked her lips, sauce running down her double-chin.

“We may be mighty as a species, queens of the stars, but we’re not invincible. We feel jealousy, hatred, lust... And greed. Denying that reality was what made the Cibus Drives so dangerous to our civilization. A species determined to suppress its darker nature, will always be

vulnerable to temptation. The asari of that age... We were vulnerable, all of us so tightly wound, so ready to give in to pleasure at the *slightest* excuse. And the Drives gave us that chance..."

Shiza nodded, suddenly aware of how heavily she was breathing, how warm her body was. The pleasure-signals from Makima's body were flowing directly into hers, from the conduit between them--and she found she didn't *want* it to stop.

Makima was right. Shiza had spent her life trying to be a "good girl," trying to prove herself to her superiors. This investigation was the first time she'd truly questioned asari society, and already she was beginning to come apart at the seams. All it had taken was one Merge with a friend who wasn't afraid of indulgence, and now strange thoughts whirled in Shiza's head, unfamiliar desires and urges she didn't understand...

She wanted to eat. She wanted to strip off her clothes and go face-first into a platter of sweets. She wanted to cavort with dozens of beautiful asari women. She wanted to...

Woah, control yourself... These are mostly Makima's thoughts. Focus--you need to dig deeper. Find the truth. Ignore these... very distracting feelings. For now.

"Maybe you're right," she said, unzipping her collar a little as the warmth of her own body made her a little dizzy. "Maybe we are just animals. But clearly we didn't give in to these Drives--today, the asari are back to being trim and fit. We beat the temptation, right?"

"Yes... We did. But it might not be enough."

"What do you mean?"

Makima sighed, setting down her oversized burger again. Shiza could sense that it gave her almost physical pain, to stop eating--the Consort's ravenous hunger was all-consuming. It was unsettling to think that Makima just lived with those urges, every hour of every day.

"What I'm about to show you is our darkest hour, as a species. The Council and the Republics successfully covered it up... but it's ugly. Depraved and filthy. And that dark moment can still come back. We haven't beaten our inner demons, Shiza--we've only kept them at bay. Come... I'll show you what happened."

And she extended one plump, grease-stained hand across the table.

For a moment, Shiza hesitated. One Merge had been enough to infect her with Makima's hunger, to make her gorge as if in a trance. What would another Merge do to her? And how many

times would she have to dive into Makima's strange, troubled memories for the truth she wanted so badly?

I can't give up now. Mom never gave up on a story... She always got what she was looking for. And so will I.

Feeling her guts churn ominously inside her, Shiza took the Consort's hand... and down she went again, into the depths of Makima's thoughts. This time, the two of them spoke as one, eyes going black and skin crackling with biotic energy.

"Embrace eternity..."

From another booth nearby, Aethyta watched the two of them, shaking her head.

Even now, the two of them were deep in trance, Makima gobbling her burger while Shiza mechanically ordered more food from the diner's kitchens. Their conscious minds were gone, sunk deep into Makima's memories... and this 'sleep of reason' produced demons. Hungry, hungry demons.

Aethyta sipped hard liquor from her hip flask, watching the two gorge themselves mindlessly, stuck in an endless feedback loop of greed. It was pathetic to watch... but at least she wouldn't have to watch very long.

Many asari scholars had come to Aethyta's bar, after finding her name in the archivist records. All of them had sought the hidden truth of the "Decadent Age," as Makima called it. All of them had melded with Makima... and none of them had ever been able to see the journey through.

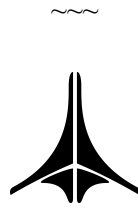
Aethyta had served as Makima's bodyguard and protector for years—an ancient contract that had been struck up between the two of them. She'd first met Makima after discovering the coverup and conspiracy, and the pair had become quite close... But the centuries had not been kind to Aethyta, and in the last few decades, Makima had begun to test her old friend's loyalty, calling in favors left and right and generally being a big, fat pain in the ass.

And then, in the depths of Aethyta's fury with Makima, a mysterious stranger had contacted her... Offering an amount of credits that seemed impossible, and requesting that Aethyta bring Makima—and anyone else who knew the secret—as captives to a dark, distant corner of the galaxy. Completely broke and angry with her old friend, Aethyta had agreed. She'd been guarding this stupid secret for centuries—and what had it gotten her? Nothing.

Now it was time for the last vestige of the Decadent Age to disappear... along with Makima's newest binge partner and confidante. Aethyta watched, and waited... and whenever the pair's plates were empty, she re-filled them, ordering meal after meal for the two mindless, gorging blue cows.

Either they would eat themselves into a coma, and be easily captured... or she would overpower the gluttonous pair by force. No matter which way things went down, she was going to end up very rich... and the dark secret of the Decadent Age would never go public.

Some truths, after all, were best left forgotten.



END OF PART 2

In the distant past, Makima the asari scientist and biotic struggles to locate her one-time friend, the now corrupted head scientist Tevura... Makima's ship orbits a distant moon, searching for Tevura's hidden signature after the mad scientist absconds with the remaining original Drives...

Shiza W'Lode, a scholar and journalist, rides along in Makima's consciousness, watching the past unfold from her meditation bond with Makima far in the future...

The Justicar had vanished.

Makima felt it was her fault—all her fault. She'd gotten Fayte involved in this mess, she'd been the one to invoke the Justicar Code and insist the graceful warrior help her with the menace of the Cybus Drives. And now... Now, after setting off to investigate the missing Drives... She was gone.

The two of them had made an admirable team, for a while. They'd tracked down a covert mining operation run by Tevura—harvesting materials and eezo to build new Drives, based on the Council's reverse-engineering of the tech.

But they weren't able to stop her production chain in time. Before they knew it, Tevura's newer newer, asari-made Cybus Drives were already filling households all over the Citadel. As Makima had noted, businesses were adapting—the easy availability of food meant restaurants and buffets had next to no overhead costs. And of course, each of these restaurants had to compete... creating an arms-race of ever more decadent foods. It was chaos.

The difficulty in stopping Tevura lay in the location of the “prime” drives, the ones at the center of the Drive network. Until these originals could be destroyed, Tevura could simply keep building copies based on the Prothean technology of the “first-gen” Drives. Her copies were imperfect and the food they created was less tasty, but they seemed just as addicting as the originals, and Makima shuddered to think what would happen if she was allowed to continue spreading the Drives...

Already, the Drives had vastly changed asari culture onboard the Citadel. The beautiful, graceful, noble race of scientists and warriors was softening, growing lethargic. Movie theaters, smoking lounges, and other relaxed pursuits had begun to replace gyms, sports amphitheatres and other usual asari pastimes. Every time Makima went outside on the Citadel, the population seemed to be getting fatter—and nobody was willing to speak out against it.

There was an outcry, at first... but it was quickly silenced by the asari government, likely on Tevura's orders. As the queen of the new “food synthesis” industry, Tevura's word was law, and she didn't much like journalists railing against her on the ‘net.

Those women who were most outspoken against the Cibus Drives were sent a Drive of their own, “compliments of CEO Tevura, of FoodSynth Corp.”

And these journalists soon went silent—when Makima went to visit one of them, she was crushed to find that the former hard-hitting writer had become a lazy, slovenly mess, so fat she could hardly squeeze into her office gear without blue jelly-rolls spilling out all over.

Asari culture, a pillar of light and knowledge built across thousands of years, was growing decadent and dulled by gluttony. It was only a matter of time before the Citadel's sloth and greed spread to the homeworlds—Makima had to work fast, before her whole species was consumed by their own ballooning waistlines.

“Dammit... Where is she?”

Pushing her chair back, Makima sighed, staring at the dozens of deep-space probe results. *Negative, negative, negative...* Not a single one had returned the signal of Fayette's ship, a beacon she'd given Makima the frequency for, in case of just such an occasion. A Justicar's work was dangerous stuff, after all.

Wait a minute...

There. Beyond the edge of this world's smallest moon, a heat signature. Makima struggled out of her snacking chair and heaved her bulky body towards the bridge controls, still chewing on a deep-fried lunar onion ring.

"Mmf, finally! Now I can... *Huff, huff...* Stop you once and for all, you power-mad lunatic..."

She charted a course to the moon's surface, paying no heed to the dangerous amount of Eezo readings scrolling out of her ship's scanners. There was definitely a lot of Eezo down there... and Tevura was a capable biotic. Which meant she was walking into a trap.

Makima would be challenging the elder asari on her home turf, surrounded by whatever defenses the wealth of selling Drive tech had granted her. And Makima was far, far from being anywhere near fighting shape. She glanced down at herself, sulking as she waited for the autopilot to land them.

Once she had been a slender, fetching young rising star in the asari Council's science corp... Now she was portly and rotund, belly hanging nearly to her knees, an ass practically the size of the Citadel jutting out behind her.

She wished, even as she scarfed down the rest of her onion-ring, that she and Makima had never found the Drives. Her face had grown so round and puffy she barely recognized it in the mirror, and her once-strong biceps now drooped with fat. Her thighs were thick, chunky and cumbersome, and her sides were decked with plump rolls that stood out under her oversized planetary prospecting suit and reinforced armor plating. Over four hundred standard Citadel pounds of soft, blubbery blue Asari were crammed into her ill-fitting enviro-suit.

"Alright... Time for some payback."

When the ship landed, Makima emerged in her environment suit, face bubbled in a breathing mask. The atmosphere on the moon was thin, barely fit for breathing--but her scans

indicated there was a pocket of breathable air, somewhere under the surface. Maybe a pocket big enough to sustain a runaway asari and her hoard of Prothean technology...

Something nagged at Makima as she waddled through the eerie green mists of the moon's surface, brushing aside twisted trees and tangled fern fronds. There was something she had never figured out, a singular question tugging at the back of her mind.

Why would the Protheans engineer their food to be addictive? She had run the numbers, and the sheer amount of different addictive chemicals in the food would hook any race on it, not just the asari. The data available on Prothean biology was limited, but by Makima's estimation, even the Protheans themselves would have been susceptible to it.

Which made no sense. Unless the Protheans were a hedonistic, pleasure-obsessed species, putting drugs and Eezo in their own food would have been the height of madness. Which, to Makima, suggested that maybe the Protheans hadn't made the food printers at all.

Maybe they had been built by someone, or something, else.

Which meant that half of the asari's entire civilization--based on the most recent Drive sales--was now gobbling down food designed for an unknown purpose, possibly a malevolent purpose. And that food was generated by technology created by an unknown--possibly malevolent--species.

Makima shuddered as she realized her actions might have doomed not just the waistlines of the Citadel, but the waistlines of her entire species.

Already, larger sizes were being normalized on the Citadel--plump was the new "trendy," with many asari on the homeworld already adjusting to the new norms of beauty and new, more size-accepting clothing lines. In a few more years, her species would become unrecognizably fat... unless Makima found a way to shut the Drives down. And she believed Tevura knew how to do that.

While researching the Drives, they'd discovered the machines somehow shared food data--they were quantum-entangled, via some unknown form of technology, to one another. Recipes and forms of food added to one Drive were shared among all Drives, even the duplicate ones the asari had begun building on their own using scavenged Prothean tech. Makima had no idea how this was possible, but she suspected that if she could hack into one of the Drives, upload a virus... maybe all of them would be affected.

It was a slim chance... a tiny shot at salvation for the asari. But she had to take it. She couldn't let thousands of years of culture, progress and civilization slide down the drain, all because the asari had literally bitten off more than they could chew. She had to try and stop this runaway train before it left every asari on every world a waddling, wheezing butterball.

Of course, she herself was no exception. With access to nothing but Drive-printed food on the Citadel, Makima had grown more and more out of shape, and now she struggled to heave herself up even the smallest of hills on the unpopulated moon, every new incline a terribly intimidating effort.

“Huff, huff... WHEEZE... Huff...”

By the time she reached the coordinates of her scan's ping, she was drenched in sweat inside her oversized environment suit. Warm humidity gathered between her rolls and in her cleavage; she bit her lip as she realized even her plump loins were soaked in sweat, beneath her undergarments. She was perspiring like a hog after extremely mild exercise--and to think she'd once competed in a gymnast's team back during her early Maiden years.

But despite this unpleasantness, she struggled onward, and soon found her destination. The pings were coming from a massive pair of blast doors--environmentally sealed and reinforced with massive rods of titanium. The place looked impenetrable, maybe an ancient bunker left behind by an asari army. It was definitely asari in origin--the runes on the side of the door clearly indicated that.

And luckily, it was a lot more vulnerable digitally than physically. A few taps of her omni-tool, and the computer system controlling the door gave way under Makima's hacking skills. There was a massive groan, and the blast doors slid open, a hiss of steam coming from within.

Makima crept inside, her pistol drawn. She hadn't wielded a weapon since her brief tour in military service, several decades ago, and the tool felt unnatural in her hands. She cleared corners, scanned for lifeforms, and scanned again. The massive chamber beyond the door was empty.

The door hissed as it groaned shut, and gas whistled from valves in the wall as the base's computer cycled fresh oxygen into the room. Makima removed her breathing mask and helmet, gasping with relief as the cool air hit her plump, sweaty cheeks.

Her stomach growled unhappily from beneath the fabric of her environment suit. Makima scowled at it bitterly; her own body had been made into her enemy, constantly complaining if it

wasn't stuffed with food at all hours. Such was the price of the Drives: you could have as much food as you wanted, but it would never satisfy you. You'd always be left wanting more... and more... and more.

“Ugh, shut up... I’m not hungry, simmer *down*.”

Shaking her head to shrug off the hunger pangs, Makima jiggled across the chamber, noting the marks on the walls--scratches from loading-rig mechs. Someone had moved a lot of equipment through here, and recently.

Suddenly, the floor rattled beneath her and started to descend. Makima experienced a moment of panic--had her newly expanded bulk caused the floor to give way? But it was merely an elevator, activated by a proximity scanner. She was descending into the core of the facility.

As the elevator rumbled its way downward, she caught the smell of food--sizzling meat, the unmistakable scent of butter melting in a pan, the warm smell of freshly baked bread, and a dozen more obscure flavors. Her rebellious stomach growled louder, her focus and determination wavering as the greedier side of her took over.

By the Goddess, that smells so good...

Struggling to focus on her mission, she stepped off the elevator... and found herself in a hallway overflowing with food, sandwiches and pastries and bottled beverages and a thousand other delights all piled on overflowing plates, cramming every corner.

None of it appeared stale, rotten or moldering--and Makima recalled, with grim realization, how unnaturally long-lasting and unspoiled the Drive food was.

This place was filled with addictive dishes, piled high on tables and stacked on chairs and even left on the floor. She struggled with her own hunger as she picked a careful path through the debris--and then raised her pistol as she saw movement coming down the hallway.

An orb-shaped utility drone, its omnitool blinking as it projected a hard-light platform, floated towards Makima.

But it didn't attack her--instead, it scooped up several of the jumbled plates and bowls and bottles, circling around and hovering back down the way it had come with its payload of calories. Hesitant, Makima followed it.

As she progressed, she became aware of a constant, wet smacking and chewing sound that echoed ominously down the hallways, bouncing off the walls and making her azure skin crawl with its mindless, almost animalistic tone.

"Omf, slurp, gllp... gllp, smack, slurp... B'HELLLLCH."

A rumbling, staccato burp echoed down the hallway, and Makima turned the corner to the central chamber of the facility... where she found Tevura.

Or, at least, what had once been Tevura.

The power-crazed asari had assembled a throne of robotic arms for herself, cushioned with hard-light projections. She was currently overflowing this throne, nearly dwarfing it with the massive size of her body.

Makima felt a surge of disgust as she slowly took in what Tevura had done to herself. The woman had been fat when they'd last met--obese, really, and clearly showing signs of addiction to her new lifestyle. But this Tevura... This Tevura was difficult to even recognize as an asari. Makima almost felt as if she were gazing on an undiscovered, morbidly fascinating xeno-species. Some kind of massive slug, perhaps, or a giant amoeba... which only passingly resembled an asari woman

The sweaty, grease-splattered, cascading bulk of Tevura was ringed with fat rolls, a massive belly half-hidden by piles of food oozing out in front of her. Her breasts were barely contained by a hard-light brassiere, holograms jittering as they held up the massive weight of her beanbag-sized bosoms.

Similar constructs were projected into the shape of tables and platforms around her, and it was onto these platforms that the drones were depositing massive, fattening meals for Tevura's enjoyment.

She was eating not with the decorous patience of an aristocrat, as she once had when Makima first met her. She wasn't eating with the languid, lazy grace of her plumper self, either. No, this eating was frantic--constant--a barrage of food jammed into Tevura's overflowing mouth, her cheeks crammed with food, chewing sloppily and greedily, gobbets of half-chewed food falling out of her mouth and tumbling down her flabby mass, leaving streaks and stains behind.

Makima saw with revulsion that Tevura's appetites were also no longer contained to food. Half a dozen plump asari maidens attended to Tevura, some of them ferrying food to her mouth

and feeding it to her sensually, the other half cleaning and bathing her, wading through piles of Drive-printed food and sponging off Tevura's immense, jiggling, engorged mass. Clearly Tevura was taking advantage of the Ilium servant-girl market, to enable her disgusting lifestyle...

Around the asari scientist floated several holo-screens, most of which were playing exotic forms of pornography. A few of the screens showed Tevura's bank accounts, which were slowly increasing in wealth as divided from the new Drives poured in to her credit coffers.

"Mmmm, yesss... More sales in the URRRP, the government sector. You, slave, fetch me more HUARRP, more wine. I wish to celebrate my... Prosperity."

And she chuckled, a deep wet sound that didn't sound like Tevura at all. Makima's former friend and lover was lost, adrift in her own twisted desires, obsessed with pleasure. There was no coming back from this, no reconciling. Like a greedy slug, Tevura was gorging herself in the dark while her species tumbled down the slope to cultural oblivion.

Makima stepped forward... and that's when she saw the bloated asari wasn't alone. There was another obese, swollen violet form in the room, this one bound by holo-shackles to a metal table behind Tevura's throne.

Oh no. The Jucticar...

The noble knight was eating mechanically, mindlessly, her eyes slack and her pupils dilated. She had clearly been drugged, and with her newfound lack of inhibitions, she was allowing drones and attendants to shove mouthful after mouthful of fattening foods into her face, eagerly gorging on each fresh morsel, stopping only to belch or hiccup occasionally.

She was not nearly as fat as Tevura, but she had clearly been eating the accursed food for weeks--she was a flabby remnant of her former self, arms and legs heavily insulated in soft purple fat.

The room was large enough--and filled with enough piles of food--that Makima thought she could make it to the Jucticar without being spotted. Nervous, she crept from food pile to food pile, the drones buzzing over her head, hacked and oblivious.

She avoided the gaze of Tevura's handmaidens despite her size--the women had their hands full, after all, satisfying their bratty and cruel queen.

"Move your asses, you **URRRP** lazy little sluts. I said I wanted HIC more, did I fucking *stutter?*"

Makima winced as a platter was hurled down the small mountain of food at one of the handmaidens. The Tevura she had known was brilliant, a technological and archeological savant... but this Tevura was nothing but a bloated, greedy, mean-spirited glutton. She had lost herself to the flood of pleasures and wealth around her.

And to think, Makima thought, that she almost took me with her.

And Makima wasn't done fighting that slippery slope just yet. As she passed by the tables and holo-tables loaded with food, her nostrils flared and she felt her mouth watering without her input. She wiped away a little drool with the back of her hand, fighting to stay in control.

As she approached the table where Fayte was held captive, Makima felt her hand sneaking towards a nearby platter of donuts--and pulled her hand back, breathing heavily. This place was a temptation minefield, and she didn't know how severely the Drive-printed food had affected her biology. If she started eating now, she might not be able to stop...

Fayre was wheezing under her own weight, speaking in an eager, sensual babble--completely unlike the woman Makima had met in the cafe. She was breathless with desire, utterly absorbed, sounding drugged as she begged for food.

"Mmmph... More, gimme that **URP**, triple-decker burger..."

Tevura's recorded voice came out of the drone, slurring a command she had clearly loaded the robot with:

"Beg for it. Beg for me, Justicar."

"Oh Goddess, *please*, fucking *please*, I'm so hungry!!"

Fayte's voice floated across the gap between them and Makima watched in horror as the bloated asari warrior opened her mouth, like a spoiled pet waiting for a treat from its master.

One of the drones hovered down to her, expertly feeding her bite after bite of a greasy, cheese-dripping burger. Fayte tore into it ravenously, with a single-minded fixation. Fayte was deep in the throes of Drive food addiction--and judging by the narcotics attachments spliced onto the drones around her, she'd likely been drugged, as well. Forcibly inducted into Tevura's growing cult of pleasure.

I have to get her out of here...

Still fighting to ignore the delights around her, Makima inched closer, pulling open the display of her omni-tool and checking Tevura's security systems.

The drones were still hacked, unconcerned with her presence... they hovered directly over her, ferrying food to the gluttonous Tevura and the the swollen, dull-eyed Fayette. But in order to get Fayette out of here, Makima would need more than a simple drone hack.

A quick sweep of Tevura's network revealed Cibus Drives all over the facility--all of them active, all of them continuously printing new food. The drives were mostly unprotected from data intrusions--a sloppy move from the normally cautious Tevura. But, Makima supposed she was a little distracted by her own ravenous, filthy, hedonistic lifestyle.

And the Drives weren't entirely defenseless--there was a stiff firewall around Tevura's central network nodes. Makima would be able to shut down the Drives and infect their quantum-entanglement network with ease... but Tevura would know the instant the hack was complete. And Makima had detected an entire fleet of security mechs on her stands--all of them slumbering on the floor below, heavily armed and ready to respond to any breaches in the facility's firewalls.

Makima swallowed heavily, her throat dry... and started the hack, a rapid-fire stream of codeflowing from her omnitool into the local data nodes. In a mere few minutes, the Cibus drives would be knocked down permanently--and Tevura would finally detect the intruder in her lair.

She waited for the flock of drones to complete their delivery cycle and hover away... then she crept up to Fayette, tapping the purple asari on one flabby shoulder.

"Hey... Fayette, snap out of it. Time to go."

"Bwuhh?"

The gorged asari stirred on the restraint table, her head tilting towards Makima. Her sharp cheekbones had vanished under a layer of blubber, and her face had grown puffy and round, a thick double-chin wobbling as she chewed on the last of her burger like a cow chewing on its cud.

"Makima? Is that... you? Hey, I did it... I tracked down your **URRP**, your friend for you. A Justicar never... **HURRP**, never fails to get her target..."

"Sure," said Makima, cautiously. "I notice you haven't, um. Apprehended her, though."

"Arrest her? Psh, no way," slurred the asari, grinning stupidly. "Thish is the besht party I've ever... **URRP**, been to. I haven't let my hair down like this in... **HUARRP**. *Centuries!!*"

Makima groaned inwardly as she realized the terrible mistake she'd made. Of course Fayte had broken immediately under an onslaught of forcible pleasure and drugs--she was an aesthetic, a warrior-monk, accustomed to a chaste lifestyle and sparse meals.

Justicars were trained to resist interrogation, but this? This was the perfect trap for a woman who had carefully repressed her own desire for pleasure, for centuries. And Makima had sent her directly into the trap, knowing how cunning Tevura was, how easily she could snare you if you let her. What a fool she'd been to involve the Justicar at all.

"Look, uh... Yeah, the party seems great. But it's time to get going. You don't want your fellow Justicars to think you're... letting your hair down *too* much, right?"

Fayte blinked, the words penetrating her drugged brain, sinking through her food-coma. She nodded slowly, licking barbecue sauce from her lips.

"Thash true. I think... I think I might have put on a little weight, hanging out here with Tevura... **HUORRRP**. Gotta go work that off so I can make my... report, or whatever."

"That's right. Let's get you out of here so you can lose those pesky pounds."

"Yeah! I'm a *HIC* noble warrior, I can't be letting myself go... Ooh, the drones are back..."

Scowling at the metal spheres approached with fresh snacks, Makima busied herself with getting Fayte out of her bonds, omni-tool humming as she pried open panels and cut power connections. As she was squatting down to do so, she heard a loud ripping sound and felt a sudden breeze on her buttocks.

Goddess damn it all... My ass ripped the environment suit open.

She commanded the smart-fibers of the suit to knit themselves together again, but it was slow going. The suit had split several times onboard Makima's ship, and by now she was getting used to it. Being a complete butterball came with such occupational hazards.

Finally, she managed to get Fayte's cuffs offline, and the hard-light restraints faded away. The Justicar sat up, flexing her newly flabby limbs, staring at them in blank incomprehension.

"Woah... I got kinda *fat*, huh? How long have I been eating?"

"Roughly three weeks," said Makima, even though she knew the spaced-out Justicar might not even register her words. "And you've been consuming highly addictive, Eezo-infected food that breaks down into more calories than should be physically possible, in your digestive tract. So... Yeah. You've gotten a bit chubby. But you're not the only one."

She glanced down at herself again, wondering whether she even had the energy to waddle through the alien forest of the moon again. She would have to... She had no choice.

She helped Fayte off the slab, and guided her towards the door, Tevura's attention still on her disgusting feast and the holo-screens. But things took a turn for the worst when Fayte glimpsed the donuts on a tray near the door.

"Oooh, *fuck*, those look delicious... Hold on, I'll be right back..."

Makima cursed and grabbed at Fayte as she jiggled towards the donuts. The poor woman was utterly brainwashed; she was visibly *drooling* as she waddled towards the high-calorie treats.

Makima's omni-tool sent her a ping, warning her--they had less than a minute to get out of the chamber, before Tevura discovered the hack. There was no time for goddamn donuts--even though Makima's belly was also growling.

She pulled at Fayte, cajoling and persuading... but nothing she said deterred the greedy asari, and Makima's muscles were too weak to wrestle a three-hundred-pound former warrior. There was no time to fight with Fayte, no time to work out a solution or some way to stun her, knock her out.

She would have to leave the Justicar behind.

Makima's eyes filled with bitter tears as she watched Fayte grab a donut in each fist and rip into them, her eyes joyful and eager, icing smearing on her plump face as she crammed fistfuls of pastry into her mouth. This... This was what Tevura had done to the entire asari species. She had to be stopped. This was war, now.

And sometimes, in war, you had to leave a soldier behind.

Makima left the intoxicated Fayte in hog heaven, jiggling away from her and hustling for the door--but red lights flashed throughout the chamber, emergency klaxons blaring.

"SECURITY COMPROMISED. FOREIGN INTRUSION DETECTED IN DATA NETWORKS. SEALING ALL EXITS."

There was a rumbling groan as Tevura's massive throne turned towards Makima, all her drones converging, their food deliveries abandoned.

Shoving away a servant girl she'd been making out with, Tevura fixed her beady eyes on Makima, her fat face spreading in a grin.

"Ah... Makima. I thought you might come after your... *huff, huff*... Your little justicar friend."

"Monster," spat Makima as she raised her pistol, barrel quivering.

Tevura snorted, her jowls quivering.

"You fool. Put that away..."

"*Monster!* You've destroyed her mind. And the minds of half our species. Why? Why would you do this to us?!"

She had to keep Tevura talking, keep her busy, while her omni-tool worked out a new hack to escape. She didn't want to shoot her old friend... or what was left of her friend. But she had no doubt Tevura would pin her down with those drones, drug her and stuff her just like she had with Fayette. There was no margin for error here--if she let her guard down, she would be ruined in body and mind.

Tevura shrugged one immensely fat shoulder, her blue flesh rippling as she grabbed a beer from a nearby drone and chugged it.

"*Gllk, gllk, gllp*... Ahhh. Makima, darling, you know better than anyone how stuffy and *repressed* our species can be. Discipline this, discipline that... Ancient and proud race of warrior queens, blah, blah, blah. They're all so damn stuck-up. So what if I want to see our kind cut loose, a little? Don't we deserve it? Don't you and I deserve a little pleasure, for all our hard work?"

Makima's eyes flicked to her omnitool. Almost there... Just a few more minutes.

"This is more than a little pleasure. This is *insane!* Look at yourself--look around you. This isn't who you are--you let the Drive food change you, control you!"

Tevura laughed, spraying flecks of beer down onto a servant-girl who was sponging her massive belly.

"Are you kidding? I've never felt MORE like myself, Makima! I held my needs in check so long for the Republic, in service to the Republic... And what have they ever done for me? Sidelined my achievements. Demanded more and more and more. And now look at them--eating like hogs out of my machines. Payback's a bitch."

Her eyes flashed as she lustily gazed on Fayette, who was rooting in the piles of food like a gluttonous pig.

"Speaking of hogs... You're looking a little *skinny*, Makima. I think you need to add a few carbs to your diet... Or a few million..."

The drones advanced, hard-light shields flickering to life. Makima only got off one shot before her wrists were surrounded by flickering, purplish flames of biotic energy.

She was hauled up into the air, hovering in front of Tevura, restrained by flashing flickers of black and blue flame.

Of course... All the Eezo in the food. asari were natural biotics, and Element Zero could supercharge biotic abilities, in large amounts. And Tevura had been gorging herself to immensity on Eezo-infected food for months.

She'd ingested potentially hundreds of pounds of the strange, exotic substance, with Goddess only knew how much of it now stored in her fat cells. Makima felt a surge of panic as she realized--the drones and mechs were just for show.

Tevura didn't need any security force.

Tevura herself *was* the security force.

A minor-godlike biotic, gorged on so much Eezo she was visibly drunk on it. She could crush Makima like a bug, if she wanted to... but her aims seemed a little more depraved than mere murder.

"Stop struggling and have a snack... I know you want to. I can see you drooling... Your biometrics are loaded with hunger chemicals. You're ready to let loose, aren't you? Ready to feast. Ready to be like *me*."

Makima wriggled and thrashed in her biotic bonds, levitated fifteen feet in the air now by Tevura's mental powers. Clouds of food floated towards her face as she struggled to turn her head away...

But oh, by the Goddess, it all smelled so good. It all looked so delicious. Maybe just a few bites, to buy time while her hack finished... Maybe just a little snack for the road...

Before she knew it, she was gobbling and gorging ravenously, chewing and swallowing without a care in the world. The absolute rush of the food sliding down her throat was enough to make her whole body thrill with addicted pleasure. Soon her stomach bulged and groaned under the onslaught of gluttony, but Makima kept eating, her focus completely overtaken by putting more calories into her body as quickly as possible.

Tevura licked her lips, watching in depraved delight as her former lover slobbered and gorged like a barnyard beast.

"Yes, that's it... Eat up. We'll live like *queens*, my dear, once you've come around to my way of thinking. Once you understand that only pleasure matters, only bliss, only indulging ourselves like the superior biotic Goddesses we are... And I plan to be the greatest, and the *largest*, Goddess of all."

Makima's omni-tool alerted her that the hack was finished. Time to distract Tevura and get out of here... Well, maybe a few more snacks first--

No!!

Her panicked mind fought to retain some level of self-control even as her body kept eating relentlessly, mindlessly.

I have to get out of here... Have to stop her from destroying the asari...

Feeling the Eezo churning in her belly, Makima reached down inside herself, summoning as much biotic power as she could.

"Yes... I think I... Understand now. **Urrrp.**"

She exerted her will on space-time, biotic "hands" blooming into existence around her, crackling constructs of Eezo-energy. She dispatched these hands, with a mere thought, to caress Tevura's bloated body, squeezing her titanic udders, massaging her flabby rolls.

Tevura purred with surprised pleasure as Makima slid one of the hands under her belly, seeking her fat-buried loins...

"Oh, my. You're a fast learner, aren't you? You'll make such a lovely pile of flesh, too... All those pretty features vanishing under the effects of indulgence... I simply can't **URRRP**, wait to destroy you..."

But she ceased her sinister murmurs when Makima found a buried path under her fat-rolls to her mound of pubic fat, the Eezo-hand teasing and stroking, delving deeper, nudging slowly and insistently at Tevura's fattened clit.

The massive, villainous asari shivered with unexpected delight as Makima stimulated her in a way she hadn't been touched in many months. Her mouth lolled open and her eyes rolled back, her pudgy fingers going slack... Which caused the crackling flames of biotic energy to shrink, dissipate, dissolve...

The obese Asari 'goddess' moaned and her eyes rolled back; she was completely vulnerable, completely lost to pleasure as Makima teased her bloated pussy. And her control over her powers was slipping.

Tevura's one vulnerability had always been her penchant for hedonism... and now it kept her paralyzed long enough for Makima to wriggle out of her biotic bonds, plunging into a pile of food.

She reflexively reached for a fistful of chocolate cookies, then pulled her hand back, trembling with a desire to keep eating. As she stood awkwardly and stumbled towards the exit, barely maintaining the focus on her biotic constructs, warning signs flashed across the holo-screens again. Up on the throne, Tevura wheezed and whimpered her way through an orgasm, momentarily distracted as Makima kept her biotic constructs expertly teasing the fat criminal queen.

"DRIVES OFFLINE. REPEAT... FOOD PRODUCTION NETWORK OFFLINE. SYSTEM OVERLOAD."

Sparks erupted from the ceiling and lights flickered throughout the facility as Ma'kia jiggled out the door and to the elevator—the Cibus Drive hack was underway, the Drives breaking down. The last she saw of Tevura was the morbidly obese asari watching her through a fog of pleasure, as Makima bounced and quivered out the door, the tear in her environment suit still showing off her bright blue, massive buttocks as she went.

The fury in Tevura's eyes would haunt her for centuries... That sullen, child-like hatred of someone who had defied her greedy whims.

She would see those eyes in her dreams for the rest of her life.



They slowly came out of trance together, Makima's eyes flickering open and her plump hand falling away from Shiza's forehead. The asari matriarch glanced away from Shiza as her young friend returned to consciousness, a blush of shame tinging her cheeks a deep blue.

"And there you have it. My shameful secret. I wasn't able to capture Tevura... Only escape, while the entire Drive network went down. I summoned the authorities after leaving the moon, but they found nothing when they returned--Tevura had already fled through a mass-effect gate to some distant corner of the galaxy. They never found her."

Shiza swallowed, struggling to come to terms with all the feelings inside her. Once again, they were somewhere new--some kind of modified ship's lounge, circular cushioned couches all over the place, with a hookah sitting in the middle of each one. Piles of empty food containers sat around the both of them, and Shiza realized once again she was uncomfortably stuffed, her stomach swollen with the results of feasting while in Makima's bonding-trance.

"Ugh... I mean... You couldn't have helped that, she was a genius and a biotic savant by that point. It's not your fault she escaped... But how has no one ever heard of this? An obesity epidemic this size... It should be in every history book..."

"The asari Council covered it all up," said Makima, bitterness spreading across her face at the memory. "They ordered all the broken-down Drives destroyed, the new restaurants on the Citadel removed. They mandated a species-wide fitness program, helping everyone slim down again. You'll still see a fat Matriarch once in a while, but for the most part, the cover-up was successful. No one ever learned about the obesity plague the Drives caused..."

"To this day, the other species in the Citadel have no idea of how we debased ourselves, acting like slovenly pigs for years... It's the best-kept secret in asari history. It's also the reason why fitness is enshrined permanently in asari culture. The Council is determined to make sure we never show that side of ourselves, ever again."

Shiza stared at Makima, fascinated... but also concerned. If this threat was dead and in the ground, so to speak, then why did Makima look so plagued with guilt?

"But... You don't think it's over, do you? Tevura is still out there. She still has the schematics for the duplicate Drives."

"Exactly. And recently, asari archeologists have been discovering traces of pleasure-cults among our colonies. She's started making Drives again... and distributing them. Starting cults, perhaps even kidnapping people. She has to be stopped."

Shiza stood up, wobbling unsteadily as she realized she'd been indulging in... whatever was inside those hookahs.

"Woah... Well, we should do something about that, we can't let the Decadent Age return! What's your plan?"

Makima opened her mouth... and then paused as she stared around, suspicious.

"Shiza... Do you have a weapon on you?"

"Right now? I... No, my belt and field kit are gone. Shit. Maybe I outgrew them in the trance?"

Makima's expression darkened and she rose, her bulky frame wobbling as she assumed a fighting stance, biotic flames springing to life around her plump fingers.

"No. They've been taken. And so has my sidearm and my omni-tool. Someone stole them off us, while we were in meld together. But Aethyta, my bodyguard, she's supposed to..."

The intercom crackled to life aboard the ship and they heard Aethyta's voice over the speakers.

"What, babysit you while you send your mind back in time and stuff your fat face? Been there, done that. And I'm a bit tired of it, if I'm honest. So tired that I accepted a new job offer... from an old friend of yours."

Shiza's hand flew to her omni-tool--but it was gone, just like her field kit. And so was her personal communicator. She stumbled to the door to try and escape, but the damn thing wouldn't budge--she slapped the open keypad and tried hauling on the hydraulic door's cleft, but nothing worked.

They were trapped, aboard an unknown ship... and from the sound of things, Aethyta wasn't letting them out anytime soon.

"It's her," Makima said, with grim acceptance. "Tevura. After all these centuries, she's finally making her move."

The asari biotic shook her head, shame on her features once again.

"I let my guard down. Melded too often, and I *know* I'm vulnerable in trance, I binge-eat, I'm... pliable. I knew all this, and I still trusted her. What an idiot I've been."

Shiza shook her head, struggling to pry open a wall panel with her fingers.

"It's not your fault... She's probably been waiting ages to spring this on you. Planning it. But we can still stop her--we just have to get to the bridge!"

The intercom beeped again, with Aethyta's gravelly voice chuckling at the two of them.

"Oh, I don't think so... You two have really been going hog wild today, eating like pigs. I think you need to relax... Maybe take a little nap..."

Nozzles on the wall hissed, and an aerosol--almost certainly some kind of sedative--filled the room. Shiza covered her mouth, staggering away from the door.

The last thing she felt was the soft embrace of the couch pillows as she tumbled onto them... The last thing she saw was Makima on the floor, belly jutting out, trapped on her back as she breathed in more and more of the gas.

Then the floor shuddered as Aethyta guided the ship into a mass-effect gate... And they were on their way to the edge of the galaxy, their ship "slingshotted" by Prothean technology to post-light speeds.

Aethyta smiled. These two were in for a terrible fate. She'd learned more about her employer while enacting this plan, and this pair were about to meet the long-lost queen of decadence herself. The dark goddess of excess, lurking on the borders of space.

Tevura the Vast...

~[TO BE CONTINUED, IN THE FINAL CHAPTER...]~