

Chapter 79: Threat

Our convoy of cars rushed back to our office's garage. Immediately upon arriving, we all swiftly made our way to the security control room.

Leo and Lana quickly took their seats upon entering the room, while the rest of us gathered at the table in the back.

One of the security officers on duty hurried to set up the projector on the table and connected the terminal to display the latest information. The projector shot out a holographic screen that rested in mid-air, directly above the center of the table.

"Sir, the new apps had just flagged these communications approximately half an hour ago. There are mostly conversations between friends or family that originate from Firebird."

With our lack of marketing, I'm surprised the app has reached all the way to the New North American continent already.

I watched as the projection zoomed in on several text communications.

Hun, I'll be stuck in Firebird for a while. The corp that is our best client is having more and more people come in and I have to ensure all of them are well-fed, so I'll have to do some overtime this month.

Did you see the corpo building down the street? They keep having their convoys blocking up traffic. I heard from someone that those trucks are filled with weapons and soldiers, and they aren't the friendly kind. So don't pick me up on the main street later, come around the back.

There were several other messages that hinted at a build-up of forces from a certain corporation.

"What corporation are they referring to, and why do you think it relates to us?" I asked.

"Sir, we got confirmation that the location they're referring to is the branch office of QuickLinks Logistics. The one on our watch list."

Those guys who we disrupted their logistic routes on behalf of the Wells Clan...Did they find out we attacked them? But how? The last time we met, they happily leased their assets to us...Was there anything that has changed?

No, they might've started to suspect us when we came in to take over their route at such perfect timing and began expanding non stop.

I exchanged glances with Thorne and Claire, who knew about our past relationship with QuickLinks Logistics.

“Rollo, you think they found out?” Claire asked.

“They probably are fairly confident, even without proof. Our timing was just too perfect. We were a little too eager back then.”

“It was inevitable the moment we decided to go into the same market as them. We would’ve fought them for market share or something else, sooner or later,” Thorne added.

“We’re a lot more prepared for a fight than we were before. Let’s contact Vin to make preparations and send out a reconnaissance team.”

“Right,” they both replied in unison.

Daniel - QuickLinks Logistics

“How confident are you, Daniel?” The silver-haired old man asked. The projection of his image couldn’t hide how fit he was, even when not taking his age into account. He stood as straight as an arrow.

“Sir, I may not have concrete proof, but the timing matches too well. We can’t let them get away with taking our route.”

“I understand the grudge you may have. You should still focus on how you may turn a profit with this newfound information. Do you have a plan to take back our route or profit in other ways?”

“Yes, sir. I had a few contacts dig around in Elevate City, where they’re based. They’re a new corporation that isn’t even a year old. We can definitely crush them with force. We just need your permission to send out a strike force quietly, and we can catch them off-guard.”

“I see...Let me discuss this with the board to see when we can spare the manpower you’re asking for. Either way, don’t take this grudge too far, Daniel. We’re not in a position to waste resources to crush every corporation that opposes us. Especially when our group is already under attack as it is.”

“I understand, sir.”

The silver-haired man nodded, and his projection disappeared as he disconnected.

Daniel sat back in his chair and stared down at the terminal in his hand.

These bastards even had the nerve to lease our facility from us. I won’t let them off with just some loss in profits.

He then placed a call to his secretary using his SAID.

“Yvonne, go reach out to that QG you talked about a few weeks ago. I have a job for her.”

NLA

Vin’s bright smile greeted us as we stepped into our NLA office. Thorne quickly stepped forward to give the man a hug while I took a seat.

“So what’s this imminent attack about? Didn’t expect to see you two back so soon. It’s been like what? A month or so?”

“You should know the severity of this from the encoded messages we sent you. We’re here to give you the details in person, so there’s no chance of anyone intercepting it or leaving any records.”

Vin took a seat across from me and frowned.

“Our new intel department believes that QuickLinks Logistics is planning to attack us to take back their transport route.”

“Those guys? So they finally found out, then. Faster than I had thought.”

“You knew they were going to find out?” Thorne asked from the seat beside him.

“You can never truly hide anything, forever. Even when you destroy all the evidence, that in itself creates a hint. They’re plenty of people that have a good sense that could pick up on it. Especially if they got the resources of a corp to aid in their investigation.”

“Well, whether you’re right or not, that doesn’t change the fact that they’re planning on attack. Have you drafted up a plan?”

“It’s hard to have anything concrete when we don’t know exactly when they’re attacking, where, and their numbers. With that said, we’ve been consolidating our assets, combining our convoys to form a larger group while we have sent out a scouting party to Firebird and hired some mercenaries to snoop around.”

“Rollo and I won’t be joining in this time. There’s a chance they may target our assets in Elevate City too, and we wanted to leave it up to you this time.”

“That is my job. We’ll manage. You boys are going to head straight back?”

“Yeah, tomorrow.”

“Okay, I’ll get to work with the information you’ve brought. Is there some way to keep us updated with your intel department?”

“Not yet. We’ll send someone to pass on the data in a physical data chip for now,” I answered.

Vin took off out of my office, leaving only me and Thorne. With our job complete, I went to inspect the only other thing we were here for.

We went out on a Wraith, accompanied by two teams of guards even though it was only a few minutes’ ride away. We arrived and parked at a nearby megabuilding and went to the seventh floor.

It was one of the commercial floors that was filled entirely with shops. We went to one of the retail units that didn’t have any signage outside and only tinted glass windows. Our company software opened the lock, and we stepped inside the vacant room where several construction workers were practicing their craft.

Multiple heads turned our way, but quickly returned to their work once they noticed the heavily armed guards escorting me and Thorne. I surveyed their work for a few minutes before heading to the rooms in the back.

Each room had the familiar operating table inside, with all the equipment one needed to install cybernetics.

“This setup looks exactly like ours in Elevate City,” Thorne noted.

“That’s fine. If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it. The employees who will be manning this clinic would have trained in our clinic back home, so this will only make it easier for them.”

I inspected the equipment in each room before turning to Thorne. “Hope on, let me do a quick checkup on you while we’re here.”

“If you say so...”

We soon returned from NLA back to the only city on Earth with access to the space elevator.

Thorne was busy reinforcing the security of our assets and with his volleyball team, while I had mountains of paperwork waiting for me with three different expanding businesses on our plate.

I only saw Thorne and Claire at the end of the day while we ate.

“How are the both of you doing?” I asked, while opening the delivery we ordered.

“I’ve been busy hiring people to fill out the intelligence department. I mostly pulled from our existing security team too, so I had to hire their replacements as well,” Claire replied before looking over at Thorne.

“With Claire’s new hires, we have to go through training again. At least we had always been expanding, so I was able to bolster our defenses with ease. We only have the office and the clinic to worry about. Just remember to lie low for now, Rollo. Don’t head out during the night until this is over with.”

“Fine, I had a new project that I wanted to spend some time in the workshop for, anyway.”

“And consider buying some additional protection. As great as our defense is, there are still some gaps we can’t cover. A sniper can still threaten us if we step outside, or they can ram a truck full of explosives towards you. Maybe look into getting a VIP car or something?”

“Hmm...Sounds expensive. It also won’t solve my problems when I’m on foot. I’ll go take a look, though. Want to come?”

“You mean right now?”

“Might as well. The sooner the better, they say.”

“Oh, I want to come too! I haven’t had the chance to get much shopping done recently,” Claire interjected excitedly.

The three of us soon drove off toward the mall we had often patronized and entered the floor with military equipment in the basement. We had two fully armed squads accompanying us inside, a perk of being from an official corporation.

We skipped the weapons this time and browsed through the defensive options. There were different sections for equipment meant for the average guard or mercenaries, and ones designed for VIPs.

The VIP equipment all had an extra zero in the price tag and was designed to be inconspicuous, blending in with the typical corpo attire. They all seemed to be lightweight bullet-proof vests to me, so I asked the clerk for assistance.

“What is the best option you have here to defend against larger caliber weapons and snipers?”

“It would be my pleasure to help you, sir. The type of vest that may satisfy your requirements may be these cloud vests. We have several models, but they all function similarly. They detect any high-speed objects heading your way and expand a large protective layer to keep you from harm.”

I watched as the salesperson demonstrated the vest’s defensive functions on the big screen terminal, where foam-like cotton candy was suddenly expelled to protect the wearer from bullets and impact.

The only downside I saw was that it could only be used once before it ran out of the cloud-like protective substance, but it could even protect you in the event of a car crash, like an airbag.

We browsed through different brands that offered the cloud vest and finally settled on the latest model from a corporation called Bulwark Tech.

With our defensive equipment shopping complete, we boarded the elevator to visit a different floor to browse other things. As I walked in and pressed the button to select the floor, an electrifying shock suddenly sparked brightly between my cyberarm and the button.

'Hacking attempt detected. The intrusion attempt has been thwarted, and the connection has been forcefully terminated.' My SAID assistant, Kiri, suddenly alerted me.

I turned back to the other occupants of the elevator. "Someone just tried to hack me. Everyone on alert!"

The team quickly pushed me toward the middle, along with Claire.

"Rollo, are you okay?" She asked.

"Yeah, my SAID is air-gapped from external connections," I replied as I got my weapons readied.

My past self sure was far-sighted. This was definitely a worthwhile purchase.

I watched as a guard cautiously pushed the elevator button with his organic finger.

"The elevator isn't responding! Everyone, watch out!" He yelled out.