

## Chapter 62: Capture

“We’re almost there now. Get ready,” Jamie said over the comms.

Not long after, the sound of fighting reached our ears.

Looking at the sensors, I could tell two groups of vehicles were fighting each other while on the move, parallel to each other. They kept some distance between themselves, prolonging the fight without a decisive conclusion.

With our arrival, that quickly changed. Whoever was in command had us start an encirclement that we could now do with our superior numbers.

Our Vanguard's were much sturdier than the dune buggies they drove, so half a dozen Vanguard's were assigned to reinforce where they could break through.

Unlike the wastelanders, who were only equipped with machine guns, the riders in our vehicles had grenade launchers as well. Our superior firepower soon had them in disarray, as I watched the explosions scatter them in different directions in an attempt to escape.

“We’ll have the cars continue to hunt them down while we can. We’ll need you to deploy some forces to clear their remaining base on foot and capture their clan leader.”

“Okay, Thorne, come with me. I’ll have Vin lead our convoy while we go on foot.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Thorne replied.

A few Vanguard's, including my car, veered away from the fight and soon arrived at the Bates Clan’s settlement. Like the Wells Clan, they lived in buildings similar to what we had in the cities.

There were several larger buildings that seemed important.

“We’ll split off into two groups to hunt down their leader. Thorne, you lead the other team.”

“But I—”

“No buts. We have the initiative and active camouflage, so there shouldn’t be any dangers. We need to finish this as quickly as we can and get the Bates Clan’s forces to surrender.”

I took my team of five, including me, toward one building, while Thorne reluctantly did the same toward the other structure.

“Stay close, and only engage if you determine I can’t handle it,” I ordered the second in command.

*I really wanted to earn some experience points in this campaign, and I finally got Thorne to split off. These guys can just watch my back.*

He exchanged glances with the others and nodded.

While the wastelanders erected buildings, they weren't that big, especially compared to what we had in cities. The building we were headed into was only three floors and slightly smaller than a typical high school.

With our active camouflage on, we made our way into the building. There were a few guards posted out front that we bypassed. We didn't want anyone wondering where they went.

Most rooms on the first floor were empty, so we swiftly made our way to the second. On this floor, the rooms were turned into makeshift barracks, filled with bunk beds. There weren't that many people here, though, most likely all deployed in the fight earlier.

There was still a communal room where half a dozen wastelanders sat together and chatted.

"How do you think our main force is doing? Those guys outside seem to be buying time just like us, so you think they're having a decisive battle somewhere?"

I interrupted their conversation once I was right behind them. I pulled out my Suri and quickly placed a bullet into each of them who were in their seats. The last two managed to react and got up, only to be knocked to the ground by one of my security guards.

<p>+10 EXP +10 EXP +10 EXP +10 EXP +10 EXP +10 EXP</p>
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We continued to clear the floor, finding their armory and several others who were resting alone. We took a break once we cleared the floor to rest our Shades before we continued up.

On the third floor were meeting rooms and offices. One of the meeting rooms was fashioned like the war room we had, with several people inside.

They seemed to be the commanders and advisors of their forces, but I didn't spot the leader of the Bates Clan.

I quickly disposed of them and quickly went to search the next building.

Just as we secured a second building, I received a text.

\*Rollo, I got the clan leader captured. Heading back to the Vanguard's now.\*

“It looks like the other team completed the objective. Let’s go help them secure our prisoner and have their clan surrender.”

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The war snowballed quickly with the capture of the Bates Clan leader.

We had several other prisoners of their clan, all important people, released into their main forces. They brought news of their leader’s command to surrender and instantly crippled a third of their forces.

The remaining two clans were the hardliners who were initially known to be highly hostile to all corporations and people from the city in general. They refused to surrender and our forces soon had them encircled. We had called out to them, informing them about the news of the Bates Clan’s surrender to attack their morale.

While they hesitated, none of them dared to surrender and only looked on to their stubborn leaders. Their short-sighted leaders ordered them to continue to fight and attempted to break out of the encirclement.

I manned the turret in our Vanguard and held the trigger down until the barrel started heating up. By that time, their forces were disorganized, and small groups started to surrender on their own initiative.

The cleanup was entirely left to the wastelanders, as they were better at navigating through the wasteland. We wouldn’t be able to track or catch up to them like they could.

Instead, we returned to the war council. Jamie led us to the war room this time, and we spotted quite a few guards present. I soon understood the reason for that when I saw the various clan leaders inside.

“Welcome back, Rollo. It seems like the battle is about over. Our enemies have surrendered or are being chased as we speak,” Eugene said.

“Yes, and we were just discussing how the new territory will be divided amongst us. In your case, you wanted free passage through our territory, correct?” The leader of the Bush Clan said, in her rocking chair, that she somehow brought along.

“That is correct.”

“Very well, our Bush Clan hereby declares that your Halls Corporation will be granted free passage in our territory,” The old lady said and turned to the other clan leaders.

They each nodded and, one by one, proclaimed the same thing.

“Thank you all. With the battle done, I will be taking my leave then, and leave you to your discussion. Please feel free to find me should you need my assistance.”

Having attained the free passage that I had set out for, it was time to focus on the other aspects to prepare for this new route we have opened up.

Once we said our goodbyes to everyone around, we immediately got back into our cars.

On the drive back, I stared at my status screen, hoping I could quickly get that last bit of experience points.

Status	
Level:	17
EXP:	1510/1700
Musculoskeletal:	211
Neural Reflex:	65
Visuomotor Coordination:	87
Endurance:	59
Sensory Perception:	127
Upgrade Points:	2
Upgrades:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Stealth +7</li><li>● Hacking +3</li><li>● Cybernetic Engineering +10</li><li>● Stealth Technology +10</li><li>● Software Engineering +6</li></ul>
Enhancements:	SAID: Zenitech Sebastien v2 Optics: Mirage Tech Clear-Sights mk.12 Cyberarm (Left): Nova Tech Heracle Mk. 3 Cyberarm (Right): Nova Tech Heracle Mk. 3 Auditory: SocialCorp Echo IV Cardiovascular: BioGen Lifepump 5 Miscellaneous: HSU Custom Shade

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As soon as we returned to NLA, we immediately got to work with the preparation for the new route to Salt Lake City. We had the personnel already because we had the foresight to prepare them ahead of time. We still had to do the leasing of additional cars, scheduling, and all the minor logistic details with the accompanying paperwork.

It was a lot of work, but I was really excited about it. The new route meant more profits, which in turn gave us more resources to strengthen ourselves with.

I had an unknown corpo out there watching over me. They were friendly for now, but who knew when that could change? The entire point of creating this company was to attain enough power to not be at the mercy of the corporate overlords. And my recent close call only invigorated my resolve.

“Hey, Rollo, can you help me with maintenance? The wasteland was not kind to all my implants,” Thorne said.

“Sure, go ahead and take a seat. Just give me one moment to finish up here.”

I quickly finished up the paperwork I had on my terminal. It helped that I only needed to set the main direction and my employees would do the rest.

“Let’s see here. I’ll have your cybernetics go through a thorough scan first. Did you feel any issues with it?”

I had Thorne laid out on the table as I plugged into his hardware to run a diagnostic.

“Not really, but with all the sand that had gotten into my chrome, it can’t be good for it.”

“Give it a little more credit. A little sand wouldn’t damage it. Did you have any other concerns?”

“How do I say this...? I’ve been going over how to make use of all these implants, and all the resources I’ve read talked about how vulnerable I am to EMPs and hacking. Is there any way for you to help in that regard?”

“Hmm, I can customize your soft more, but that will take a while. The cybernetics you have should already be pretty resistant to EMPs. It’s just my Shade that isn’t EMP-resistant. I plan to fix that soon, so just give me a bit of time for that as well.”

We finished our checkup and soon headed out into the night of NLA.

*Thorne had to go and remind me how close I am to leveling up. With a few more points, it should be enough to start implementing some EMP countermeasures to my gear.*

To humanity’s disappointment, it didn’t take long for us to find sketchy people hanging around the nightlife area. I watched as a group of thugs waited outside a club with their weapons ready.

I tapped Thorne on the shoulder and gestured toward the group.

“You sure they’re up to no good? They could be good guys ambushing bad guys too.”

“Just look. They have no trigger discipline. If we let them do their thing, they’ll probably hit several bystanders.”

*I was usually a lot more picky with who I targeted. I would observe while I tailed them. It also gave them a chance to lead me to their hideout for more loot and experience points if they turned out to be a threat to the public.*

*I will probably pull the trigger much faster this time. I am just so close to leveling and they seem prepared to have a public shootout.*

“Look, they’re making a move.”

The two of us swiftly turned on our active camouflage and got closer.

The group of people we were monitoring was just hanging out in an alleyway, watching people go in and out of a club. Many people exited the venue at the same time for some reason, and before long, they found their mark.

The half a dozen of them swung out from the alleyway and fast walked with a hand in their jacket. They didn’t even wait for the crowd to thin out and pulled out their weapons and started shooting once they got close.

The people quickly recognized the situation as they heard the gunshots and rapidly scattered. The six gunmen took no heed to the crowd and shot toward their target, who was escaping under the cover of the crowd.

\*Told you, I’ll take them out before they hurt more civilians, you stay put for any unexpected situation,\* I texted Thorne.

I ran through the crowd with my vibro-bladed dagger out in one hand, and my Suri in the other. I waited until I was almost touching the gunmen before I attacked. Otherwise, I would risk shooting into the crowd like they were.

The gunmen didn’t even notice their allies being taken out for some time, thanks to how chaotic the street was. By the time only two remained, the crowd had dispersed, allowing me to finish them off with a few well-placed bullets.

+10 EXP
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+10 EXP
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Unfortunately, scenes like these were too common in this world. I spent the rest of the patrolling around with Thorne.

We finished by the time the sky began to brighten, and I ended off the night by spending some upgrade points for the first time in a while. I braced myself for the flood of knowledge to come and selected my upgrades.