

Chapter 41: Shade

“That’s right, our company has recently launched a new cybernetic, the HSU-003 ‘Shade’.” I said as I sat down on the opposite side of the table to Ida Mereth, the middle-aged woman and her assistant.

“Yes, I’ve read about it but haven’t had the chance to see one in person yet. Stealth cybernetics are rare for a reason. It will be a risk for us to carry this product if there isn’t a market for it.”

As expected of a corpo, of course she would probe for any faults possible to push down the price. Good thing I came prepared.

I brought out my terminal and placed it on the table between us, “You do not have to worry about that. Here is some data from my business regarding the market for stealth implants. As you can see, demand for our product has been exponentially growing, and that is from minimal marketing. There is still a large untapped market with all the mercenaries in Elevate City.”

“I see... These are attractive numbers, if true. Let us see a sample, if you will.”

Opening the briefcase, I fished out the sample of stealth cybernetic we newly designated as ‘Shade’. It was unimpressive looking, as it was a small device that only had the purpose of housing the nanomachines within the human body.

“Rebecca, if you will.” Ida looked back and instructed her assistant.

The assistant then took a full minute to insert commands into her handheld terminal before the doors opened and a humanoid robot clumsily walked in.

“Mr. Halls, we wanted to test your product on our G-Pig, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course, go ahead.” I’ve seen them before when getting my medical license. They were not only used to test cybernetics but also helped practical exercises in med school. However, I didn’t have any experience working with them as they weren’t used in my exam.

It didn’t take long for the assistant, Rebecca, to install Shade into the robot.

“Connected with the G-Pig’s SAID, activating the cybernetic, Shade, now!” She cleanly enunciated with a voice that carried across the entire room despite it only being the three of us.

The robot that was standing still swiftly blurred out of our vision and I caught both Ida and Rebecca looking left and right around the area before it disappeared. Ida quickly composed herself when she noticed my gaze.

She took a moment to clear her throat, “I see...I can definitely see it is up to par, but marketing stealth tech so openly may put us on the wrong foot with other corpora—”

“Please, let’s be honest here, Ms.Mereth. If that were the case, you wouldn’t even be sitting here talking to me. We’re willing to give you a wholesale price of 75% of what we retail it for.”

The middle-aged woman took a deep breath and replied, “50% and we have a deal.”

A common habit from all the corpo I’ve seen is that they always keep negotiating until they feel like they won something. It makes it a pain in the ass to negotiate with most of the time, but predictable, which makes it manageable.

After some back and forth, we settled on 60% of the retail price before we messaged our lawyers to draft up the legal documents. They were on standby, so it only took thirty minutes before we both read over the written terms and electronically signed the contract.

Okay, finally, one down and two more to go, for today at least...

“Where is Henry? We have to meet our client soon!” Our team leader, Magnus yelled as he paced around impatiently. It was especially menacing with his large bulky frame that probably consisted more of chrome than meat, but someone had to be the one to answer him. He wasn’t all that bad once you got to know him.

“He said he was going to the clinic earlier, but I wouldn’t worry too much about him. I don’t think he’s ever been late...for work-related things.”

“You trust him too much, Mia. He’s the type that you have to constantly hassle or he’ll instantly slack off. Give him an inch and he’ll take a fucking thousand miles.”

“I didn’t say to stop calling him, but we can relax while doing so.”

Magnus took a deep breath before he sat himself back down on the sofa and chugged the rest of his drink down. He looked like he wanted to say something but decided against it, as no one else in the room seemed to be on his side. Stealing a glance at the rest of our team, they were all doing their own thing without a care in the world.

Who was it that said mercenaries all had a screw loose in their head or something? Because they are so right.

When there were only two minutes left until our meeting, Henry’s lanky figure nonchalantly strode into the private room.

“Where the fuck have you been?” Magnus immediately snapped at him.

His aggression seemed to bounce off Henry, who just shrugged and spoke back in a laid-back tone, “Who cares? I’m on time, aren’t I?”

“You...let me have a word with you after this. Everyone, it's time. Let's go.”

The five of us got up and made the short trip out of our private room on the ground floor of Haven to the much noisier common area. We made our way directly to the stairs to reach the second floor, where it was quieter as it was reserved for private rooms only.

We entered a new room where three unkempt men were waiting. It was our team's policy to let Magnus do all the talking in these negotiations. Though recently, I'm starting to think maybe it's just because everyone else just let Magnus deal with the stuff that is a pain in the ass.

“You the guys Oli sent?” The smallest of the trio asked as soon as we got seated.

“Right, you asked for discretion, so just tell us the details and we'll be on our way.”

One of the men sitting beside the speaker stood up and aggressively glared at Magnus. It was a little amusing seeing someone try that on the behemoth of a man, though. I held back my laughter and applauded myself for my restraint. “Show some respect, co. You're working for us now, right?”

Magnus stared right back at the man while the entire room was quiet. It would be a lot more tense if I wasn't only an inch away from bursting out into laughter. The silence didn't last long before the previous speaker gestured for his friend to back off, “Excuse us, he's not the best communicator. I agree with you, this is no more than a transaction of money and services. Everything you need to know is in this terminal here. Do not download the file, just read it from here.”

The others sat with glows in their eyes that easily gave away that they weren't paying any attention to the conversation while Magnus read over the details of our job.

To no one's surprise, I was the only other one who even bothered to go over it after he was done.

We exited Haven and began our journey to the location provided. The gig wasn't anything new to us, a simple kill these guys from the other gang and take over the location. The only thing to note was the location being a small grocery store, so there would be random civilians in the way and they wanted to keep the damages to a minimum.

We checked our weapons as Magnus debriefed the idiots who hadn't paid any attention. This time it was my turn to zone out the talking as I caressed my beloved Zappy, the best submachine gun in the world!

It wasn't until I finished cleaning every single nook and cranny of Zappy that Magnus finished.

“---any questions or ideas?”

“Me, me, me!” Henry raised his hand like a school kid. “I just got a new toy installed. I can go in to pop the fire alarm or something to get those uninvolved out of the way.”

“New toy?” I reflexively asked, “Yeah, active camouflage. Stuff that I always wanted, and what the corpos hogged to themselves.”

“I thought the corpos installed self-destruct mechanisms in all of them or something. How did you get your hands on one?”

“I think a few corpos are selling ’em now. Luckily I waited and a new model just released that was within my budget and had better performance than the old one, so I got it installed earlier. Here look.”

As soon as Henry said that, his body began to vanish, starting from his torso and spreading to the rest of his body. For once, our other team members turned to look as well. A second passed as we all stared dumbly at the space he had previously occupied before he suddenly came back into existence a few steps away.

“Absolute zero, right?”

A rare sight occurred as the others started to ask Henry various questions about the capabilities of his new implant and where he got it, but Magnus silenced the budding discussion at the clap of the hand.

“All right everyone, we’re almost there. We can chat later. We’ll go with Henry’s plan for now. Mia, if Henry gets you into their network, can you stop the fire alarm’s signal from getting out? I’d rather not have the fire department show up to get in our way.”

“Sure thing. He just needs to plug this in,” I pulled out a small chip from my pack and held it out for all to see.

“Okay, let’s finish this job up, quick and easy.”

I finished the calibrations, ensured the chip was connected to my terminal, and handed it off to Henry as they got out of the car. I was the only one left in the car and enjoyed the extra space by stretching around.

It wasn’t long before I gained a connection to the grocery store’s network. It was easy to breach, allowing me full access to their cameras and other systems. After giving the okay to Henry, we executed our plan and triggered the fire alarms while I intercepted the signal from leaving the network.

I watched from the cameras as the shoppers all slowly walked out of the store pissed at the disruption. I spotted a few obvious gang members in the back scrambling to find the source while some exited along with the customers.

“We have a few stragglers that exited the building, along with the crowd just now,” I spoke into the comms.

I continued monitoring the show as the shootout started, our team wasn't known for our stealth, after all. The previous gang members who exited the building soon heard the shooting and tried to head back in when they suddenly fell down one by one, all with their throat slit.

It didn't take a genius to tell who had done that, especially when I spotted the man himself come out of that active camouflage and join the fight. I guessed it didn't last as long as he bragged about, but still...

A few weeks after we started selling our products across clinics all over the city, orders started to come in at an accelerated rate. Word had gotten around and with our prices comparable to what Hathway had but with better performance, it was only natural the pragmatic mercenary market shifted toward my product.

This allowed us to start a round of expansion with our new credits, hiring additional professionals in various areas, such as finance and management.

These professionally combed through our previous records and were implementing improvement in areas we were lacking in. And today, yet another person came into my workshop, which was more like my office now, with a recommendation.

“Sir, we believe from our projected income, the best course of action right now is to incorporate with the Elevate City Consortium. It requires an annual fee, but the lower taxes of becoming a corporation will pay for itself with our projected profits.”

I paused at tinkering with my workbench for a second as I took in what my employee had said. If I listened correctly, what he meant was that it was time to officially upgrade the business into a proper corporation.