

Chapter 95: Back in the Saddle

The event to celebrate Holly Corporation's promotion to D-Class corporation continued, and I chatted with Joey over some snacks while I waited my turn to participate in the trap shooting tournament.

"It has been nice chatting with you, Rollo. I believe it's almost your turn, so I'll go check in with some other acquaintances before I must take my leave. I'll talk to you later. Good luck, Rollo." He was just about to turn away before he faced me again. "Oh, and one last thing. Do take care to bolster your forces while we have the opportunity. You never know when a stormy day will arrive."

"What—"

"Rollo Halls!"

Before I could ask him for details, one of the people up front called out my name.

As the attention gathered on me, I couldn't help but walk up front and receive the pistol one of the staff members extended to me. He then placed three mags on the table before me and started explaining the rules.

"Make sure to keep the weapon pointed away from the party at all times. The target drones will fly out between 0.5 seconds to 3 seconds after you call for it. Any questions?"

It was simple enough, so I shook my head and inspected the pistol. It was simple in design and handled similarly to my railgun, Coil Wrath. Once I was ready, I signaled for them to begin, and a drone soon flew out.

The first few drones came quite close to me, so there wasn't any issue, but after that, they got further and further away. It was inevitable that I began missing, as I was never a marksman to begin with. I relied on stealth to take my time aiming or simply getting close enough.

As I got overwhelmed, the shooting was over before I knew it, and I don't think even got half of them by the end.

I relinquished the weapon and quickly went to get a drink to console myself, all while avoiding gazing in the direction where Thorne was waiting with the other bodyguards. He was definitely smirking at me and I would no doubt hear his speech about how I've changed since I spent more time in the workshop than in the range.

I didn't stay long at the party once Joey had left. I exited the meeting facility operated by SocialCorp and went to meet up with Claire, who had been shopping the entire time.

We found her sitting in a cafe, surrounded by bags around her. A quick look at the bag's logo that displayed 'Airo Tech' was all I needed to know the contents within.

Airo Tech was one of the premier corporations that dealt with electronic parts. The spaceport we were at was likely the best place to purchase their products, as all their manufacturing was likely done in space, especially when it came to specialty parts like processors.

"Did you boys have a good time?" Claire asked as she sipped on her iced coffee.

"Here, I'll send the recording of Rollo participating in a shooting competition. Heh, he got so into it that his form was crumbling as he struggled to hit anything."

"...So you did record it."

He turned back to me and shrugged. "You're the one who picked the optics."

I ignored the two of them, who were happily going over the footage and laughing at it while I ordered a milkshake to console myself.

I'll have my revenge sooner or later!

Once we returned from the spaceport, I resumed working on the implant for monitoring my employees. The prototype was very close to completion, and I had to start considering how I would test it. The entire point was to keep it a secret, so I didn't want to inform anyone at all. That created the dilemma of me being unable to procure a tester.

My alarm soon rang, reminding me it was time to finish up for the day and go earn some experience points before retiring for the night.

The moment I exited my workshop, I was almost run over by Thorne, who was heading in the opposite direction.

"Watch it! Your body isn't exactly light!"

"Sorry, I was coming to get you."

"Yeah, yeah. Let's go."

We headed out to one of the smaller clubbing streets that was in the opposite direction from the Neon District in our unmarked vehicle. While the appearance was different, I had used the same internals as the Wraiths, with some slight adjustments to make it fit.

We got out of the vehicle and sent the car off to be auto-parked in a nearby lot. We strode around the busy street filled with bars and clubs. The bright neon light illuminated the place as if it was daytime, and crowds of party-goers merrily went about their night.

“You pick today,” I said to Thorne while I looked over the chrome people had to study the current market trends.

“Fine, that one will do.” He immediately pointed in a random direction.

I looked over to find it had decent traffic, so I shrugged and we entered.

There was a line, but a quick tip to the bouncer got us instant access to the establishment. The interiors were lit up with blueish lights with some pink spotlights here and there. The spotlights happened to be pointing at some young men and ladies who were each on an elevated platform, dancing around in clothing with very little fabric.

Upon closer inspection, I realized that there were projections when I spotted one float into the air, a feat that defied physics.

I leaned in close to Thorne and whispered. “A show bar, nice pick. Didn’t know this was what you were interested in. I’ll be sure to let Claire know.” I quickly toggled on the recording function in time to capture his tongue-tied face.

He froze for a few seconds before he gave up thinking about it. We relaxed at a table and ordered some drinks and snacks as we watched the scene around us unfold.

On our second drink, Thorne nudged me, and I looked up to find one of the other patrons highlighted in my vision. They were sprawled on the table, drunk as a skunk.

We watched on from the corner for a little while longer and as expected, they soon made their exit.

Exchanging glances with each other, Thorne and I paid our tab and discreetly followed after the drunk man.

It didn’t take long before I noticed another group following the same person once we left the show bar. I sent Thorne to retrieve the car while I stalked behind the other party.

As we had suspected, the newcomers soon took the opportunity when the man was vomiting his guts out, to attack and capture him. I watched as a car soon pulled up beside them and they retreated into it.

Once again, harvesters are so predictable...

I may have now preferred to hunt mutants out in the wasteland for experience points, but it never hurt to do some community service, especially since there were no wastelands near Elevate City.

After having hunted harvesters for so long, I was starting to know how they thought. It had become a lot easier for me to find them by staking out high-traffic nightlife areas, just like how they did it to find their marks.

I swiftly toggled on my camouflage and placed a tracker on the vehicle before I waited for Thorne to pick me up.

“Do you want to end today early or wait for them to return to their base?” Thorne asked as soon as I got into the car.

“The latter option. We don’t have anything planned tomorrow, so let’s be thorough.”

I did have to make up for all the time I was forced to sit out in our base, when we wanted to avoid giving our enemies any chances to attack me.

We followed them around the city, picking up more victims until they finally returned to their hideout.

At this point in time, storming a harvester den wasn’t even a challenge for me or Thorne anymore. There was no more nervousness, as it played out exactly like all the other times. They were simply too under-equipped, untrained, and dumb compared to the corporate opponents we had been dealing with.

We silently eliminated all the harvesters in a manner that created the smallest mess. Once we were done, I found some of the victims already had some of their implants removed during the short time we took.

Just like before, I scoured the den for the cybernetics and swiftly put them back together. I found their chrome swiftly as I scanned their faces and found their social media accounts. Their pictures had what they looked like before being taken apart, meaning I could see which chrome they had previously.

As I performed the reinstallations, I passed the time by studying my patients’ profiles to see who they were. It was just to satisfy my curiosity, but an idea suddenly popped into my head. I paused the surgery and examined the corpo I was operating on and then the cybernetic to be installed.

Hmm...This could definitely work. Just need a self-destruct button or something, just in case. If only I was more prepared... It’ll have to wait for tomorrow when I find another den or something, but that should be easy enough.

Jeremy Stand - Wiper Corporation

Jeremy woke up to the most pain he had felt in years. It was all over his body, from his headache to the soreness he felt throughout his torso. When he opened his eyes, he found an unfamiliar white ceiling.

He forced himself to sit up, ignoring the pain, and found himself on a bed that was surrounded by blinds. He heard people quietly talking behind the curtains and quick footsteps. His curiosity didn't last long when the curtains were pulled to the side, revealing a middle-aged lady in a nurse uniform.

"Mr. Stand, I'm glad you're awake. According to the insurance covered by your employer, you are to immediately check out and report to work for it to be valid. You have two minutes to vacate that bed."

"What happened to me?"

"You are very lucky to have survived being captured by harvesters. They found you in a den full that was cleared out, probably by some merc. That is all I know. Please get up now, sir. Other patients urgently need that bed."

Harvester den? Oh, shit... I lived.

Jeremy cursed the horrible treatment he received despite recovering from his fresh injuries while at the same time, thankful that his company provided any healthcare to a low-level worker like him at all. He was glad he picked this new company that offered slightly better conditions in lieu of the bigger corp he had received an offer from as well.

As instructed, he quickly gathered his belongings and ensured his SAID still had access to his bank account. He quickly hailed a cab and went straight back to work. He was smart enough to remember the contract he signed stipulated he had to immediately report once he had recovered enough to move in the case of an injury.

Only an amateur corpo would forget the terms of the contract they had signed, and Jeremy wasn't an amateur.

When he arrived at the small three-story office building where his corporation was, the front desk security immediately flagged him down, making him wait as someone came to get him.

"Jeremy Stand, thank you for waiting. I am Issac from security. We received a report of your incident and will proceed to give you a mandatory checkup right away."

Knowing better than to argue, Jeremy complied, as he knew the company had to check if any of the cybernetics they had loaned him had been stolen or tampered with. He was brought to a set of scanners and had all his chrome diagnosed. After a full hour of inspections, he was finally cleared and returned to work.

When he sat down at his cubicle, he immediately let out an exhausted sigh and stretched his back before he put on a serious expression and got to work.

I really need a promotion. Let's hammer out some code and aim to be the top performer this month! That half a day off is going to be—Ouch!

Just as Jeremy celebrated, a sharp burning pain suddenly flashed out from within him. The pain disappeared as quickly as it came.

What in the world was that?

Elsewhere within a messy workshop located in another building. A lone man laughed manically to himself.

“Success! After some fine-tuning, it will be complete! And then I can finally move on to the next project!”