

While Jackie went over the gang base with a fine-tooth comb, looking for anything worth taking and stuffing it into our bags, I stood watch. I picked a spot at the entrance to the open pavilion, my back to the heavily perforated mini-shop that sat in the middle. I kept my eyes on the road, watching for anyone suspicious driving past, my helmet blocking the glare from headlights as I stared. Thankfully, the few normal civilians around at this time of night knew better than to approach, but I had no doubt word of a new Borg hanging out, taking down a 6th Street gang spot, would get around.

Like I needed any more attention.

After about five minutes, Jackie walked out and dropped two bags off by my feet before walking back inside and grabbing two more. I quickly clipped my rifle to my back, grabbed both bags with one hand, and drew my pistol. When Jackie returned with his loot, we made a beeline for the truck, quickly stuffing our bags into the back before hopping in and peeling out.

We traveled at a pretty quick speed through the city, only slowing down to a more reasonable pace once we were back in Valentino territory. Rather than heading straight home, Jackie punched in a location nearby before letting the truck drive itself. He was about to call Padre when I spoke up.

"Tell him I have a few more inventions he might be interested in."

"What? Already?" He asked, the shock clear in his voice. "What are they?"

"A small, quiet, multipurpose drone that doesn't use fuel and has decent range, as well as some scanning equipment that can monitor a large building for intruders," I explained.

"Damn, choom. That's quick... I'm not sure he will be ready to buy something new so quickly," Jackie admitted with a frown. "He spent a good chunk of Eddies on you already."

"Should we look for a new buyer, then?"

"No, definitely not," he said, shaking his head and waving his hand. "We try Padre first, and if he doesn't want it, we can ask him to find someone who does. We are already in his good graces. Cutting him out of a deal now would only ruin that."

"Even if we make less money because he needs a cut too?"

"Padre won't screw us," Jackie assured me. "The last low price was the cost of protection and keeping things dark. This time, he will be more fair."

I nodded in agreement, hoping for Jackie's sake he was right. If Padre expected me to sell all of my stuff as cheaply as I had my first batch, he was in for a surprise.

Seeing that I was satisfied, Jackie contacted Padre and explained that the job was done. He also informed him that I was already ready to show him a few more things, the fixer agreeing to meet us tomorrow night, which, since it was almost two in the morning at that point, meant in two days. While Jackie was talking about setting up a meeting, my keyfob vibrated in one of my belt pouches. A quick look showed just over six thousand eddies deposited in my account.

While he talked to the fixer, the truck continued to drive, making its way through Valentino territory. Just a few minutes after Jackie was done on the phone and had taken control of the truck back from the Auto-driver, we pulled into a back alley. We stepped out of our vehicle and were immediately greeted by a pair of obvious Valentino members. They looked aggressive, eyeing me up and keeping their hands near their weapons, right up until they spotted Jackie. When they did, they immediately started talking in Spanish with friendly smiles on their faces. After a short negotiation, Jackie handed the four bags off, only after grabbing a smaller bag from inside one of them. Apparently, he found a few rolls of cash during his quick sweep of the building.

The gang members took about ten minutes going over whatever it was that Jackie had stuffed into the bags before coming back and paying Jackie. They talked for a few more minutes before the gangers returned to their posts, and we returned to the truck. Jackie pulled out of the alley and turned to head back to the garage.

"How did it go?"

"Good, another three grand for both of us," He explained, his eyes glowing for a moment while he transferred my share to my account. "When we get back, take three rolls from the bag too. That's another five hundred."

I nodded, leaning back in the seat as best as I could in my armor. Almost an hour later, I was finally stepping back into my apartment. I was tired, sore, and ready for bed. As the door sealed behind me, Samwise stepped out of the workshop.

"Welcome back, Sir. How was your 'job'," He asked, taking my rifle from me and, after deftly checking it was unloaded and off, stored it in the workshop.

"About as well as you could hope," I said, taking off my jacket and hanging it up before walking further into the apartment. "How did your night go?"

"I am currently seventy-three percent done with my first project," He explained, once again exiting the work area. "I find adapting to your tool options to be... interesting. I will likely finish both projects by tomorrow morning."

"Good, then we can finally put the idea of me getting credit for you finishing something to rest," I said, stretching with a yawn. "Though it's already looking pretty much busted since I haven't gotten any new information from you assembling it."

"Indeed. Unfortunate, but you suspected it would work this way."

I grunted in acknowledgment before dropping down to the edge of my bed and kicking off my shoes. Spot left his charging point and snagged them with his grabbers, flying them over to their proper location by the door before I could even ask.

"Sorry, Sam. I would love to stay up longer to chat, but I really can't," I said, pulling off my shirt. "It's late, and I still need to sleep off the nearly all-nighter I pulled programming for you."

"Understandable, Sir. I will continue working," He confirmed with a small nod. "Have a good night's rest."

"Thanks, buddy. Wake me up if you need me."

I quickly crawled into bed while Samwise made his way back to the workshop. Thankfully, with the door sealed, the sound of the fabricators and 3D printers would be heavily muffled. I watched as Spot flew around, snagged my clothes, and carried them to the clothes bin before sliding himself back into his charge station. I was out before he had even fully powered down.

The next morning, I woke up to find Samwise charging in the drone workstation. I was halfway through my poor excuse for breakfast when he booted back up and stepped away from the work area.

"Good morning, Samwise," I greeted. "How did everything go last night after I got home?"

"I completed the devices, save the final steps for each one," he responded. "Will we be completing the experiment now?"

"May as well."

We stepped into the workshop, and I watched as Samwise got to work. He had completed most of the drone, with only its power source, a few screws, and a single panel left to attach. He completed the work deftly, putting the final pieces together in several minutes. Normally, that would be when I got the final burst of information. Unfortunately, but not unsurprisingly, there was nothing. I still had the basic information that I got while creating the CAD files, but no new information presented itself.

"Oh well, check that off the list," I said with a frown.

Thankfully, I really didn't care about understanding this particular drone, and there wasn't exactly some great secret I was missing. I had the designs and a working model, which was plenty to sell to Padre. If, when the tech tree switched over, I lost all that knowledge completely, I didn't really care.

With the drone done, it was time to test the second potential cheat, having someone build *most* of the machine, stop, and then finish it myself. I was about as confident with this portion of the experiment as I was with the previous, but it still needed to be done. Unfortunately, we had to wait about an hour for the final pieces I needed to get delivered. Samwise then needed to modify a few of them before I could finally put it all together.

We spent about thirty minutes putting the final touches on the early version of the minion detector, fitting the parts together, and sliding everything into the custom case. In all honesty, I was pretty impressed by Sam's work. There was a fair bit of modifications that had to be done to the sensors we purchased, the ones that functioned as the backbone of the device. Despite being a bit nervous about how my new assistant would handle them, they were as near perfect as I should have expected from an AI.

When I finally put in the last screw, I quickly hooked up the unit to my computer before booting it up. Unsurprisingly, the sensor was useless in an apartment complex as massive as a Megabuilding, but that didn't matter since I didn't even let it finish the scanning process, as just turning it on was enough.

"Alright, so. I got something for finishing it, but not much," I explained, chewing my cheek as I tried to put it into words. "It sort of cemented the design in my head a bit, and I understand just a bit more about it. I *might* be able to build it again from scratch, with the designs, but... It's hard to tell. I definitely didn't get the same burst of knowledge that I usually get, showing what's around it and lighting up the tech tree."

"That is more than you predicted."

"Yeah, but way less than I'd hoped," I responded before shrugging. "Still, depending on what I keep after the switch happens, it might be useful. Maybe for simple tech that functions on ideas I already know. I'll get the designs, a bit more of the knowledge, but nothing else."

"Something to keep in mind for the future, sir," Samwise suggested, and I nodded in agreement.

With the experiment over, it was time for us to get to proper work. I had a long list of things that I wanted to build from the Titanfall universe, and I did not have a whole lot of time to do it. Some of them were more important than others, while some things were absolutely crucial if I wanted to fully move into Rocky Ridge during my next break week.

First on the list was the ability to make custom parts, which in and of itself was a multi-stage process. Next up was the ability to turn scrap and trash into raw materials.

My first step was custom parts production, though it wouldn't really be useful until I finished step two as well. In the Titanfall universe, when it came to big productions or mass productions, their tech was basically just more advanced versions of what the Cyberpunk universe used, usually from the heavy implementation of AI-controlled systems. Fabrication arms, vacuum welding, and several other more advanced construction methods worked together in large, automated factories to turn raw materials into products.

However, when it came to small-batch, small-scale production, they had fully embraced the 3D printing trend and ran with it. Rather than using a subtractive method for making small-scale things, IE starting with a block of steel and carving it down into the part you need, the Titanfall universe used additive methods, most often by literally printing things.

Originally, like in my world, this was done mostly with plastics. Several high-tech polymers, better than what the Cyberpunk universe had access to, ended up replacing metal for a lot of stuff. Of course, 3D printing with metal is something that exists in my home world, in Cyberpunk, and in Titanfall, but it had a lot of issues and wasn't always capable of what you needed. Then, someone at IMC figured out how to print down quickly and accurately at nearly the *molecular level*, with basically any material, with no loss in strength.

Unsurprisingly, it replaced a huge portion of 3D printers almost overnight. No seams, no defects unless your machine was faulty, and quality systems, the ability to print with multiple materials at once. These new printers were incredible and could easily print just about anything. Some higher-end machines could print out equipment wholesale, rather than go part by part.

Unfortunately, there were, of course, some pretty heavy restrictions that made the method impractical for mass production.

For one thing, it was incredibly energy-intensive. Running one or two of the molecular printer machines, colloquially known as molly-makers, took an incredible amount of power, but running enough to be considered a mass production facility would be astronomical. Further, while the technique was fast, that was only when compared to other 3D printing methods. In most circumstances, it was easier to mass produce individual parts the normal way before putting everything together, rather than printing out each piece or even multiple pieces at once.

It also required that the material being printed, whether it was metal, plastic, or something else, was suspended in a very specific solution. Unfortunately, that mixture was extremely sensitive and would become inert from exposure to sunlight, high or low temperatures, or rapid shifts in pressure. It even had a shelf life that, once passed, required a remanufacturing process to reactivate.

Thankfully, I had power generation covered. Elerium was basically free energy, and at this point, I knew it backward and forward. I could make enough Elerium to power a

decent-sized molly-maker in a couple of days, and I already had enough on hand to power a smaller one.

That just left the suspension solution. In early models, this required two separate machines. The first was to process, filter, and reactivate the used inert solution, and the second was to reinfuse raw materials into the activated solution. Later, machines were capable of doing this all in one standard device, but those were too advanced for me for now. Thankfully, the process of making the solution was a relatively simple chemical process, one I could handle on a small scale for now.

There was one silver lining to all of this. The technique, or at least the basic version of the technique, scaled extremely well, meaning that once I had the process of making even a small version, I would be able to pretty easily puzzle out how to make a larger one. That is, if making the small one didn't immediately fill in the blanks. If I wanted the more flexible, efficient, and faster version, I would have to build whatever this first model unlocked and then upscale from that.

Of course, that was all just half of the story. I wanted to be self-sufficient, and that meant having my own source of materials. Thankfully, Titanfall had a solution to that as well, in the form of mass recyclers. These devices could take mass amounts of trash and scrap, shred it to pieces, and use nearly a dozen different separation methods to pull out a variety of useful metals. It also separated useless waste and plastics, producing plastic cubes made up of whatever plastics you fed into it. These plastics could be useful for some things, but the inconsistencies in their makeup made them pretty much useless when you needed consistency and precision.

The plan, for now, was to make the first versions of all four of these devices before the first week was out. Then, using the money that I would hopefully get from Padre, I could buy a chunk of the land at Rocky Ridge. Once I owned that, I could build larger, improved versions of the molly-maker, its required support, and the mass recycler there. Then, when my new production foundation was secure, I could put it to work for the remaining time I had the Titanfall tech tree.

Between having no lag time for parts delivery, no longer needing to modify parts to work, and having everything on hand at once, I would be able to get through everything I needed and at least some of what I wanted.

I was hoping to be building the larger, improved machines by the start of my second week so I could at least have four or five days to make as many bits and pieces from the Titanfall universe as I could. I was not letting this tech tree pass without at least getting the jump jets and particle shields. It was a tall order, but as long as Padre paid out properly for my new ideas, I could brute force it with money.

As you can imagine, with such a tight deadline, I immediately got to work, powering through the first step of the process, CAD designs. The second I finished one of the designs, I began working on the second, while Samwise monitored the 3D printers and fabricators, keeping them fed and printing while I continued to put the designs in my head into the computer. When I was done for the night, he continued to produce parts so we could assemble everything.

This continued for the next day and into the late afternoon. By then, we had assembled both the molly-maker itself as well as the material suspension device. They were small models, both of them the size of mini-fridges, and when they were done, they provided a burst of insight into how they really worked and how some of the direct improvements made in later models worked. I could feel that when I was ready to build the larger models, I would have access to the higher-end version, ones that came out much later in the Titanfall timeline.

While part of me would have loved to dive into the next step in my plan, Jackie and I had an appointment with a fixer. I spent half an hour making myself decent before leaving to pick up Jackie. This time, Padre picked the place, meaning we were driving deep into the heart of Valentino territory to a small lowered pavilion between two large apartment buildings.

The space was relatively clean and well-lit, with vending machines along one far wall and a few benches and tables around. We passed a row of food stalls selling noodles and other random foods before stepping out into the mostly empty space. Padre was sitting on one of the concrete benches, reading his weathered bible, his large bodyguard standing beside him.

Jackson, Jackie, good to see you both again," He said, motioning us to sit on a bench that ran perpendicular to his own. "Have a seat."

After making ourselves comfortable, the fixer once again patiently sat there, under no rush to start the conversation. Part of me wondered if he was doing something with his neural link, pretending to be a wise man of few words by playing the Cyberpunk equivalent of Clash of Clans in his head. Finally, after what seemed like a full minute and a half, he spoke.

"So, Jackson. Jackie told me you have more to sell?"

"I do," I answered, beginning to lift the small box I had fit the drone inside of, stopping when he held up my hand.

"While your creations are worth money, buying so many of them so quickly would spread me thin," He explained. "If I purchase these as well, it will take months before I am prepared to buy more."

"I understand that, Sir."

"Good. In the future, I may have other buyers interested in your creations, but for now, these will be the last I purchase. Assuming I am interested."



Sensing the unspoken permission, I lifted the small case, revealing my drone.

"This is a flying drone. It is relatively quiet, tough, easy to make, cheap to repair, has a decent camera, and has a built-in payload release mechanism. Normally, its max payload is just under a pound, but at the cost of stealth, heavy battery drain, and a lot of wear on its parts, it can lift a pound and a half for short periods," I explained before handing him the drone. "Unlike most modern drones these days, it doesn't burn fuel or use thrusters. That means anyone with access to electricity can charge and use it."

I answered a few questions about "my" invention as he connected its controls with his neural-link. As he guided the drone up off the ground and high into the air, he nodded.

"A useful tool," He agreed, the drone scanning over some of the vending machines. "If a bit disorienting to use."

When the drone was safely back in the box, Jackie handed over some footage of me using and showing off the minions tracker. When he realized what he was watching, Padre leaned forward in interest.

"With one of these set up inside a building, one man can watch the entire place by himself," I assured him. "You can secure an entire building with just one of these. No cameras, no patrols, and no sensors. Larger buildings or buildings with more than three stories will require more than one system, but they are designed to work together seamlessly."

"How does it work?"

"It uses a whole host of different sensors to scan a building, then lock on to movement," I explained. "It's only limitation is that it can't pick up people running faster than thirty miles per hour, but at that pace, the likelihood of someone being stealthy..."

Padre had several more questions about how the minion detector worked. When he was finally satisfied, he leaned back on the bench.

"Do you have a price in mind?" he asked, laser-focused on me.

"I do. One hundred thousand for both, plus fifteen percent of your profits."

For a moment, the older man looked at me before finally chuckling and nodding.

"Seems like my doubts were unfounded. I am glad you understand the game to some extent, or you would have made a poor friend for Jackie," He said before responding to my offer. "Fifty thousand and ten percent."

"Eighty and fifteen."



"Seventy and twelve."

Now it was my turn to pause and consider, my eyes watching the older man as he confidently waited for my response. Seventy thousand Eddies was already more than I got for my three other inventions, and the added twelve percent would hopefully help keep me flush for a while, depending on just how many of these things he sold.

"And you'll continue to look after me and Jackie?" I said, ignoring my friend's shifting. "Keep an ear to the ground, that sort of thing?"

"I'll even continue to obfuscate all of your online shopping deliveries," Padre assured me, shaking his head at my shocked expression. "Do you really think someone wouldn't catch on to so many materials being delivered to one location? I've been keeping your name out of records since we made our first deal."

"That... Thank you," I said, letting out a long breath. "It was a concern, but hopefully for not much longer."

"Your first three inventions will more than makeup for any bribes I make," he assured me, brushing off my first words. "What do you mean it will not be a problem?"

"I... plan on purchasing a chunk of land from Rocky Ridge, the abandoned town," I explained. "With any luck, I'll be moving out there within the next two weeks. Something that I would prefer to stay between us for now."

"Ah, interesting. And would you be needing help with that?"

"I... Depending on the cost, maybe." I said. "And I don't just mean money. But I will know more once I start the process."

"I understand. While many here consider gang contacts to be an important resource, to the man trying to stay neutral and out of sight, they are a burden," He said with a nod. "Keep the offer in mind, but I will not hold my breath. In any case, do we have a deal?"

"We do," I agreed with a nod, reaching out and shaking the man's hand.

"If you have more to sell, contact me with some details, and I may be able to find someone interested," He said, still holding my hand. "I will facilitate the trade, with a minor cut of the profits, of course."

"Of course," I said, internally rolling my eyes.

With our business concluded, Padre transferred thirty-five thousand credits to my account before Jackie and I made our way back to the truck. When we climbed in, I transferred ten thousand eddies to Jackie.

"Woah, choom, that's a lot of Eddies!" he said, his eyes wide, showing off their glow. "I hardly did anything this time!"

"It's your contacts, Jackie. I wouldn't be on nearly as friendly terms with Padre without you," I pointed out. "Besides, we are a team. When I succeed, so do you."

He looked at me for a long moment before giving me a slight nod. I could tell my statement meant a lot to the larger man, but I focused on the road.

"Speaking of being a team, why didn't you mention moving out of the city?" he asked, his face falling a bit.

"I'll be five minutes away, tops," I pointed out, shaking my head. "I need a lot more room to grow, and out there, I won't have anyone breathing down my neck when I start improving my security and building larger stuff. It is cheap, isolated by the desert, and the Wraiths are really the only major threat I will have to deal with."

"Still sounds risky," He commented. "Wraiths are no pushovers."

"I know," I admitted, chewing my lip. "The first week or so is going to be intense. Once I have some time to build up some security, I will feel much better, but until then, it's going to be tight. I will probably spend some time bouncing back and forth, sleeping at the apartment and working there. That way, I will at least avoid being ambushed at night."

"We could hire some people to act as security, at least until you're set," He pointed out. "I'll obviously be there, but with a few solos around, we could keep the place safe to work in."

"That's... a pretty good idea," I admitted with a nod. "Padre probably knows some people willing to work for a discount on some proper body armor or maybe some other tech."

"He would probably pay them and hold the discounts for himself if you offered that," Jackie countered. "Your armor is good choom. He likes how easy it is to wear."

"Yeah... Hey, I'm thinking of getting some bone and muscle lace or maybe a skin weave, depending on what Vik can get his hands on," I said, changing the topic.

"Good idea. You need some chrome to toughen you up," Jackie said, reaching over and slapping me on the shoulder. "I've got all three, and I don't regret any of them."

We spent the rest of the drive discussing which I should get first, eventually arriving back at the megabuilding. After a quick goodbye, Jackie hopped onto his bike and drove off, leaving me to head back to my apartment and get back to work. There was a lot to get done, and every day counted.