

Chapter 71: Day Off

“Hi, can I get a cao-free chocolate milkshake?” I asked the teenager behind the cashier.

“Yes, just a moment, sir. That will be...errr, 9.62 credits.”

I watched as he fumbled his job, likely the first day on the job. When he finally entered my order into the terminal, his co-worker had already finished making my drink.

I walked back to the seat near the front entrance and sat on the opposite side of the table from Thorne, who was munching away at some fried crickets. He nodded at me before his eyes took on a glow once more, probably watching some video.

As for me, I enjoyed my milkshake while I people-watched. On my right was the window that showed streams of people going about their day on the other side. To my left was the fast-food joint where people lined up for their orders.

We had stayed in the wasteland for a full week before we couldn't handle it anymore. My hair felt gross no matter how much wiping I had done. The field rations we had to eat weren't any better at keeping my sanity, either.

The last straw was the lack of web connection. I had only downloaded so many shows and books before I ran out. As a modern person, every day disconnected from the web was torture.

That was why we decided to take a two-day break back in NLA. I had gotten tired of doing nothing but hunting mutants through all the sand and dusty buildings.

I took advantage of this time to check out the prospecting equipment we needed for our resources problem, but they were all rented out with none available.

After the war out in space, the spacers were hogging all the materials they usually sold to Earth in order to rebuild, or so they say. This made all the middle or lower-tier corporations urgently look for alternatives, such as mines, to keep up their profits.

With no other option in sight, I had given up for now while I did some shopping as a relaxing activity, yet there wasn't anything I found interesting.

Clothes were great and all, but I only needed so many sets before they just took up space. In the first place, I always wore my armor overtop anyway, so fashion didn't really matter too much as long as I was presentable. The only time I wore armor underneath was when I had to dress in my business suits for official meetings.

Armor was just that mandatory when living in this world. Who knew when—

A gunshot suddenly rang out within the line for food.

“Everybody hands up! Hand over every single credit you have right now if you want to live!”

I watched as a duo, a man and a woman, raised their guns up to the cashier and the people around.

It didn't take long for the crowd to realize what was happening, and they all dispersed like the wind.

The duo seemed to have given up on the people running and focused on the cashiers instead.

I watched as my optics highlighted one of the employees at the back, drawing out their own weapon while hiding behind the fryer.

Is it exactly these everyday occurrences that make armor so important whenever I go...

I looked up to Thorne, who was still munching on his snacks as he watched on.

"You want to handle this, or should I?"

"Those two are cute. You go ahead if you want," He replied.

I took one last big sip of my milkshake before placing it down. For these amateurs, I didn't even need to use active camouflage to sneak up on them.

I silently walked up to them, making use of their blind spots, and gestured to the employees in the back to stay put. I tapped on the shoulder of the man, who was still yelling at the poor employees out front to transfer all their credits to him.

"Hey, you know there are better ways to make money, right?"

He jumped at my voice before quickly turning toward me.

"Who the fuck are you?"

"Calm down, I'm—" Mid-sentence, he tried to raise his gun toward me. I quickly gripped his wrist while it was in motion and pushed it to the side. He struggled to break free, but my Nova Tech cyberarms weren't a joke.

His partner finally reacted as she heard the scream of pain and attempted to point her gun at me too. I shoved the man in front of me, as my human shield, and closed the distance to the second assailant.

She wasn't that bad after all, as she hesitated to pull the trigger. It also allowed me to ram into her with her friend, knocking the wind out of the woman.

While they were groaning in pain and squirming on the ground, I took the liberty of picking up their weapons and unloaded both of them. I then placed it on the counter where the employees stood blankly, watching the scene unfold. I spotted the employee who had the firearm earlier and gave him a nod to reassure him.

Seeing how the police were probably on their way, I returned to Thorne and picked up my milkshake.

It's a little annoying how it's slightly melted now, but that's just how life is.

"Let's go."

Thorne took a moment to finish chewing before responding, "Where to?"

"Let's check out the racetrack again."

We got back into our car and made our way to the racetrack I went with Vin previously.

Just like last time, the clientele around our seating area were all wealthy-looking corpos. We watched the electric cars below complete their warmup laps before they began the race for real.

Now that I had more points in electrical engineering, my urge to closely examine those machines only deepened. Just from the sound alone, there were many ideas I wanted to confirm by looking under their hood.

There were races every thirty minutes, and we had arrived just in time for the start of one. We planned to stay for a while as there wasn't anything we wanted to do instead. If we just went back, we would've wasted it by either watching videos or going to the gun range.

We could do those things at the outpost too, so we would stay for the next race as well.

Just as the first race ended, a voice called out to me from behind.

"Rollo, fancy seeing you here again."

I turned around to the aisle in the back and found a bald man standing there, surrounded by his bodyguards.

I stood up and approached, shaking his hands.

"Joey, what a coincidence."

"Haha, it's fairly easy to find me here, as it is one of my few hobbies outside of fine dining. Please, join me."

We moved seats to join Joey and conversed with him while we waited for the next race to begin.

"I heard your business was expanding again. How great," Joey said as he took a sip of wine.

"You are very well-informed, I see."

“Ha, words travel fast in our circles. You should network more with other corporations. It may be a give-and-take relationship most of the time, but there’s a lot of useful information to be gained.”

“Maybe, I just haven’t gotten a chance to network as thoroughly as I liked.”

“Then why don’t you join the party I’m holding at my estate at the end of this month? I don’t mind introducing you, though. You’ll have to be mindful lest you get taken advantage of.”

A chance to connect...Why not?

“That is...very generous of you. Don’t mind if I do accept your offer.”

“Great, I’ll send you the information soon.”

He moved on to discuss the issues he had been facing at work with his employees and how his company, Authentic Corp, was doing. The point he kept returning to was how the price of operating was increasing too quickly, and the price of food only ever rose, as well.

“Why don’t you join me for some food after this, Rollo?”

The first thing that came to mind at his words was the delicious steak I had the last time he took me to his restaurant. My bodily urges were simply too strong.

“Sure.”

“Hey Claire, how’s it going?” I said, over the video call displayed directly on my optics.

“Busy as ever, since you boys are slacking off!”

“Haha, come on. Someone has to be here to oversee the expansion and production of our vehicles.”

“And someone has to guard Rollo, since he’s always getting into trouble,” Thorne added.

“And what is this I’m hearing about you guys taking on gigs again?”

“...We wanted to blow off some steam. Nothing intense, just a relaxation mission. You do not know how hard it is to live away from civilization for an entire week.”

“Whatever you say, I’m done talking. Unlike you guys, I still have a lot of things to do.”

She hung as and the two of us could only shrug at her antics.

We resumed going over our equipment while we sat in the car and prepared for our mission. We had another day off and we already exhausted all the recreational activities we had in mind, so we decided to take an easy gig from a local QG to keep our skills sharp.

Hunting mutants did that as well, but fighting against mindless beasts was completely different from sneaking around humans or fighting them head-on.

I re-donned the outfit I wore during my tenure as 'Cloak' and went by the same name when I had approached the QG. Once I was ready, I inspected Thorne, who wore nondescript, jet-black gear.

"We simply going to install a virus on the terminal of some grunt-level employee and, if possible, on the person himself. That means we want to be quiet the entire you, so you stay by the door as our contingency while I take care of the sneaking."

"Right, I get the boring role," Thorne complained.

"I don't think you're the right fit when a delicate touch is needed here..."

"Yeah, fine. I understand, but next time I get to pick the job."

"Sure. Why not? As long as it isn't anything risky and doesn't involve sand and mutants, I'm down."

We headed for the megabuilding that had a familiar layout. In fact, I think almost all megabuildings had the same layout. It was simply cheaper to use a design that was already proven to work, I guess.

The two of us used our Shades to project the image of a normal-looking civilian as we headed for the elevators. We walked by families and their children, gang-affiliated ruffians, and regular corpos who all shared the building.

Arriving on the 28th floor where our target lived, we moved immediately, as we knew where the regular access points were. I breached into the flimsy network and gained control of the cameras and shared the feed with Thorne, who was on lookout duty.

The door to our target's unit had the access panel wide open right there, and it was just almost too easy compared to all the other facilities I had to break into. The door soon clicked unlocked, and I slowly eased it open. The lights were already out, and my optics automatically kicked into night vision.

I took a cursory glance around the living room before I made my way into the only bedroom in the apartment.

Unlike the living room, the lights in the bedroom were on. I activated my active camouflage before I quietly entered.

Inside, I saw a skinny man seated at his desk conversing with someone over his SAID.

“How much longer do you think this’ll take? I can’t believe Malcolm would give us such a tedious task...”

As the man continued to complain, I moved closer and jacked into the terminal beside him.

He looked completely engrossed in whatever he was doing in his optics, so I took the chance and brushed my cyberarm as close to the neural port in his wrist as possible. The Nova Tech Hercule had both great strength and utility, with dozens of useful gadgets at my disposal.

I could even gain access to connections like this using its close-range wireless transceiver.

I quickly uploaded the virus I got from the client into his SAID and made my way out. With access to his system now, I could even eavesdrop on his conversation.

“Yeah, I’m not even sure if any of these listings are real. The bottles we’re looking for are probably extinct by now. We should look for another gift to please that Ophelia bitch from Airo Tech, or some other way to win the contract.”

I was sure the client had access to his cybernetic systems too, and could see my access, so I quickly logged out and took my exit.

Now then, a party to go to at the end of the month, and I still needed to find a way to find a mine or some other alternative for materials too. Have I become a workaholic, only taking comfort when I’m busying away...?