

# Chapter 176: Escape Plans

## Thorne - Halls Corporation

“That was a risky trick you pulled on me, but now you have my attention. Go ahead and speak, this communication line is secure,” Titus’ voice authoritatively rang out from the projection that shared his semblance.

“Apologies, but I couldn’t think of any other way to get a message through to you.”

“...I’m sure you’ve been informed to keep quiet during this time. Get straight to the point. What did you mean by being in contact with our target?”

“You should have done a thorough investigation on him, correct? His captors hadn’t done theirs or didn’t bother to communicate details down the chain of command. He’s moving unrestrained under their eyes.”

“I’m sorry to say you have brought this information to the wrong person. I don’t make the decisions for this matter. You should obediently wait at home.”

“...You can at least relay this to the person in charge, right? Trust me, having us be there when you take action will be beneficial to all of us.”

Titus’ projection went silent for a long minute before he responded.

“...I will send a message when I can.”

“Perfect, thank you! I’ll—” Just as Thorne was speaking, Lana loudly crashed into the room. She then grabbed him by the shoulders with a serious look in her eyes.

“Thorne, it’s urgent!”

Thorne took a moment to glance back between the newcomer and the projection.

“Forgive me, please give me just one moment.”

He decisively muted the call.

“What is it? Make it quick!”

“Rollo just contacted us again. Says he’s about to do something big, plotting an escape for a whole bunch of people and whatnot.”

“WHAT?!” Thorne couldn’t help but raise his voice.

He had been there when Rollo had carefully explained that he needed to stay in their captivity to protect the company. Only when his mysterious return would he break out.

“What is he thinking?”

“He also says he’ll only be facilitating the prison break. He’ll be staying behind as planned.”

“That idiot! They’re going to relocate him after this if they succeed. Then the security around him may increase several folds as well. He’s making it a lot harder for all of us.”

The two spent a brief moment in silence before Thorne began to shake his head.

“Did he say when he’s carrying out this escape?”

“...In three days. He asked us to help out the escapees if we can.”

“Does that mean it’s too late for him to receive our message?”

“Most likely...He’ll have to escape from his facility to make contact and I’ll doubt he’ll do so again, so close to their plan.”

“Then it’s out of our hands now. Let me finish this call first, and we’ll discuss it further.”

After seeing Lana out, Thorne quickly resumed the call.

“Sorry about that, but I have some new information you may be interested in.”

“Oh, please do tell,” the powerful owner of an A-Class corporation urged him to continue with a skeptical look.

“Rollo is taking action. He plans to break out some captives in his facility. Now, before you misunderstand, he won’t be escaping. He plans on staying behind himself. If we wait any longer, we might not be able to stay in contact with him again if he gets relocated.”

“...”

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After leaving another message to my allies about my upcoming plans, I returned to work the next day as usual.

Today, we performed tests on mutants again. By feeding them incremental improvements, our lab was satisfied with keeping up the status quo for now. When I left at the end of the day, I stole a few glances at the test subjects being kept in the main lab area.

I could see them grouped up together, with Polina at the center.

When I returned to my room, I immediately messaged her.

\*How's it going? Does everyone know about their role in the plan, yet?\*

\*Yes...We are ready to take action two days from now.\*

With the stage set, two days passed by in the blink of an eye.

However, things didn't go as planned.

On the morning of the day we would carry out the escape, an unexpected announcement caught us off guard.

"We will be transitioning to experimenting with our human subjects today. That means we've made adequate progress recently and the higher-ups are satisfied. Let's give ourselves a round of applause," Cora celebrated.

I mechanically clapped along with my peers as my mind raced to adjust our plans.

*Relax Rollo. You planned for the unexpected. No plan survives contact with the enemy.*

"Let's get started, everyone! Time is money."

While we got to work, I risked discovery and began compiling messages to Polina about how to proceed. They didn't have much time to alter course, so our current choice was between waiting until night as planned or taking action early.

\*...It's too late to escape now. They have us separated already,\* Polina replied.

\*In that case...You'll all have to survive the day first.\*

I silently pray for their survival, especially their pilot. He was the only man who could fly them out of here, and losing him now would be fatal.

*Wait, no! Don't leave it up to fate. I can still intervene!*

Perhaps because my plan didn't directly involve me, for a moment, I didn't consider taking some risks myself.

That wasn't because of my lack of confidence in the plan. It's just that I planned to stay until my guardian angel was back.

Before I knew it, several subjects were ushered into our room, and I grimaced when I didn't spot the pilot among them. This was going to be a lot harder since he was with the other teams.

As the assistants prepped our new subjects for a round of tests, I walked over to my supervisor.

"Hey Cora, do you think I can go around the other teams to observe?"

"Hmm? What, why? We have a lot of our own plates."

I mentally braced myself as I took on a facade.

“That’s because I’m just too excited about finally moving on to the human testing. I feel my inspiration flowing, so I want to observe all the tests at once! Please, I want to view the results of my work in real-time.”

“...Let me ask Dr. Gab.”

Whether it be because of my stellar performance or due to the results I’ve been showing recently, Dr. Gab soon agreed to my request.

However, it earned a few begrudging stares from the assistant. The work I would be leaving behind would go to them, after all.

I pretended not to have noticed their gaze and began finishing up at my workstation. Despite getting permission, it didn’t mean I would be leaving right away. I had to play the part and observe the tests our team was taking care of first.

After witnessing the cybernetic installation process for the hundredth time, we swiftly moved on to testing the reaction time of the new bio-coprocessor. It was the exact same test we did with the mutants.

I watched the first two test subjects before I moved on to the next room.

I only needed to walk briefly to reach the adjacent testing room. It was identical room to our room, being the size of a football field, and the ceiling reaching over five stories high.

My eyes naturally were drawn to the crucial difference between this room and my own, namely the pool they had installed in the corner. It was apparent they were responsible for testing the cybernetic performance in aquatic environments.

Nearby, numerous terminals were set up with a couple of dozen screens. I walked over to where a man stood idly, staring at the monitors.

He had to be the man in charge, as I doubt the other assistants would dare to slack off.

“Hey, there. I’m here to observe if you don’t mind.”

“...Orders are orders, and I’ve received mine. You can watch all you want, but don’t you dare interfere.”

“Of course, thanks umm...”

“Bradley. Junior Researcher Hugo Bradley.”

“Thanks, Bradley.”

He then gave me the silent treatment as he continued to oversee his assistants' work. He occasionally barked out a few orders.

It was harder to make out the test subject's faces as they were in the pool, but I soon got a good look at them all. No luck. The pilot wasn't in this batch.

I quietly watched the first tests they performed underwater before quickly excusing myself.

The next lab had a lot more researchers than I was used to seeing. In turn, it also had the largest group of test subjects I've seen yet. However, they weren't doing any physical tests. Instead, they were each seated at their own desk, as if this was a college examination.

I wasn't far off the mark. They were taking tests on their terminals, where they reacted to various cues. It made sense that their cognitive functions would be tested too, as we were dealing with a brain chip here.

Again, no luck.

I moved on to the final room in my wing, hoping I wasn't too late. There were still another four rooms on the opposite wing, but I was keeping optimistic.

The new room was set up with four square courts that were divided by netting. There were firing rubber balls rapidly at the test subjects inside, from multiple angles. I assumed this tested their cognitive load, seeing how much they could handle.

It was here that I finally found the man I was looking for. He was sitting off to the side, awaiting his turn. That fact made me grin, as that meant there was still time.

While the improvements I made to the co-processor should've made it a lot safer, it was hard to say as it pertained to the brain. Plus, the balls they were pelting them with didn't help. I'd rather not have an injured pilot.

I walked up to the researcher in charge and greeted them. This time, the man in charge was an old man.

"Hello, you may have heard. I'm here to observe. I hope you don't mind."

"Associate Researcher Randolph Perkins, at your service. Feel free to just call me Ran," the old man kindly smiled.

"Ran...Do you mind if I talk with your test subjects? I want to gauge how they are before and after your load tests."

"We are already doing that, but be my guest."

I nodded amiably to the old man and strode over to the pilot who I recalled was named Seth.

If I was a little more naive, I would believe Randolph Perkins to be a kind old man. However, seeing the tests up close, I formed a different opinion.

The test subjects weren't being pelted by rubbery balls akin to tennis balls, like I had thought. They were using balls that were as hard as baseballs.

I couldn't help but deviate from my course to ask the nearby assistant.

"Are you sure it's okay to use such firm projectiles?"

"Hmm? Dr. Perkins says it's fine. We need to test how they perform when injured, anyway, or so he says."

I held my sigh in and resumed my course for the pilot, Seth.

He didn't bother to meet my eye, staring only at the ground, mumbling to myself when I stood before him. I crouched down and discreetly plugged my terminal into his port.

It was only then that he bothered to look up, but I was focused on my terminal. I was taking a detailed reading on his condition. I needed to observe if the installation process was done correctly, and if there were any adverse effects.

I didn't bother asking him to give me access to his SAID and breached it.

It only took me a minute to go over everything. He was doing fine, and likely will too, without external factors. However, being pelted by solid balls would be one of those external factors. It could damage the chip and him in the process. There also hadn't been enough time for the cybernetic to settle.

That was why I commanded my nanomachines to go instead and began fidgeting with his new bio-coprocessor.

My ten points in cybernetic engineering gave me mastery over how well machinery melded with the human body. While I couldn't accelerate healing, I could do a lot of things.

It took several minutes before I was done.

While I was in his system, I didn't forget to leave him a message, too.

\*I am Polina's ally. If you want to survive, drool.\*

I then stood up and moved to inspect the other subjects to put on a show.

Thankfully, all the other researchers were too busy with preparing for the tests to pay me any mind.

It wasn't long before I returned to Randolph.

“Ran, I found something concerning with subject number thirty-eight. It seems the installation process hadn’t been carried out correctly. I took a look, and it seems not all neural connectors were installed or they had been entangled somehow.”

The old man silently stared at me for several seconds before turning over to one of his assistants.

“Kenneth, you go do a thorough scan of that subject in question.”