

Chapter 117: Return

“Hurry up and bring over the last piece over there,” Grom said as he continued to weld.

I sat back on a chair in the mess hall of the ship as I watched Andrew and his team heft the piece of plating that would cover up all the internal wirings.

From the outside, the ship appeared no different from the original model that we rented, but having been part of the repair crew, I knew there were many minute differences. I was sure the rental company would spot these discrepancies, and it was annoying that the rental company cared, even though its performance was up to par. Still, there shouldn't be much for them to complain other than nitpicking.

“Call Priya. Let's perform some tests so we have something to back us up when the rental company starts complaining.”

“Quit your yapping. Testing your work is a critical step for any repairs. I don't need you to call anyone and I can take care of the tests myself.” Grom grumpily replied.

I shrugged, and we all took a seat in the mess hall as we silently watched him work. He finished welding without any fanfare and wordlessly walked toward the cockpit. We quickly got up and followed after him.

He sat down in the cockpit and got straight to it. The ship began to vibrate as it came online and before we knew it, we were floating in the hangar.

“Is flying in here safe?” I couldn't help but ask.

We hovered above several other ships and the ceiling wasn't that high, so not that much room was available for us to maneuver around in. That didn't stop Grom from continuing to pilot the ship, ignoring me entirely.

We made our way toward one end of the hangar, where a large gate started opening as we approached. On the other side was a small room and an identical set of gates at the back that remained shut. We flew in and the gate closed behind us.

An airlock. That means...

The second set of gates opened, revealing the darkness of space that was sprinkled with sparkling stars.

As soon as the opening was wide enough for our ship to fit through, we instantly accelerated rapidly. Several yelps could be heard behind me as some of my employees slammed against the wall.

I raced toward the only other seat in the cockpit and when the others realized what I was doing, they all scrambled back into the ship in search of a seat before it was too late as well.

I wasn't sure if they got into their seats in time because the acceleration just now was only the beginning of what was to come.

After a long and strenuous talk with the rental company, we finally settled on a small fine.

They were adamant about it because the composition of the ship was entirely different, while we argued the performance matched or exceeded the original ship we rented.

We had signed a contract though, so I decided to settle for the small fine and be on our way back to Earth. A corporate war was still ongoing and anything could happen at any moment, which was why we wanted to return to begin our preparations.

High Gate Group may still be banking on the support of Virtue Corp to win out this conflict, so they may be positioned to fight a battle of attrition while they stall for time.

That was why Joey had mentioned we would soon pool our forces for a big move, and his lack of a concrete plan meant I could still influence how our alliance would play this out.

I propped my leg up as the shuttle began its journey back down to Earth. I reviewed everything I'd experienced up here in space and was slightly disappointed at the High Gate Group's weak response to my arrival. They had only sent the one-strike team, and that was it. No contingency plan or anything.

It had been a fruitful trip, but it also delayed my leveling as well.

Status	
Level:	23
EXP:	2170/2300
Musculoskeletal:	211
Neural Reflex:	65
Visuomotor Coordination:	87
Endurance:	59
Sensory Perception:	127
Upgrade Points:	0

Upgrades:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stealth +7 ● Hacking +5 ● Cybernetic Engineering +10 ● Stealth Technology +10 ● Software Engineering +8 ● Electrical Engineering +10
Enhancements:	SAID: Zenitech Sebastien v2 Bio-Coprocessor: SocialCorp Lightning II 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 Vocal: SocialCorp Orator III Cardiovascular: BioGen Lifepump 5 Sensory: Halls Corp Argus Elite Custom Additional Processing: Halls Corp Custom ST Miscellaneous: Halls Corp HSU Custom Shade

As long as nothing urgent came up, I planned to grind out the last bit of experience points I needed tonight, once we returned.

“Arriving at Elevate City. Please...”

As the announcement on the shuttle sounded out, I looked up the window to get a good view of the familiar city coming into view.

I tried to spot the area where my company was, but to no avail. The city was just too big and our building was just too small.

I wonder how the expansion is going... It shouldn't be much longer until it is done, considering the speeds at which the construction crews work around here.

We safely landed and secured our luggage, which mostly consisted of our two power armors that were in storage mode. They blended perfectly with other suitcases.

When we exited the spaceport, we were immediately greeted by a large convoy that all sported our company logo of a snow owl.

One of the security officers who seemed to be in charge stepped forward and saluted, and we were quickly escorted back into the city proper.

Having just come down from space, I couldn't help but look up the space elevator during our trip back. It only really hit me that we were back when we arrived in our company garage, where a small entourage awaited us.

“Welcome back guys! Did you get me any souvenirs?” Claire grinned our way.

I exchanged glances with Thorne and we both began to panic, as we both didn't know how to respond.

I knew I was forgetting something...

"Umm..." I cleared my throat. "That can wait. Let's go to the meeting room and get situated first."

Claire's eyes narrowed at me before she slowly nodded.

We swiftly made our way inside, and more familiar faces began to gather around the meeting room.

"Where's Lucy?" I asked after taking a look around the table and found our intel director missing.

"She's on an urgent field assignment. Our intel department is super short-handed, as they aren't equipped to handle something that encompasses so many moving parts and involved corporations." Claire promptly responded.

"Okay..."

"Don't worry, I've been keeping tabs on all the intel in her stead."

I glanced around the room at Leo, Lana, and all the other members staying silent, so there really wasn't a choice in who to hear the latest updates from. Claire took the silence as consent and began to speak.

"So nothing much has happened since you left. Occasional skirmishes mostly take place in NNA."

That all sounded within expectation. While I had been gone, I was still receiving updates, albeit a bit delayed. The main thing I was looking for right now was the sensitive details that we had omitted from our transmissions.

"Oh wait, we did have someone attempt to attack us a few days ago...but that was so minor that it doesn't really matter. I don't believe they were even part of the High Gate Group. Our assets in NLA have been doing fine too, since the alliance sent us additional reinforcements."

They must've been worried I would get targeted and sent additional forces to prevent me from getting blackmailed. There's no way corps would do anything out of the goodness of their hearts, after all.

Claire continued reciting over the unimportant tidbits of what had occurred. During her rambling, I received a message from Joey and scheduled a meeting with the rest of the alliance for later tonight.

It appeared they were in the middle of something or else they would've had the meeting immediately.

Once our internal meeting was adjourned, I immediately conveyed to Thorne my plan to level up before the meeting.

“This is...not the most opportune time to do that, Rollo...”

“It’ll be fine. I doubt High Gate Group has the leeway to target me when they didn’t even know when I would be back. It’d be safer to go out now than later when they had the time to organize.”

“I...” He furrowed his brow before nodding. “Fine. I may not understand why, but if you deem it important enough to go fight some harvesters right now, then I’ll go along with it...”

His trust made me feel a little guilty. While all the other strange times I went out to hunt harvesters for the last bit of experience points were justified, this time, there wasn’t nearly as much urgency. It was just the fact that I had been so close for so long that urged me to do so while I had the time.

I avoided Thorne’s gaze and headed out into our unmarked vehicle.

It hadn’t been that long since I left, but those harvesters should have crept back like the cockroaches they were. It was just a hassle to find them.

With that, I scrolled down to one of the oldest contacts I had, which was simply labeled ‘QG’, and placed a call through my SAID.

Lucy - Halls Corporation

While Rollo was at Ferrumus Station

The terminal before Lucy alerted her to the latest intel yet again. The cy-sec specialists who had been going through all the incoming data from the company’s app had been keeping Lucy busy.

It only took Lucy a few moments to skim through the new content, which involved some individuals suspected to be part of the High Gate Group’s hit team. They were trying to gain passage up the space elevator into Aegis, not the first Lucy had to deal with this week.

Setting the matter to be of high importance, she began skimming through her list of contacts to find someone to assign this task to.

Away, busy, busy, recovering, busy, MIA, busy, busy...Is there no one left...?

“Hey, can one of you deal with this—” Lucy yelled out to her peers in the office only to find no one responding. It wasn’t that they were slacking off, but the simple fact that she was the only one left at the office.

The intelligence department she was in charge of had found themselves short-handed when the Halls Corporation found themselves in the middle of a corporate war. Unlike other roles, it took quite some time to hire and train intelligence operatives, especially ones that could be trusted.

Finding herself alone, Lucy collapsed back into her chair and let out a sigh.

“I want a vacation...”

While she could simply send the information to the security team to deal with, she didn't trust their skills to covertly track down the right suspects. They were fine fighters, but hunting for malicious individuals who did not want to be found required a different set of skill set.

That was why the modus operandi was to have an intelligence operative find and confirm they had the right targets first, and if they couldn't handle it, they would call in the muscle.

Thoughts of putting off the task until someone else was available crossed Lucy's mind, but she couldn't go through with it in the end. She thought back to her time as a mercenary and began to resolve herself to take the frontline once more.

It should be fine...