

## Chapter 75: Mining Your Own Business

A week after we found the mine, we completed the construction of the roads leading down the mine. We just needed to finish building a defensive outpost here now, preferably a hidden one, which wasn't too hard, with so much rubble around us we could use as materials.

"You have all the materials gathered?" I asked the construction manager who was in charge of the entire project.

"Yes, sir. The last cement truck has just finished its delivery. We should be able to use the metals here to construct a bunker-grade door and seal off all the unwanted entry points."

"Good work, I'll leave it up to you, then. I won't be back until we finish our new vehicle production facilities. Keep up with the regular updates and let me know anything that comes up, no matter how small."

"Yes, sir. Have a good trip." He saluted me as Thorne and I walked by.

We boarded the prototype Wraith, which Andrew was driving, and joined the convoy that escorted the cement truck back to the outpost after having delivered its last run.

We drove across the sandstorm in silence for only five minutes before the lead car sent out a warning to the entire convoy.

"We detected a vehicle at the edge of our radar for a split second. Be on alert," the woman called out.

I exchanged glances with Thorne before taking a look at the sensors in front of me. Electrical engineering had also taught me about some radar technology. A good chunk of radar technology was composed of the transmission and reception of electromagnetic waves and their reflections.

It was a given that I would implement all the things I had learned and put together a customized radar in the prototype Wraith. The sandstorm was like an all-encompassing broadcasting tower that made a lot of noise that disrupted other signals. The new radar had stronger concentrated waves that allowed it to detect further, though at a slightly reduced cone width.

I quickly scanned toward the direction our leading car had indicated and detected the vehicle in question.

They were moving rapidly away from us. I ordered our convoy to change directions toward the vehicle, and within a minute, they detected our course and made adjustments to stay away.

"They have better detection equipment than our Vanguards. We already upgraded to the latest civilian model, which means they're likely from a corporation."

“What are the chances they just randomly ran into us and just want to stay out of trouble?” Thorne asked.

“Normally, it doesn’t matter, but we just came from our mine. If they were monitoring us and found out about it, there’ll be hell to pay. Order the entire convoy to give chase, Thorne. We need to go make sure they haven’t found anything.”

“Right.”

Our entire convoy soon received the command to steer our course back to our outpost before we engaged our stealth units to hide from detection. We then smoothly altered our course back to be on the suspected corporate car’s trail.

We followed them for almost a whole hour, where they detoured and went around in circles for a while.

“Sir, the other Vanguards won’t be able to have the sensor blockers active for much longer.”

*They’re playing it too safe to just be some random people...*

“Have them fall back and stay out of the enemy detection range. Our Wraith will follow them and transmit our location.”

The chase continued for another half an hour before the car soon approached a small valley that was shielded from the sandstorm. Vin had shown me a similar one, albeit smaller, the first time he brought me to the wasteland.

Our sensors picked up on a lot of metal there, so we veered off to the side.

“With that amount of metal and signals coming from there, they’re in a base of some sort.”

“Must be their outpost. Should we back off?” Thorne asked.

“No, let’s sneak in and check them out. I’m pretty sure they found out about our mine or have a clue about it. We need to nip the trouble in the bud.”

“If you say so, just hope they don’t detect us.”

“Let’s get a closer look first. You might need to stay back if their base looks heavily fortified. Your large frame filled with cybernetics tends to be a bit easy to detect.”

“...”

“Andrew and Peng, you two stay in the car,” I commanded.

I exited the car with Thorne, entering into the sandstorm, and made our way to the entrance of the base we discovered.

With our active camouflage on, we soon entered the valley where the storm couldn't reach. With our visibility restored, we instantly spotted the large metal gates at the front that defended the place. There were watchtowers behind the gate and tall walls with lookouts patrolling.

"They seem to have only walled off the chokepoint here. Let's go back around and climb over to get in."

Under the cover of the sandstorm, I had my Nova Tech Heracle cyberarms turn into picks, to be used as makeshift ice axes to help scale up the steep valley. Thorne could climb up fine without it somehow with his fully cybernetic limbs.

We jumped into the valley once we reached the top to shield ourselves from the sandstorm and surveyed the area below us.

There was a small outpost there, with several buildings made of metal sheets. They looked similar to the prefab buildings I had seen in the catalogs when I initially planned for my wasteland outpost.

We could spot several people moving around outside and the only lookouts were on the watchtower near the entrance. I spotted several cameras and sensors on the edges of the outpost, but they were easy to deal with once we knew they were there.

"They seem...lax, so they shouldn't be backed by a big corp. They only have people defending the main chokepoint and automated everything else. They must be working with a limited budget."

"Rollo, it's not like every company is paranoid about every little bit of their assets. This is probably a simple outpost without any valuables. The corp behind probably didn't bother to invest too much and would rather claim insurance if anything happened."

*Right, insurance. We had opted out of getting it so far, as our transportation business in the wasteland was low risk. I'll need to get it for the new clinic, though.*

"I see their vehicles gathered over there. Let's head over and see if we find the one that led us here."

We donned our camouflage and moved along the edge of the base. When we got close to the parking lot, I had Thorne carefully follow me to avoid their sensors.

I had to load an EI round and fire it at a nearby pole to breach and disable the final sensor.

Once we were through, we strode around the various cars parked there. There were several mechanics working on the vehicles, so we made sure to leave some space between us. All the cars were marked with the logo of Cipher Corporation, an unknown name to me.

*Kiri, got anyone information on this corp?*

*'Database has limited information. All that is known about Cipher Corporation is that they are a small corporation based in NLA.'*

*Just great, very helpful information there.*

I used the thermal vision on my optics to spot the residual heat from the cars. The one we had chased should be much warmer than the ones that were sitting idle.

I saw one of the mechanics approach, so I hid behind a vehicle and waited for him to pass. He stopped right in front of the vehicle that I was heading for, the one with the most heat.

"Did Josh's crew get back? How come I don't see them?" The mechanic yelled back to her team.

"They went straight to the supervisor. Bring their car over first before you go off to find them. That's the last one we have to work on for today."

The female mechanic proceeded into the car, which meant we no longer could inspect it, but we got the information we needed.

We left the parking lot and went toward the closest building to start our search. The first one was simply a storage of car parts, so we moved on to the next one.

As soon as we opened the door, we immediately spotted a reception desk with a woman behind it, staring at the open door.

"Hello? You coming in or not?"

I quickly moved in with Thorne and stepped to the side as she came out to investigate. She peeked out the door, looked both ways, and found no one.

"...Is there something wrong with the door, or am I being pranked?" She muttered.

Hoping she didn't dwell too much about it, we quickly moved further into the building. We took a more careful approach with the next door that obstructed us and shoved the snake cam from my arm beneath it. There was an empty hallway there, so we quickly passed through it before the receptionist came back inside.

With more room to maneuver, I shot an EI round at the nearest camera to disable them.

We then scouted out each room and didn't find anyone until the room at the end of the hallway. There was an office with several people inside, who were in the middle of a conversation.

"---confident are you in this information?"

"Sir, we followed the lead of construction trucks and found out the same corp that had recently rented prospecting equipment. We should send some operatives in there to verify."

“Who else have you four told?”

“No one, sir. We came straight to you.”

“Very well, I will take charge of it from here on and contact headquarters. You guys should keep quiet if you know what’s good. You’ll be rewarded handsomely if we turn up with something.”

“But sir, we—”

“You’re dismissed.”

“...Have a good day, sir.”

I quickly sent a text to Thorne as I heard them walking out.

\*Wait until they get somewhere where we can bag the bodies.\*

\*Okay, following your lead.\*

We stepped aside as the door opened and watched as four men aggressively stepped out. We followed closely behind. On our way out, I found a window conveniently along the way and unlocked it.

“That dumb prick wants to steal the credit for our info. Are we really just going to let him get away with it?” One of the men complained to their leader.

“What? What else can we do?”

“...”

“Let’s think this through after some sleep. We all need it after staying up for surveillance for so long.”

“Agreed.”

The four of them made their way toward their dormitory. They had the luxury of each having their own rooms, though they were small to the point that they could be compared to capsule hotels.

We waited until they split up and retired to their rooms before striking. We each followed one into their room and quickly dispatched the key witnesses.

+10 EXP
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Once we were done, we each took the time to bag up our bodies before moving on to the next.

I knocked on the door to my target and waited.

“You guys forget something?” A voice called out as the door opened. He found nobody there and peeked his head out into the hallway, only to have me drag him back into his room from behind. My cyberarms made quick work of his unaugmented throat.

+10 EXP

With four bodies to carry now, I was thankful for Thorne’s monstrous strength as a cyborg.

We wanted to bring their bodies along with us as their corp would have a harder time investigating what happened. For all they knew, they could’ve simply deserted or bought out by someone else. If they found their bodies instead, they may dig a little too deep towards the real reason.

Thorne took custody of the bodies while I headed back to the office from before. These pre-fab buildings didn’t exactly have a back door, but they did have windows. I made my way back into the building using the window I had left unlocked and proceeded into the supervisor’s office.

I didn’t waste any time and strode straight in.

“What is it, Debra? Could you not at least notify me before rudely walking in?” The man spoke as he remained focused on the terminal in front of him.

I moved behind him and placed my hand near his neural port so I could establish a connection to his cybernetics.

He soon looked up as he received no response. I ignored him as I continued to work his network. I got in just in time to cancel the call he had just placed to his secretary.

With his networks in my control, I disabled my active camouflage and pressed my gun against his head.

“Who did you tell about the mine?”