

Chapter 167: Proactivity

Raven - Nova Tech

“Hello? Rollo?”

After having heard no response coming from the room, Raven opened the door into the room. She found it completely empty, with no one there.

Her heart began to beat rapidly as she ran through a scenario in her head. A scenario where their captive had escaped and while it was on her watch, too. She dreaded the consequences of failing her duty and could even feel her palms beginning to sweat.

Just as she was placing a call to Commander Poltrix, the door to the bathroom opened. Raven reflexively placed a hand on her firearm and was about to draw it, only to be stopped by a voice calling out.

“I’m in the washroom. Can you give me a few minutes?”

“...”

Raven awkwardly stared at the door to the bathroom for a moment before doing a quick one-eighty and briskly walked out of the room.

It was then, with perfect timing, that the base commander picked up her call.

“Raven, what’s the matter?”

“...Oh, nothing much...I just... wanted to see if the application to prompt Rollo to a junior researcher is approved, yet?”

“...I’ll ask Dr. Chen again when he has the time. Is that all?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Raven let out a sigh of relief after ending the call.

I need to get my shit together!

That was way too close for comfort.

After hitching my ride back to the base along with Cora and other members of Nova Tech, I found someone standing right outside the door to my room.

Thankfully, I hadn't been too late. I waited until she got impatient and entered my room to slip in with her. Then I jumped into the bathroom and called out to her. Thankfully, she immediately retreated.

I quickly got myself in order and prepared for another workday in the lab.

When I exited my room, I found the same woman waiting for me, as expected.

"Did you need something from me?"

"Oh, I wanted to update you about your current situation. Unfortunately, the threats haven't passed yet, and we strongly recommend you stay in this place for the foreseeable future. If there is anything you're in need of, please feel free to let me know, and I'll see what I can do."

"A connection to the web would be nice."

"...That isn't something we can do, as it may compromise the security of this base. Please understand."

"Fine, fine. Can I at least have better food? This synthetic stuff just doesn't work for me anymore." I complained with the best whiny voice I could muster.

"...I'll see if that is possible. Anyway, I believe your promotion from assistant to researcher should be approved soon, so we may have a better chance at fulfilling your request if you are willing to use some of your pay."

"Oh, I'm getting paid? How much?"

"Our junior researchers start at a salary of two hundred thousand credits."

"That's...a lot! Sure, I could use some of it to upgrade my food."

I watched as Raven nodded in satisfaction at my answer.

"Okay, let's bring you to the lab then, shall we? I'll be your guide today."

"Is this really necessary? I know the way by now, I can go by myself."

"...If you insist...I'll ask the commander. Just note that there will be penalties if you wander into restricted areas, unknowingly or not. I highly recommend against it."

"...Sure, let's see what the big man says."

After attending the Halls Corporation security forces' morning training, Thorne once again made his way to Claire's office to repeat the same question he had been asking throughout the past week.

"Any new updates?"

"No... Nothing has changed."

"I see..."

Claire was used to this exchange by now and swiftly resumed her work on her terminal.

Thorne stood there for a few moments as he sent out messages to the cyber security experts, Leo and Lana, and then to Lucy, the intelligence director.

"Feel free to sit down, Thorne. I'm not expecting anyone today." Claire offered as she continued to be focused on the terminal before her.

However, even after a dozen seconds, Thorne remained unmoved, causing Claire to look up.

"Thorne?"

"...Come with me, quickly!"

Thorne wasted no time and closed the distance between them, grabbing her by the wrist. He pulled her to her feet, and they quickly made their way out of the office.

Claire didn't bother complaining as she immediately realized Thorne's strange behavior meant something urgent had come up. She struggled to keep up with the cyborg and only had a moment of respite when they entered the elevator.

"Thorne, what's going on?"

The man in question turned to her while continuing to spam the elevator terminal.

"Lucy says she received some strange messages from our mailbox reserved for informants. It could be about Rollo!"

Claire was instantly taken back at the sudden development, but quickly took on a determined look.

"Let's hurry, then."

They soon arrived at the intel department, and they both briskly walked toward the desk at the very end. All the employees in the department looked up from their work at their executives charging through their department.

“What’s going on?”

“Are they angry at us for something?”

They all perked their ears when the duo made their way to their boss’s desk. However, they didn’t get to hear a single word as the company software instantly deafened them. If they tried peering in their direction to read their lips, their optics would blur them out as well.

“Lucy, show us the message, quick!”

The intelligence head of the Halls Corporation didn’t flinch at the eagerness of her friends and superiors and quickly turned her screen toward them.

“This is the message we received from one of our electronic mailboxes just earlier. It’s heavily encoded using the cipher we employ for our top secret intel, and even after decrypting it, it’s just a bunch of gibberish to me.”

Both Claire and Thorne leaned in at the same time.

“This…” Claire muttered. “Is this what I think it is?”

“Yes…it’s from Rollo…”

“What?” Lucy’s eyes widened at the revelation.

She had been informed that Rollo had been taken away, but not much of the details.

Thorne cleared his throat and explained.

“It’s a new encryption he…made, just before he left. The message says he’s alive and well. He’s currently near…Ceres Station? Where’s that?”

Lucy swiftly pulled up the station in question on another screen.

“Dwarf planet between Mars and Jupiter. Not exactly a place our company has any reach in…”

“We need to prepare a plan to extract him right away. His situation could change at any moment,” Thorne shouted.

“Quiet down, will you?” Claire quipped. “You heard the plan before he left. We need to wait for his backer to return so he can keep the big corps in check. There’s no point in trying to do anything ourselves when we are up against…Nova Tech.”

Lucy nodded at her words.

“...Claire’s right. If our enemy is really Nova Tech, even if we manage to extract Rollo ourselves, they could easily chase us down and destroy us. Especially so if we’re going out into space where we have no assets.”

“...”

“Thorne, the message says to reply before we even do anything hasty. Rollo wants to wait until his backer is ready, too. What we should be doing is contacting them, so we can relay their plan to Rollo when the time comes.”

“Very well...”

Claire and Lucy shared a nod before they went to carry out their plan.

They discreetly sent a message to Titus, the owner of AeroDynamic, asking to talk.

However, they didn’t receive a response even after a whole week.

They suspected Titus was either not ready to speak to them yet or the message hadn’t even gotten through at all. After all, it was hard to say for sure that an esteemed individual, like a boss of an A-Class corporation, would be that accessible. His secretary or someone else along the way may have disregarded their message for all they knew.

It was exactly seven days after they had sent the message that Thorne could no longer take it.

“That’s enough waiting. I’m going up to find him to speak with him myself.”

“Thorne, don’t be reckless! If they don’t want to answer us, what makes you think they would see you? You’d just be wasting time.”

“Then what else are we going to do? At this rate, it’ll be years before we get Rollo back!”

“I...I don’t know.” Claire weakly replied as she glanced off to the side in search of an answer.

“Look, Claire. If you can just sit here and wait, then good on you. But I can’t sit still anymore. Just let me go find this Titus guy. I’ll make him hear me out if I have to.”

“...Thorne, do you even know what you’re saying?”

“Yes. If I can’t meet with him in person, I’ll just have to leave messages that he can’t ignore! There’s no way he won’t value our ability to contact Rollo while he’s in captivity.”

“...Fine, but tell me your plan first. I can’t let your recklessness ruin the company while Rollo is gone.”

Lana - Halls Corporation

On a sunny morning just outside the spaceport of Elevate City, several Wraiths were parked and several people were gathered beside them.

“Let me get this straight. I’m only coming because Claire wanted me to keep an eye on you. I expect you to listen, like you promised. Got it?”

“Yes, I got it. I already promised Leo, too. Rest assured,” the cyborg perfunctorily replied.

“...Whatever, as long as you understand. Anyway, are you sure you want to bring these two along?” Lana pointed toward the two security agents behind Thorne.

“Yes, and they have names. Both Peng and Andrew have been with us for quite some time and have proven their capabilities and loyalty.”

The bigger of the two nodded immediately.

“Peng agrees. You can rely on Peng to do a good job.”

Lana took a moment to scrutinize each of them further before turning away.

“Come on, it’s almost time for our shuttle.”

The four swiftly made their way across the spaceport and soon boarded the shuttle that would be taking them up into orbit.

As Lana got seated, she couldn’t help but sigh upon thinking back about why she had accepted the request to accompany Thorne. Either Leo or she had to stay behind to look after the company, and she was selected to accompany Thorne.

Claire’s reasoning was that Leo would easily get overpowered by Thorne when it came down to it, or would just go with the flow once he found it a hassle. Lana couldn’t even refute her claims, as she knew it was true.

As they were others within the same shuttle, the four of them never spoke about anything sensitive throughout the entire ride.

They waited until they had arrived in Aegis and had checked into their rooms before talking about their mission.

“Okay, Argus indicates this room is clear. Let’s talk now. Claire said you had a plan, but can’t share any of it with us. Not even our main objective until we get there. Can you at least outline our next few steps now?”

“...Yes. Our first objective is to get to Ganymede Station.”

“What? That’s quite the journey. We’ll be completely isolated there,” Lana sighed. “You do know that we’d be disconnected from the net we’ve been using the moment we get too far from Earth, right? We’d literally be alone in foreign territory.”

“Yes, and I know we’re not exactly the most experienced in how things work in these space stations. That’s why our immediate goal is to rendezvous with someone who is. He should at least be able to arrange for our transportation.”

Lana frowned and gave Thorne a skeptical look.

“We have connections up here?”

Thorne confidently nodded.