

Chapter 180: Communication is Key

I safely arrived at the comms center I had snuck into where my handler, Raven, occasionally reported to her boss. This place was as spartan as before, with only a large terminal at the center paired with an equally large screen.

The security on this is not easy to get through...How did Raven do it again?

I dug into my memory and remembered how Raven had always been accompanied by Commander Poltrix whenever she was here. That must have meant that authorization was required from someone high up.

I'd rather not go against that man in his power armor while I am so unprepared...

I quickly scrolled through the camera feed to get an update on the movement around the base. The guards were running around and setting up checkpoints.

All the researchers were either hunkered down in their rooms or in the lab. It seemed the facility was under lockdown. Then the image of a familiar face appeared on the screen.

It was Dr. Chen, the head researcher of this place.

I don't believe they would only give one person access to this comms room. It would be too inflexible if the comms could only be used by one person.

With a new target in mind, I headed toward lab number one. I took a moment to track down the position of the guards before I set off.

Thankfully, they were mostly positioned to defend against external enemies right now. It seems the commander had decided the people outside were a bigger threat than me right now. Or perhaps he thought it could serve as a two bird one stone move, by using perimeter defenses to fence me in, too.

Regardless, it lessened the amount of patrols in the interior of the facility, which made it easier for me to move around.

The only challenge was getting past the two vault doors to the lab. However, I had already blown my cover. That meant I had no qualms about making use of all my tools, which included the access I had to their systems.

Having breached into the terminals from within lab three, it didn't take long for me to migrate the program over to lab one. I sent an innocent research report to the head researcher under the name of Dr. Loo. The file was automatically accepted, allowing my trojan horse entry.

From there, all I had to do was take over Dr. Chen's profile and use it to override the main doors.

Time was ticking, and distant fighting could be seen on the various security cameras around the place. I could only catch glimpses of it, but it gave a good idea of how close the frontline was.

I strode into the main area of the laboratory and found it deserted. The facility was on lockdown, and they were all hiding in the smaller rooms. I jogged over to the Head Researcher's office and simply strode in.

My active camouflage was active, but it didn't stop the door from opening. From the onlooker's perspective, the door opened by itself. No, that wasn't accurate. They were corpos and a well-informed one at that. Dr. Chen must know the telltale signs of corporate special ops teams.

The old man instantly rose to his feet and whipped out a pistol from his desk. He didn't hesitate to unload his entire clip at the entrance. The pistol had a whitish rounded body and didn't fire normal rounds.

I could quickly tell it was a railgun. It was similar to the Premier Arms Electra pistol I had previously owned. It was back on Earth with Thorne, and I missed it along with my Suri.

The railgun rounds flew at a much higher velocity than the normal rounds.

Thankfully, I reacted in time. I had been working on bio-coprocessors for some time now, so I had a greater understanding of how my own cybernetic had saved me there. The speed of the projectile didn't matter as much when you paid attention to the opponent's trigger finger.

I should definitely upgrade my own chip when I get the chance.

After dropping to the ground to dodge out of the way, I took a moment to examine my target. I had underestimated him as I was pressed for time, but now I knew he wasn't just a scrawny researcher. He could at least shoot. I soon found out that was the extent of his abilities.

I saw his fear grow as he realized his shots had hit nothing. He blinked rapidly before lunging at his desk for a fresh magazine.

However, I acted.

I pushed off the ground and sprinted toward him. Just as he was about to jam a new clip into his gun, I tackled him to the ground. He was an old man, after all. His strength was no match for my augmented limbs. I realized a second too late, and my hands crushed his brittle wrists.

"Ahhhhhhhhh! That hurts! God damn it! Stop, I'll talk."

He tried to roll around in pain, but I continued to pin him down.

“Can you hear me, damn it? I said I’ll give up. I’ll surrender and defect to your corporation or whatever. Just keep me alive and well!”

It was apparent he didn’t recognize me. I played along with it and edited my voice using my vocal implant. I selected a distorted voice.

“Tell me how to gain access to your comms room. If you pull any bullshit stunts, don’t think that’ll be all the pain you’ll be feeling.”

“Yes, yes. I understand. I’ll send you the access codes now.”

“...You better be thorough. I don’t want to have to come back because it needs your biometrics or something.”

“Don’t worry, I disabled those stupid features. I knew stuff like this could happen, and I’d rather keep my eyes and limbs.”

I remained still as I inwardly shook my head at the head researcher. His readiness to surrender and jump ship was somewhat surprising. I thought the corporation at this level had better reins over their employees.

Well...they do have thousands of employees and they are locked up in a secure facility.

It didn’t take long before Dr. Chen sent me his codes. I tied him up and gagged him, then threw him in the washroom stall. It was only then he realized something was off, but he no longer had the capacity to struggle.

Before I left him, I made sure to pick up his weapon and armed myself.

I then swiftly raced back to the comms room while the fighting was still ongoing. It was vital to get into contact with the other forces so I could gauge who they were. If they were friendly, I needed them to know where I was and how to identify me. I’d rather not get accidentally gunned down.

The gunfight wasn’t just on my cameras now and could be heard in the distance.

I wasted no time and dashed into the comms room. Thankfully, the access codes I got were legit. I gained access to their comms terminal and began browsing its capabilities. There was no convenient dial button to call the incoming warship outside, so I had to find their frequency or beam a public channel across to them.

While I went through the terminal, I inadvertently found a special module within it. It was responsible for the site-wide jamming. That meant I now had access to it as well and could disable it.

Before I could deliberate further on if I should do it right away, the door behind me opened.

I had been too absorbed in my work and realized too late. The newcomer in power armor suddenly charged in my direction at full speed. It was so fast that the occasional scans on my Argus only picked it up when the door had already opened.

This resulted in me activating my Shade a split second too late. I watched as Commander Poltrix's power armor stared directly at me in the corner of the room before I turned invisible. He didn't hesitate and brought up his weapon.

I suddenly felt like I was a goalkeeper, defending a penalty kick. I had to select a direction to dodge, except I wanted to choose a different direction from what he picked. If I chose wrong, I'd be screwed.

Left? Right? Down? Or maybe even directly at him? No...

I trusted my gut and swiftly jumped up on top of the terminal. Then I went up further and climbed on the screens affixed to the walls. Thanks to my stealth skills, I managed to do it with minimal noise.

Either way, any sound from my feet making contact with the metal terminal was immediately drowned out by the sound of gunfire.

The commander swept his gun left and right, spraying around the entire room.

I had the opportunity to fire off the railgun pistol in my hand at him, but I decided against it. I doubted it had enough power to punch through the energy shield of his power armor, and it would just give away my position.

I didn't have access to any EI rounds either to hack into his armor, so I could only come up with other alternatives.

From my tests, energy shield technology doesn't protect against low-velocity, high-mass attacks like from melee weapons. I had to close the range. Too bad I didn't have a vibro blade of some sort...

Think Rollo, think. You had the chance to observe this power armor during your entire time here. There must be a weakness somewhere.

I surveyed our surroundings, which were just a barren room with only a large terminal hooked up to the screen. There was no other obstacle around besides the cable leading into the walls behind me.

Is my only choice to get away from him somehow? I might be able to escape during the chaos and also get the chance to examine who the attackers are anyway.

My hopes were dashed when I watched a blue shimmer field be deployed around the figure by the entrance.

It expanded beyond the surface area of the armor and covered the entire doorway.

“Surrender yourself, Rollo! You can’t escape from here. My men are coming now as we speak. It’s only a matter of time before we get you. Now my boss wants you preferably alive for whatever reason, so let’s not make this hard for yourself.”

People never failed to call out to me when they knew I was around, but couldn’t find me. It wasn’t the first time this happened. That was why I prepared something so I could respond. I was tired of just having to keep my mouth shut, lest I give away my position.

I deployed several Nyes around the room and used the speaker on them to carry my voice.

“Come on—”

Before I got more than two words out, Commander Poltrix held down the trigger while pointing in the direction of my Nye. His reaction time with all his chrome was seriously intimidating. It made me want to finish my set of cybernetics as soon as possible to level the playing field.

I waited for him to cease firing before making use of my Nye on the opposite side of the room.

“Come on now, commander. I thought your orders were to capture me alive. I thought we were friends too, so what’s with all the hostility?”

This time, he swung around toward the sound of my voice, but didn’t shoot. He cautiously glanced around.

“I said, preferred. Since you’re in the middle of escaping amidst an attack, it wouldn’t be strange for you to have died in the crossfire. If you want to blame something, blame yourself for getting on my nerves, you annoying little brat.”

“I had thought you liked me, too... If you thought I was annoying, why didn’t you tell me? I would’ve corrected my behavior. Come on now, commander. Someone in your position should know that communication is key!”

“Well, I’m communicating to you right now that I want to kill you, aren’t I?”

Well, shit. He really wants to kill me...

Great, just great. I need to subdue him somehow, before more people come. There’s no way I can handle more than one power armor right now.

Again, I glanced around the room as the sense of urgency within me welled up. I alternated between looking at my pistol, my opponent in power armor, and the lone terminal in the room.

God damn it! Why can't they leave high-caliber weapons lying around everywhere?