

Chapter 80: Coordinated Attack

“The elevator isn’t responding to us! Everyone, get ready!” The guard who tried to press the elevator buttons yelled.

We could feel the elevator bringing us higher and higher.

Thorne sprang into action and pushed the hatch open on the ceiling of the elevator. He carefully climbed up the moving elevator and a short moment later, the elevator came to a shrieking halt. I could spot sparks flying up above as the elevator brakes did their job.

“Come on up, I’ll pry these doors open,” Thorne yelled out from above.

We had several security members go up first before Claire and I followed. I stepped forward and helped Thorne pry the elevator doors open with our cybernetic arms. The doors were half a level above us, which made it more difficult than expected, as we didn’t have the greatest leverage.

The metal creaked under our combined strength and eventually failed to obstruct us. Immediately upon opening the doors, our security swiftly climbed out with weapons at the ready.

I could hear shouts of surprise as I climbed up. There were numerous customers staring at us with caution as they hid inside the stores. Our group scanned our surroundings for threats, which meant weapons were pointed at the curious shoppers who peeked their heads out. Some were scared and retreated while some yelled angrily and reprimanded us, but we ignored them all and moved toward the staircase, with me and Claire at the center of our formation.

I watched as our vanguards checked each corner carefully as we made our way down the stairs. The elevators had brought us up to the seventeenth floor before it was stopped. We maneuvered cautiously down each flight of stairs, taking us an entire ten minutes to get down.

There were several security guards from the mall on the ground floor waiting for us, trying to secure the area. It seemed they were well aware we were the victims, as they yelled out to us instead of pointing their weapons.

“We’ve secured the exit if you would like to leave. We have additional teams and the ECPD en route as well. If you would like to bunker down here.”

“No, thank you. We’re leaving now,” Thorne replied immediately as he stood at the forefront of our party.

The mall security didn’t argue and moved out of the way. They even secured the driveway for us as we made our way toward our vehicles.

We quickly boarded and rushed out of the area at full speed.

"I called for backup to meet us halfway. We're going to take a random roundtable route back," Thorne said as soon as the glow from his eyes faded.

"You should head around downtown where security is best to prevent any potential pursues from tracking us through the street cameras," I said.

"Right."

Our convoy of military vehicles swerved in and out of traffic as we blared our horns. Most cars were smart enough to stay out of our way, but some decided to honk and flip the bird at us. Entitled drivers were a breed that never went extinct, like cockroaches.

Just as we were coming up to the bridge that brought us toward the downtown area, I spotted a vehicle parked off to the side of the bridge. It started up its engines, flashing on its headlights.

'Weapons spotted in that vehicle,' Kiri, my SAID, warned.

It quickly followed us as we passed by, and the hatch on top of their SUV opened, and I could spot a figure peeking out with a rocket launcher in hand.

The alarm in our call rang out as it warned us of being locked on by a hostile targeting system.

I had already jumped forward toward the driver's seat and slammed my hand on the button that enabled our Wraith's stealth field.

I turned back to see the rocket being fired, chasing after us. Our driver reacted to the alarm as trained and swerved. The rocket failed to track us and continued flying at a straight trajectory before it soon exploded as it hit the road.

Thank the heavens the stealth field worked on homing systems.

"Open fire! Don't let them shoot again!" I yelled to Thorne, who had climbed to the gunner's station.

In response, the machine guns mounted on the Wraiths spitted out heavy caliber rounds at our enemy's vehicle.

Their SUV was of a civilian make, which meant the bullets ripped it apart like it was paper. I watched as sparks flew as new holes were made in the car until it veered off course and crashed into a streetlight.

"Keep your guard up. Who knows where else they can come from."

Our cars continued onward, crossing the bridge. We soon came upon the concrete jungle that made up the downtown core. There were various office buildings here, from a large variety of corporations from throughout the world.

While we couldn't cross off one of them may be assisting with the attack, it wouldn't be likely they could gain access to many cameras around here to track us down unless multiple corps were in on it. In that case, we probably wouldn't have even survived until now.

"We shouldn't go back straight away, Rollo," Thorne advised.

"You're right. Let's drive around here for a while first. Have our backup do a sweep of the area around our office before we return."

"I contacted Leo and Lana already. We're going to look for any suspicious activity trying to track us down," Claire added.

"Hmm...This probably has something to do with QuickLinks Logistics, right?" I asked the two.

Thorne turned to me at my words. "If that is so, then they're probably taking action in NLA, too. You should contact Vin to warn him if it hasn't happened already."

Drew - Halls Corporation

"Hey Drew, how long do you think we're going to stand by here? We've been here for over twenty-four hours now when they would normally only give us ten to rest," a tall but thin woman said to the man sitting nearby. They both had a cup in front of them as they sat listlessly in the breakroom of their company's wasteland outpost.

They both wore dark attires that made it apparent they were meant for combat and provided resistance against small arms. On their shoulders was their corporation's logo, which depicted a snow owl that showed their affiliation.

"I think they're waiting for the other team that went out to Salt Lake City to make it back. We're forming large groups now for increased security."

"Who knows if we're actually their target? If we have to be this careful every time a corp gears up, we'll be stuck like this forever!"

"Calm down S. I'm sure the higher-ups know more than what they're telling if they are being this careful. Better than them pretending to know nothing and sending us out as bait."

"At least you two have it nice and easy, just taking a break here. We, in logistics and maintenance, still have a ton of work to do."

The two security guards glanced over at the middle-aged woman who had just entered the room.

"Right. We're thankful for you guys, helping us keep our vehicles in good working order," Drew said.

“You better. You have no idea how much of a pain in the ass it is working with these babies that regularly go out in that nasty sandstorm. The new Wraiths are better since we can produce all the parts easily enough, but the Vanguard’s are like a jumble of mess that is barely held together.”

The two security guards smiled at the woman in mechanic’s attire as she passed them toward the coffee machine.

Drew took another sip of his coffee as he watched on.

This stuff may be synthetic, but at least it doesn’t taste like shit. And it’s free, so we can’t really complain.

Just as Drew was expecting the same synthetic coffee to be spat out by the machine, the device vibrated strongly and made a noise he had never heard before. Soon, thick liquid poured out, and the mechanic shoved a straw into the cup.

She turned around and saw the two staring, confused.

“What? You two didn’t know the drink machine got a milkshake option added?”

“No...That’s a thing? Who even bothered to install that sugary crap?”

“Watch your words, kid. The boss himself had it installed. He’s a big fan, though this machine only dispenses coffee-flavored milkshakes. It’s good enough to take the heat out of me from being in the workshop all day.”

Curious, Drew stood up and dispensed himself a milkshake as well, to give it a try. The burst of energy he got from the sugar and the caffeine made him feel slightly refreshed, but he still preferred his coffee.

Hot drinks are more my style. The frozen stuff makes me long for a hot shower. How long has it been since I last showered, anyway?

Just as the older mechanic left the room, Drew and S both received a message that popped up in their optics. It was from the company software, so there was no way to mute it. It also monitored them, so they were careful not to mess around with it too much.

Your unit #702 is scheduled to head out today at 14:30. Please be there at least fifteen minutes early.

Drew looked down at the time displayed on the top right of his optics and found that he had less than thirty minutes before the departure time. He exchanged looks with his partner before they got up and went to prepare themselves.

They passed the hallway with a window that looked down at the garage below, where a dozen or so mechanics busied themselves with the vehicles below. Once they were down the stairs,

they headed straight for the armory where their comrades in the security department had begun to gather.

Drew plugged his neural port into the scanner at the door, allowing the company software to verify his identity before the armory door opened. Inside was another set of doors, where he had to wait for the doors behind him to close before he could proceed.

His friend, S, performed the same procedure and joined him in the airlock. Once she was in, the first set of doors closed and the two were allowed into the core of the armory.

Various small arms were available, though the expensive railguns were only rewarded to those who performed exception tasks. Drew and his companion selected an assault rifle to add to their armament, which had only consisted of a pistol until now.

They then exited and went to the change room where they found and equipped their helmets. The entire helm felt smooth and looked like it was made of tinted glass, but Drew had seen one of these deflected bullets before.

By the time they were fully equipped, they exited out into the corner of the garage, where they found the rest of their team. The company organized their security into groups of four to make up a squad, which meant they had another two members that were part of their team.

After a brief moment of waiting, the captain of the security forces, who was in charge of this base, walked in with his lieutenants.

“You’ll all be carrying out the daily transport mission to retrieve the material from Point B now. There’ll be a dozen squads on this trip this time, so you may have guessed it. We are expecting to be attacked. Everyone, keep your guard up!”

“Yes, sir!” everyone yelled out as they saluted the superior officer.

Drew then boarded the Wraith their team was assigned and slowly drove out of the garage. He was in charge of driving and monitoring the detection equipment, which also made him the squad leader.

Watching the pings return nothing but sand was a boring job, to be honest. At least the new equipment can detect further out, so there should be a mutant or something showing up on the screen soon.

“Hey Drew, I heard you were talking crap in the breakroom about the boss’s taste in drinks,” the lanky man beside him teased.

“Ha, you sure the boss man hasn’t already heard what you said from the company software? Are we going to have to host you a goodbye party already?” The long-haired man said as he poked out his head from the back.

“Stop it, you guys. We’re not on break. I’m sure Mr. Halls isn’t one to dismiss me for such a minor thing, anyway.”

At least I hoped...

Just as he was about to continue consoling himself, an unmistakable ping rang out on the scanner.

At first, he thought it would just be the occasional mutant, but upon a second look, the sensors detected too much metal for that to be true, and various other pings were picked up one after the other. He quickly opened the channel that was connected to the entire convoy and relayed his findings.

“Contact, I detect five—no, a dozen vehicles heading our way!”