

Chapter 68: Gang War

Today was a special day.

A week after dealing with the Rust Scrapper's leader, we kept out of their way and monitored the situation. With their leadership completely gone, the remaining members were conflicted about who would take over the gang. They pointed fingers at each other for being responsible for the previous leader's death, and soon a civil war started amidst the gang.

In the meantime, I kept busy by doing my community service and leveling up. I had cy-specialists, hard at work, decrypting the data we downloaded from the gang leader's residence.

And on this special day, I finally managed to level up.

Status	
Level:	19
EXP:	40/1900
Musculoskeletal:	211
Neural Reflex:	65
Visuomotor Coordination:	87
Endurance:	59
Sensory Perception:	127
Upgrade Points:	2
Upgrades:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Stealth +7● Hacking +3● Cybernetic Engineering +10● Stealth Technology +10● Software Engineering +6● Electrical Engineering +4
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

I immediately dumped my newfound points into electrical engineering and enjoyed the sensation that I hadn't experienced in a while. The flow of knowledge answered many of my previous curiosities but also brought on new ones. The way I looked at anything in the field had gone through a metamorphosis once more.

I spent the whole day studying and figuring out ways to improve the EMP-resistant properties of my cybernetics. When I was done with that, I moved on to the electric motors of our Vanguards and all the other internals of it.

Just as inspiration struck me in an application on how to improve efficiency, several familiar faces barged into my workshop.

"Rollo, we're finally done decrypting the data," Claire said, with Leo and Lana standing behind her.

I tried to pretend I didn't hear her, hoping she would come back later and continued working on the motor.

"Rollo, Rollo. Mr. Halls! Wake up!"

She started grabbing my shoulders and shaking me around, so I no longer had a choice.

Sigh...

"Yes, I'm listening. What did you guys find?"

"So you were listening, huh?"

"...I'm sorry for ignoring you. I was busy, but I can no longer focus now, so go ahead. You have my attention."

Claire smirked, and she looked back toward Lana, who stepped forward as Leo gave her a slight push.

"We found detailed records of all their business activities: function, schedules, contacts, locations, everything."

"Sure, but it's been a week. The remnants must be fighting over these things, and some of it may have changed by now."

"Some of them, yes. But the majority of it should be left untouched. They shouldn't be stupid enough to affect their profit-making businesses with their squabble. After all, profits are what they're fighting for."

"So, what do you recommend we do?"

This time, Leo responded.

“Before we say anything, take a look at the files first.”

He sent me a large file, which was transferred over to my handheld terminal to examine.

Inside were all the business activities the gang did. From drugs, prostitution, racketeering, kidnapping, and much more. It even had a list of people they held captive or kept around for their labor as if they were slaves.

“This is a lot, but if we steal from them, we’re going to become their common enemy.”

“We weren’t thinking of that. You were always worried about how they may still retaliate after their war settles, right?” Claire replied. “If we go after these businesses and dissolve them instead, there wouldn’t be anything left for them to fight for. Then their entire gang will crumble and be absorbed by others, effectively destroying the Rust Scrappers for good.”

The three of them gave me a knowing smile.

“You guys want me to help these people who are their victims?”

“Just an added bonus along the way of removing the threats. We thought it was something you would want to do.” Leo winked.

When did I give off the impression that I want to help people?

I thought I made it clear that I was in it for the profits. They weren’t wrong that I don’t mind if I could save people along the way, as long as I don’t lose anything doing so.

“Plus, this can serve as a training exercise for your new hires and that new team you guys are putting together,” Claire added.

“...Let me go ask Thorne and Flo if they are even ready for an operation so soon. I’d rather not have to find replacements and restart training if they get zeroed.”

And the compensation, can’t forget the compensation I will have to pay if they get hurt or die on the job. The Rollo in the past, you should’ve set the compensation to be lower. Why were you so stupid?

Andrew - Halls Corporation

“Peng, you got in my way again. How many times do I have to tell you to push in and side off to the side as fast as you can?”

“I’m sorry Andrew, Peng will try to remember that for the next time.”

“Goddamnit, it’s been the—”

“Drop it, Andrew. You guys are still new, there’s no rush,” the large woman with cybernetic arms strode in and chided.

“You mercs should know danger could be lurking anywhere. To survive, we have to learn and adapt as fast as possible. This has been the eleventh time we had to repeat your training exercise!”

“What did I tell you to refer to me as?” She glared.

Andrew unconsciously took a step back and gulped. “...Instructor Flo.”

“Good. Now get back there and redo the exercise with your team. You’re causing issues, not just to Peng, when all you do is complain. Remember, you have other members on your team as well. We may train with interchangeability of members in mind, but that doesn’t mean you should ignore them.”

Knowing when to take an L is a key part of survival. But just you wait, I’ll be sure to get back at you.

“Yes, instructor Flo,” Andrew replied.

The two obediently went back to the entrance with their team and readied themselves for another attempt. Once the course was reset, they were the first two to rush in.

They posted up against the front door to the building as their two other team members followed. Andrew then tapped Peng on the shoulders, signaling that he was in position.

Peng held up a fist to his team before he shield-bashed the door down. Andrew quickly followed him in and shot at the defending team while hiding his body behind Peng’s shield as much as possible. They kept moving forward the entire time to create space for the two teammates behind them.

“Behind us!” the team member protecting their flank shouted.

Andrew ducked behind the shield and turned back to see the red contours through the walls, back out where they came in from. He aimed and fired his rifle at the highlighted enemies.

There was no damage to the walls as the virtual bullet traversed it and pinged the target on the other side. Having been shot, they instantly stopped shooting and moved out of the course.

The virtual system accurately simulated the firearm physics, so he knew if this was a real engagement, his bullet would’ve penetrated through the walls and hit his targets.

Fights would’ve been so much easier if I had this tech back when we were fighting other gang members.

“Gather up, I have an announcement to make,” Flo, our instructor, immediately yelled out as soon as the training exercise was over. “You guys are still pathetic in my eyes, but tomorrow, we will be going out on a live operation.”

He exchanged looks with Peng, only to find him staring blankly at the speaker, so he glanced over at his other two teammates. There were also people from the other teams, but he hadn’t spoken to any of them yet.

“You people will hear the details tomorrow. You’re all dismissed for now.”

“Peng is hungry. Can we go eat, Andrew?”

“...Sure.”

Just as he began to walk away, a voice called out from behind.

“Wait! Can we join you guys?”

He turned and identified the speakers as his teammates. He hadn’t taken any interest in them, but if they were going to be fighting together tomorrow, he thought it wouldn’t hurt to at least get to know their names.

“Okay, let’s go errr...”

“...He’s Brian and I’m Mark. How long have we been training together again?” The taller of the two stepped forward and replied.

They were both pretty muscular for being barely twenty. It was enough to tell him they had a good upbringing and were actually fed, unlike him and his childhood friend.

“Let’s talk at the restaurant, Brian and Mark. You don’t want to see Peng throwing a tantrum when he gets too hungry.”

“...”

Andrew - Halls Corporation

“You boys look sleepy. Are you sure you guys are ready for some action?” Flo said, right after they had assembled.

“Yes, mam!” Everyone saluted and responded in unison. They were experienced enough to know the repercussions if they didn’t, and it almost came reflexively to them now.

“Well, suit yourselves. The operation today may get violent, you have been warned. The two teams are being split, and here are the dossiers with everything you need to know. No one else will be giving you a hand, so you’re all on your own.”

They all continued to stand at attention until Flo was completely gone from the room.

As soon as she left, everyone collectively let out a sigh of relief as they split off to go over their own mission details.

Andrew and his two other team members read the terminal together while Peng played around with his tower shield.

After agreeing on a plan, they got into an unmarked van and moved out. For this operation, they wouldn’t be using their Vanguard’s so they could stay incognito.

The team parked in a small street near their objective, a rundown part of town that was just outside of the Neon District. They all left the car, as it wouldn’t be necessary for the rest of the plan. There was no way for them to escape with the captives without neutralizing all the enemies in the area, not safely at least.

The early morning streets were mostly deserted. The GPS on their optics quickly found the address their instructor had provided them with.

“Remember, no stealth tech. We don’t want anyone to think we’re from a corp.”

“Peng remembers.”

I’ll give it a 50/50 that he will actually remember.

“Okay. Just like training now. Peng, you got the lead.”

Peng nodded and started moving into the back alley of the commercial unit that was their target. His large figure lugging around a tower shield meant that it was only a matter of time before they would be spotted, so speed was their priority here.

Andrew watched as the large figure of Peng charged at the back door and slammed his shield into it, just like in training. The flimsy door came off at the hinges, and the team quickly filed in behind him.

Inside were empty hallways, but they didn’t dawdle, and started clearing the rooms. They had Brian in the back, holding the hallway, while Peng and Andrew charged into the closest room. Andrew found several people with tattoos that matched the ones he had seen from the dossier and wearing red, the signature color of the Rust Scappers.

“What is with all the noise? Who the fu—”

One of the men nursing a headache was about to reach for his gun, so he fired. Peng took that as the signal to go wild and slammed his shield at the closest gang member who was just rousing. Hearing the firefight, the fourth member of the team, Mark, who acted as the flexible rotator, immediately came to back the two of them up.

It couldn't even be called a fight, as they were caught solely unprepared and quickly succumbed to the surprise attack.

It was only when they finished clearing the room that Brian called out to them about the others in the building who had woken up and were on their way. The team quickly retreated into the narrow hallways and had Peng move to the front with his shield.

Bullets bounced off his shield, holding them back, as Andrew prepared a surprise for them. He hefted up the company-supplied grenade launcher and shot it down the hallway at his foes. He shot another one for good measure before his team started advancing on the enemy, who were all either injured or taking cover.

Weak, just too weak. We were weak gang members, just like them not too long ago. I really should make use of that employee discount to chrome us up. You never know when a corp would throw you away, after all.