

Chapter 40: Sending a Message

I stayed back on the rooftop and glanced down at the floor. I watched as the highlighted red enemies slowly slumped down one by one before disappearing. Only the pair of two guards in front of the master bedroom was spared.

“They’re about done. We should head down lest they notice anything,” Thorne stated from beside me.

“Okay, let’s go.” With those words said, we leaped down onto the balcony. My boots canceled out any noise of the impact, which saved me from the hassle of having to roll on the ground to disperse the impact.

One of our men stood watch by the balcony door as we walked by to head into the living room. Several bodies lay sprawled on the ground in every corner that our eyes reached.

“Sitrep?” I heard Thorne quietly ask from behind, “Twenty targets subdued except for the three by the master bedroom, as instructed.”

Inspecting the bodies, I found that they were still breathing, as it was the protocol Thorn and I set when ambushing our foes. More often than not, people were more useful alive. It allowed us time to identify them before deciding on the appropriate follow-up option.

We continued heading further into the penthouse, toward the owner’s bedroom. We soon rounded a corner where we could hear a conversation nearby.

“---our shift, want to go to the Neon District?”

“Ehh...Why not? We’ve been racking up overtime these past few days. I could blow some credits.”

“Now we’re talking. Alfred has been down our throats with the protocols and infrared cameras. It’s high time you come blow some steam off with me.”

“Yeah...when is that bastard Ed coming back from his hush-hush mission anyway? He should come as well.”

“No clue. I tried asking Alfred in a roundabout way, but he didn’t reveal anything.”

“He’s always been a tight a—” I didn’t let the man finish his sentence as I put him in a rear naked choke.

His friend beside him turned in surprise at the sight, but before he could scream, Thorne took care of him.

With the guards taken care of, the only obstacle that remained was the door to the master bedroom. It seemed like James had some sense of self-preservation. His room was more like a large safe, locked behind a biometric scanner.

Thorne moved up and connected a terminal to the back panel of the scanner. A moment later, Claire's voice rang out in my head.

"Thanks for the wait, guys! This is worse than expected. That impressive-looking lock still used the default software it came with, which is something accessible to the public. It's open now. Tell our friend I say hi."

The door audibly clicked open as it was unlocked. The light from the hallway leaked into the dark room.

"...Alfred? What's going on?" Our friend, James, nervously said from his bed. Despite the lack of light, my implants helped me make out the movement of his throat from swallowing.

We made our way into the room and closed the door behind us to James's panic. He jumped up from his bed and reached for the drawer of the nightstand beside him. He held up a gun that resembled a collector's revolver. From its markings, I could tell it was from Premier Arms, just like my weapons, which meant it was probably an electromagnetically propelled weapon of some sort.

He grew more nervous and confused as he realized there was no one by the door. He frantically looked around the room and found only himself.

"Jasper, Gran, are you there?" He screamed out.

When he found no response, he quickly drew another item from the drawer, a pair of glasses, and wore them before taking a scan of his room.

Having seen enough, I lunged toward him, slapped his gun out of his hand, and shoved him into his bed face-first.

"Hey there, James, guess which of your friends came for a surprise visit?" His struggle to get up intensified, "Now, now. Calm down James, we're all friends here."

"Get off me. Do you have any idea who I am?! You're so dead! You and all your loved ones."

"Oh, are you convincing me to tie up loose ends right now?" I gestured to Thorne for his gun, which I then racked right next to his ear and pressed it against the back of his head.

My fancy guns were cool and all, but too bad I can't rack them to make this iconic sound.

"Stop, stop! I'll give you way more than what you're getting paid right now. Just let me go. "

"Sure, transfer me some credits from your account to this one," I immediately replied.

Who in their right mind will pass up on free money?

The temporary account I set up soon received a transfer of fifty thousand credits.

“So you think fifty thousand is way more than what I’m getting paid? You’re pretty cheap for a CEO, don’t you think?”

“That’s all I can move right now, trust me! Let me go and I’ll wire more to you later.”

“Don’t worry about that. I didn’t come here for the credits anyway.”

“What?” He tried to turn back toward me, but I shoved his face harder back into the bed.

“You tried to attack the wrong people. This isn’t an issue you can buy your way out of, understand?” Once he heard my words, his struggle re-ignited and was stronger than before.

“Calm down James, we’re not unreasonable people, we talk reason, that’s why you’re alive and chatting with us right now.”

“What do you want?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? You sneaked into my home and pinned me to my bed for nothing?”

“We came here today to just warn you, James. Leave the camouflage cybernetic business and stay in your own lane, making projectors or whatever, before anything unfortunate happens.”

“Is that a threat!?”

“Yes, it is. Think carefully now, we can always find you again and have another chat next time, though I doubt we’d be as friendly. It’s your choice.” He fell silent.

I brought out the bracelet restrainers and put them on James before whispering to him one final time, “We’ll always be watching.”

On my way out of the room, I threw a down milkshake from my pack on a nearby desk. It may have melted by now, so he’ll have to do with what he’s got.

I hope he enjoys my handpicked gift. It’s from the place I have constantly been ordering from recently.

After our visit, we returned to the clinic and disbanded, leaving only one security team on the premises, along with me, Thorne, and Claire. We set up a few hidden cameras at James’s place

just in case of immediate retaliation. It probably won't last once he makes a clean sweep of the house, but it allowed us to see his immediate reaction.

"Are you really sure we should let them go?" Claire asked as she munched on some peanuts.

"Yeah, it'll be hard to root them out when their family is scattered around the world. We don't have that kind of reach. Rather than fight a war with them, it'll do us more good if James listens and backs off. Besides, who knows if they have some insurance that had a revenge clause or something, can't be too careful with these corpos."

"But you had to let all his men go too. He's got the manpower to retaliate at any moment now, you know?"

"He always can. We just have to keep our eyes open. There's no point killing all his employees, he'll just hire new ones. Also, I'd rather not murder some poor worker doing their job. There's enough garbage around for me to clean up that I can't get to yet."

"Fine, but we should prepare for the worst-case scenarios."

"That was the plan. We'll need to earn more first to upgrade our security and hire more people. In the meantime, we'll be more careful." I looked to Thorne, who nodded back.

With our conversation finished and we didn't spot anything unusual with James, I returned to my workshop now that I had some time.

I wanted to study the active camouflage Hathway Corporation had put together as I could only tell that the tech base for it was an entirely different approach to how I did it, even though they performed similarly.

They had several synchronized small wide-view lenses that were installed around the body to project images of the surroundings to create the effect, as opposed to my nanomachine-based method. If I could adopt some of their tech onto the nanomachines, I could increase the efficiency of my nanomachines, allowing for the same effect with less of them, which in turn lowered the costs.

After a detailed breakdown, it turns out the main things I could replicate were their lenses and the software their implant used to accompany them to keep multiple lenses in sync, though it will take some trial and error.

Without the original blueprint or anything, it took a full week until I could reproduce lenses that could perform at 90% of the original. It then took another week before I got a consistent enough production method.

The most fortuitous thing to come from the new production method was that it was possible to use the product of my old design as materials with minimal loss, which further kept my costs down.

I planned to reduce the price slightly but my target market, who would spend on stealth tech, weren't ones to cheap out on equipment that their life depended on. It would increase my margins per unit as a result.

"Our existing stock has been changed to the updated version, and the next shipment is on schedule. You have a meeting with Delnar Medical's representative scheduled in thirty minutes and one with State Care Clinics at 4:00 PM today," Claire faithfully recited from her terminal.

"Got it. I'll leave things here to you then," I said, as I started packing away some samples of our product into a briefcase.

"...Are you sure you don't want to sell our better model, or at least a watered-down version of it?"

I inspected the sample one last time before packing it away, "Claire, our latest model contains some tech that we will want to keep to ourselves, indefinitely."

"Why can't we just patent it and sell a downgraded version? It'll be hard to keep it a secret forever."

"Ha, a patent won't solve anything. It's not a monetary concern but a security one. You can see from just the recent incident with Hathway, leaking their tech allowed us to prepare countermeasures. A watered-down version will still have the same operating principle that others can extrapolate. We're only going to sell the basic version where it doesn't matter to us if everyone got a hold of it."

"Okay, okay, just a suggestion. I got things to do. See you later," She said and quickly exited my workshop.

She was right in that it was hard to keep our tech a secret, but everyone had that same issue. I already installed a self-destruct sequence in the new cybernetic we gave out to our security team. It had several trigger conditions, such as disassembly, the death of the user, or manual activation. Even then, it won't be perfect. I'll just have to keep updating the anti-theft measures and monitor closely.

I arrived at the meeting place, which was one of Delnar Medical's nearby cybernetic clinics, with fifteen minutes to spare. They were a middle-sized corporation and had various medical facilities besides cybernetic clinics, but that wasn't relevant to me today.

The receptionist had helpfully guided me towards a meeting room on the floor above, where a middle-aged woman was already waiting inside.

She was dressed neatly in formal business wear with subdued colors as expected of a typical corpo and was sitting relaxed while she watched me enter. Standing beside her was a younger woman who was bent over, whispering something into her ear.

“Welcome Mr. Halls, I am Ida Mereth. I know it’s a little early, but why don’t we jump straight into it since you are here already? I believe you have a product you would like us to carry in our clinics?”

“That’s right, our company has recently launched a new cybernetic, the HSU-003 ‘Shade’.”