

Chapter 159: Last Minute Gamble

“Lanus, are you sure you can fit into this?” I asked as I scrutinized the thumb drive before me.

“Affirmative. It is adequate to hold my core memory and vital processes. However, my resources will be severely reduced, and I will not be able to make any complicated calculations like those required in research projects.”

“That’s fine. You have all our data saved as well, right?”

“Affirmative.”

“If there’s still room in there, transfer every bit of data we have onto it. There should be enough on it that we can just resume everything once the danger passes.”

While I let Lanus continue to take care of the software side of things, I inspected the new power armor once more. I had made some hasty changes to them. Judging from what I’ve seen of corpo hit teams belonging to top-tier corporations, it should give me the extra edge I need to survive.

We had completed most of the other preparations we needed to do before we planned to depart from Elevate City. As a corporate-controlled area, it was just too risky to stake here when our potential enemies were powerful corporations themselves.

For our headquarters, we will leave it in the hands of our employees for now, while Lanus’ hardware will be repurposed into a simpler supercomputer. It was done in case someone breached our base while we were gone. The last thing we needed was to give more reason for other corps to come after us.

When I was done with everything, I sat down in my office and glanced out the windows to enjoy the view of the city.

I sure hope I get to see this again, and not from somewhere else. I can only hope the big corpos don’t bother to squash my insignificant company if they know I’m not there. If only my company could grow legs and run away with me...

The sound of the door opening brought me out of my head as I turned to find Claire.

“Done with everything?”

“Yep, I’m just bringing you the latest reports to sign off on.”

I chuckled as I began browsing over the terminal she handed me.

I couldn’t help but burst out in laughter after reading through it.

“What is it, Rollo? Something wrong?”

“Haha. No, no.” I composed myself. “It’s just that it’s so ironic that our latest report is showing we’ve been performing better than we ever been. Sales are way up with our new products made in partnership with Sensorial, and even our transport business is breaking records.”

Claire shook her head and didn’t say a word about the report, instead she told me to prepare for tomorrow before exiting my office.

The next morning, Thorne, Claire, and I discreetly took an unmarked car out of our compound. We made our way toward the airport while we had our Shades on the entire time, projecting the image of three middle-aged men onto us.

We passed by security calmly and handed over the fake passports I made based on some random folks I found in the ECPD database.

Once we passed security, we sat down by our boarding gate while we continued to make calls to various members of my company about their new responsibilities while we were gone.

“Like I said, Vin, you do what is necessary during this time. You might not be able to get in touch with us.”

“...Should I be expecting anything to happen?”

“It is hard to say, so I guess it is better to be prepared than not in this situation.”

“I see...”

He gave me a knowing nod before the call was cut off.

I glanced over and found Claire still on a call, so I conversed with Thorne, who was already done.

“This’ll look so silly if nothing ends up happening,” I muttered.

“It wouldn’t be so bad. It’s a nice test anyway to see if the company can function without us. I heard other corps do these kinds of tests sometimes to simulate when their entire management team gets wiped out.”

“That’s... reassuring.”

He shrugged.

“Hope for the best, but plan for the worst.”

We only chatted for a short while before the PA system rang out. It announced the start of boarding, or so I thought.

“The flight to Lion City LTP 0377 has been canceled due to unexpected issues with the aircraft. All passengers, please follow the instructions with our staff on how to retrieve your belongings and reschedule your flight.”

I swiftly went on the web to look up alternative flights. We didn't have a destination in mind and only planned to take several flights before reaching one of the Europa countries, where we would continue our travel on foot to obfuscate our trail.

My searches came up empty as I found every flight within the next two hours canceled.

I swiftly glanced over at my companions with a look of urgency.

“Guys, watch out. I think—”

Before I could finish my words, all the lights abruptly went off, throwing us into darkness. Our optics instantly switched to low-light mode. I messaged Claire and Thorne to activate their active camouflage while I did the same.

I can't believe we were being ambushed already...Did they have to be so quick about it?

We began scanning our vicinity with our Argus, while also sending out Nyes to keep watch.

The other passengers all huddled together as they waited for the issue to sort itself out, so most of the bleeps on the scans were stationary pings.

However, there were several fast-moving targets we picked up. I'm sure some of them were people panicking or staff trying to solve the issue, but several of them were headed straight for us.

Their pings were also weak, and I could barely receive any information on them, which was characteristic of stealth materials. It worked well enough to hide the material makeup, but not well enough to hide from our detection.

Thankfully, our stealth tech was good enough to fool the security check. All three of us were in our power armor and were fully armed. We hadn't stowed it yet as we hadn't boarded the plane.

Our optics were updated with the latest position of the potential enemies as our Argus kept scanning repeatedly. It didn't take them long before they were in range, and after checking there was no one in the way of our firing line, we pulled the trigger.

It was better to err on the side of caution.

The large marksmen railgun in our hands fired off a high-penetration round that almost instantly reached our targets. A piercing sound resounded throughout the area as three projectiles broke through the sound barrier.

However, the scene of our opponents being decimated by our weapons didn't happen. A soft blue glow flashed in the way momentarily, and our attacks disappeared.

"Energy shields! Use explosive rounds!"

I wasn't sure if there were more specialized rounds to deal with energy shields, but explosive rounds were the most effective from the tests we did with our own energy shields. It allowed some of the energy from the kinetic shockwave through as a byproduct of the function that allows breathable air through.

We moved to switch weapons to the assault rifle with the appropriate rounds loaded, but we flinched in surprise as our enemies suddenly sped up drastically. Our scans couldn't keep up as they crossed a hundred meters within a few seconds.

"Stay back!" Thorne yelled.

"No, activate the new thing I added first!"

Thorne's movement froze for a split second at my reminder before we activated the new features one by one.

From what I had experienced, I knew the forces of the top-tier corps had us outmatched in frontal combat. Our advantages were mainly our stealth and detection. That was why I concocted something that took full advantage of those perks.

When I thought of the idea several days ago, I couldn't help but want to beat up my old stupid self. It was such an obvious way to make use of our perks.

I guess there was some truth to the saying, 'During times of war, technology advances rapidly.' The pressure you face with your life on the line really spurs you on.

Immediately after we activated the new function, each of our power armors released a gush of grey smoke. It only appeared like smoke, but was a special type of gaseous material that blocked all sensor readings and visuals at the same time.

It wasn't anything fancy, but powdered-up particles made from the stealth material I already employed in our power armor coating.

With three power armors all releasing this substance, the entire area around us soon descended into darkness, even for those with night vision optics. The only ones who could navigate through this smog were us, who were equipped with Argus scanners that were calibrated to still be able to function normally within it.

As the chaos began to take hold of the airport and the other passengers began to react to the gunshots and sudden loss of vision, our opponents speedily closed the distance.

They charged through the haze like an arrow, lunging straight toward our last known location. Their movement was so fast, it pushed aside some of the fog surrounding them.

I could see on the scans that they eagerly ran through where we were, and I grinned.

I had also added a decoy function, where our power armor could drop these small devices that projected holograms identical to ourselves. Combined with the haze, our enemies must be really startled at the illusion they saw right about now.

It was too bad I couldn't enjoy the surprise, but our lives were on the line.

The three of us spread out, listening to Thorne's direction, before we opened fire with our new assault rifles on full auto. A steady stream of explosive rounds made their way toward our stunned enemies, peppering their energy shields.

Those hit were stunned by the shockwave and became stationary targets.

No matter how strong it was their shields were, they couldn't hold up to our unrelenting assault.

Our opponents soon proved to be well-trained as several railgun rounds made their way toward us. There was no way we could react to the sudden attack, but thankfully, we had our own sets of energy shields.

Their shooting quickly ceased, likely due to the unexpectedness of us having similar tech, as they worked to switch to countermeasures. During that momentarily pause, we continued to unload our weapon at their stationary allies, and their defenses soon popped.

+30 EXP

+30 EXP

We didn't stick around to find out what countermeasures a top corp had in reserve against energy shields, so we quickly repositioned ourselves.

Not long after we did, a grating noise screeched out from our old position. It was so loud I could feel my power armor vibrating, but not much else happened besides being a nuisance.

Was that a frequency weapon? Whatever, I can think about it later.

We continued to exploit of advantage of being able to hide in the smoke, while we shot at them from the dark. We were lucky. Most of them didn't have power armor, which meant the shockwaves of each explosion were easily able to disorient them for more follow-up attacks.

I counted a total of seven attackers at the start, but we soon demolished six of them.

The remaining enemy was, unsurprisingly, the only one among them wearing power armor.

We couldn't disorient them as easily as their peers, but they were one-sidedly being fired upon just the same.

It was only a matter of time before their energy shield was also overloaded. It lasted much longer than the ones the others used, so they must've had a stronger power armor version.

I swiftly switched to my marksman rifle with the penetration rounds and fired as soon as the shield went down. In the aftermath of it, I could see a noticeable dent in the armor, but it was otherwise unharmed.

However, the occupant of the power armor didn't think the same.

"Stop, stop! I surrender, don't kill me! I have value as a hostage, so please don't kill me!"

"Rollo, we need to get out of here...It has started. We don't have time for this. Let's finish him off and run. They may have underestimated us during this first fight, but I don't think they will continue to do so," Thorne said with undisguised worry in his tone.

"To be honest, with our stealth tech, it wouldn't be hard for us to just hide. However, they would then target our fixed assets in an attempt to flush us out. We'd lose everything we had built up until now. Our only chance was to escape the city and leave a trail for them to keep following and waste their time, but that's no longer possible...I think I have another...drastic way to deal with this without losing anything."

"What do you mean by that? I don't like it when you have that look in your eye!" He shouted.

I ignored him and stepped toward our remaining enemy.

"You there. Get out of the power armor now, unless you prefer we continue shooting."

This may be the stupidest idea I've had...but I don't see any other way for us to get out of this unscathed.

We had been too late.

There was no way I could see ourselves escaping now and leaving a trail to distract them. If we disappeared into the city, they would target our company to draw us out, and I didn't want everything I had built up to be destroyed.

It'd be naive of us to believe we could get out of a conflict against a top corporation that could employ energy shields unscathed. If I didn't want to lose anything, then it was time for the gamble of a lifetime.