

Chapter 181: Finding Weakness

Time was ticking, and sooner or later, Commander Poltrix's reinforcement would arrive. I was already stumped on what to do against one power armor, so I'd rather not have to deal with multiple. I had to act fast.

I dredged up every last detail I knew about their model of power armor, and several ideas came up. Unfortunately, I didn't have any of the tools and weapons required to carry out my plan.

All I had was one pistol. It may be railgun technology, but I doubted it could penetrate the armor even if I shot it from point-blank and bypassed its energy shield.

I cautiously navigated around the room, toward the only thing in the room, the terminal. It was hooked up to the giant screen above it, so I would give my position away if I played around with it. Thankfully, that wasn't my purpose.

I went around behind it and inspected the hardware. The encased terminal the size of a cabinet was hooked up to the walls using several thick cables. With the jamming constantly online, it made sense they had to use a wired connection for this comms module.

From what I learned, this terminal was connected to the jamming device as well. From my experience with jammers, I knew that it required a lot of energy.

I began scanning each cable with my Argus.

Found it! Now for the hard part...

After ensuring the cable was easily detachable, I maneuvered back to the front of the terminal. I didn't hesitate to start using the terminal, alerting my opponent.

Commander Poltrix ruthlessly unleashed a torrent of bullets my way, but I had already ducked for cover. Still, this meant he had a good idea of where I was. This made him take action.

He hit the door panel beside him and locked the doors shut. He then even employed a tiny flameflower on his wrist to weld the door shut, locking us in. Once he was done, he resized his energy shield to cover only him.

It wasn't something I should worry about, as I knew it didn't physically block my path. Energy shields didn't block things traveling at low velocity most of the time unless it was purposely used as a wall. They did this with the hangar entrance, but even then, they didn't keep it up for long. It was especially energy-intensive for it to block high-mass objects. In its normal mode, it would just alert the owner if something passed through it.

I threw those idle thoughts away as I watched him charge toward me.

It's now or never.

I took the opportunity to take a few shots at him. Even if I had my active camouflage still enabled, it definitely gave away my position. I was taking cover behind the terminal and the commander rushed my position.

I didn't even have the chance to take a breath, and the power was right before the terminal. It seems he decided to simply clear this entire area by physically bulldozing his way through. He knew I wasn't nearly as fast as him, and there was no point for him to randomly shoot around. It also had the added bonus of keeping damages to the comms terminal to a minimum.

It was exactly this thought process expected from a man of his position that I had gambled on.

I had lunged out of the way, out into the open space adjacent to the terminal. If he had continued spraying and praying, I would be in a precarious spot.

The man in power armor circled the terminal before standing still, glancing around. It wasn't hard to tell that he was trying to scan for me, but I knew it would do him no good.

"How'd you manage to sneak in stealth tech good enough to evade my scans?" He waited a moment for my response but to no avail. "Come on. I thought you liked to talk. So let's talk."

Confirming he was standing still, I closed the distance. I raced to position myself behind him and began looking over his power armor. He had customized his own suit quite a bit, but the base model was the same.

It meant it must have the same ports I had once seen on the power armor his subordinates had been using. It was what allowed them to refill water and remove waste from the suit, so I doubted this feature would be removed.

Knowing where to look, it didn't take long for me to find the small gaps in the armor that covered the ports.

I could only trust in my cyberarms and clamped down on my targets. In my right hand, I had ripped out the power cable from the terminal. In my left hand, I had ripped open the piece of armor covering the ports.

I had to perform this in one smooth motion lest I allow him to react. That was why I didn't hesitate to jam the live power cable straight down into one of the ports I uncovered. No matter how well-designed it was, I doubted the designer accounted for damage coming from within.

While I did so, I watched carefully for any reaction from the commander. I wasn't sure this would work.

My heart lurched when I noticed the power armor turning my way. I instantly jumped back to gain some distance to come up with another plan.

However, I noticed the power armor was turning painfully slow. Previously, I had trouble keeping up with its speed, but now I could even catch sight of the details on it as it moved.

It clumsily tumbled forward after completing its turn, struggling to regain balance. It was like watching a drunk man stumbling around. Soon it lurched over, crashing down on its back.

“What—” the commander’s voice buzzed sporadically, as if the comms channel was under heavy jamming. “You—won’t—this.”

He was still alive, as seen from his persistent struggle even while on the floor. He reminded me of a flipped-over turtle. I had no time to bother with him any longer, as I could see his men closing in on the cameras.

If I break out now, I might not make it. The plasma torch on my cyberarms isn't that strong and my Shade is overheating...What should I do? No, I need to finish what I started first.

It took me a split second to decide, and I went back to the comms terminal. I quickly finished the job and found a frequency where I could contact the party attacking this facility.

While I was waiting for the other party to accept the call, I could hear sounds on the other side of the door.

Someone was trying to cut their way in, and I didn’t think they were friendly.

Thorne - Halls Corporation

The jamming throughout the Nova Tech base had suddenly stopped working. This meant the invading forces could now communicate with their superiors on the warship.

Thanks to this, Platoon Leader Loo received new orders that resolved his dispute with Thorne.

The assault team sped through the enemy facility, as they received a detailed layout of the base. Thorne followed closely behind, careful not to disrupt their existing teamwork, but it was apparent he was impatient.

“Can you guys hurry up and blow through this checkpoint already?” Thorne yelled over to his current commanding officer. “If you guys can’t do it, let me take the lead. I’ll have them dismantled in short order.”

“Ha, while I’d like to see you try, I’d advise against it. There’s a reason for everything we do. Players at our level have many tricks up their sleeves, so we can’t blindly charge in like you’re used to. Just sit tight, kid. We got our orders, so we’ll carry them out.”

The two paused their conversation for a moment as an explosion rocked the corridor beside them. The assault team was currently exchanging fire with the enemy on the other side of the corridor.

If this was the usual operation Thorne partook in, he would've had the entire team throw in grenades and blitzed them by now.

He could only grit his teeth at being treated like a rookie, but he couldn't refute their claims. It hadn't been long since Thorne had become a corpo. Their company was unmistakably a newcomer with a weak foundation. It would've been too much to ask of him to be able to dominate the battlefield between large corporations.

Thorne examined his company's power armor that his subordinate wore and let out a sigh.

He didn't forget to compile a list of complaints for his friend. Once he rescued him, there was a lot they needed to do. They had started tussling with the big players, and they had to gear up for it.

"No matter what Rollo says, I'll make sure he approves a larger budget for the entire department and for a new cyborg body for me," Thorne muttered.

I can't just keep up. I need to excel!

"Yeah, good idea," Andrew nodded in agreement.

It took another half an hour for their team to push through several checkpoints between them and the comms room. Just as they were only a corner away, the sound of heavy metal collapsing rang out. It was accompanied by tremors due to how heavy the object that fell was.

When the assault team turned the corner, the mystery was revealed. They saw a giant piece of metal, collapsed on the ground. It used to be the door protecting the room.

Before they could examine it further, gunshots rang out from within the room. The residents within had clearly noticed their arrival and fired the first shots.

The railgun rounds were easily stopped by the energy shield belonging to the vanguards in their oversized power armors. Thorne once again watched the assault team take action.

They repeated their strategy where the large units blocked enemy fire and pinned them down while the lightweight power armors harassed from a distance. The moment the enemy revealed an opening, the more agile units lunged forward.

Their speed made them hard to keep track of, but their handiwork could easily be seen. They effortlessly cut into the gaps of the enemy power armor, stripping plates of armor off the enemy. Sometimes they would pierce deep into the enemy unit, bringing down their energy shield.

Regardless of the results of their strike, they quickly back away, allowing their teammates to pelt the enemy with even more gunfire.

Both outgunned and outnumbered, the two resisting power armors belonging to Nova Tech were soon felled.

In the aftermath, Thorne could only see three power armors lying on the ground, but no sight of his friend. However, he knew what Rollo was capable of.

“Rollo? Are you in here?”

Platoon Leader Loo quickly commanded his team to take up a defensive position. He then glanced around the room and deployed scans of his own.

“I don’t think he’s in here. The enemy had already breached it, so he must’ve relocated. The jamming is down, so try calling him.”

Ignoring Loo, Thorne turned his helmet transparent to reveal his face and shouted out once more.

“Rollo! It’s me. Come out already!”

The platoon leader shook his head and grabbed Thorne’s shoulder.

“Look. I said he’s not here. Get ready to move out al—”

“Thorne? So this really is Mr. Mysterious’ forces?” a voice resounded from above the assault team.

Everyone instantly directed their attention upward, to where a giant monitor was. A moment later, a man materialized into existence, hanging off the top of it. He let out a sigh of relief before hopping down.

Thorne immediately grinned, as it was impossible for him not to recognize his friend. He quickly pounced forward, bringing the man into a hug.

“Ouch, ouch. Control yourself already, you big oaf. You’re crushing me! You’re in power armor, for God’s sake.”

While the two men reunited, Platoon Leader Loo watched on with his mouth agape. He exchanged glances with his team to confirm the scene before them. Someone from some F-Class corporation had managed to fool their sensors and was hanging literally over them.

He couldn’t help but let out a cold sweat as he imagined how things could’ve gone wrong if the other party had been hostile.

Still, his professionalism prevented him from asking any irrelevant questions in the midst of the battlefield. He quickly opened up his comms channel to his superiors.

“VIP found. The target is in our custody. En route to the extraction point, please guide us. Over.”