

# Chapter 182: Snatch and Go

“Men, get ready to move out in one minute,” Platoon Leader Loo shouted out.

His voice drew my attention and reminded me of the question I had been wondering ever since I saw their huge spaceship.

“Thorne, who are these people?”

“You know more than me,” he shrugged. “They should belong to exactly who you are thinking of, or at least related.”

“...How in the world did you get mixed up with them?”

“It’s a long story. To summarize, that Titus guy from AeroDynamic brought us together. Anyway, are you okay? They didn’t do anything to you, right?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. In fact, I learned a lot while I was here.”

“...About what? Being a captive?”

Before I could elaborate, the platoon leader strolled over.

“Save the talking for later. We’re heading out. Are you good to move on your own?”

I took a moment to examine his power armor before replying. It was thicker than Nova Tech’s default model, but moved a lot smoother. Nova Tech’s power armors moved like they were stomping around, while the one before wasn’t clunky at all. The entire thing seemed way better put together, without any obvious gaps.

“Yeah...”

“Good, we’re heading out!” He turned to one of his men. “Have squad two start clearing the path ahead!”

He gave Thorne a meaningful look before heading outside the comms room.

I exchanged a quick glance with my friend before he gestured me to go first.

“After you.”

“Wait...Let me do something real quick first.”

Now that there were no imminent reinforcements snooping around or about to show up, I had the leeway to finish what I started. I walked over to the motionless power armor by the comms terminal.

“You got a vibroblade I could use?” I said to the cyborg beside me.

“...Here.”

After receiving a combat knife similar to my old one, I stabbed out at the joints of the power armor. The energy shield was useless when I was so close, but the armor surprisingly held together.

*I guess regular vibro blades aren't going to cut it...*

The sharp edge wasn't working, so I employed brute force instead. I thrust the knife with both hands, empowered by the strength of my entire body, and most importantly, my two cyberarms.

This time, it slid in slightly into the gaps, and I only had to hammer it down. It took two tries, but I eventually breached the armor around the neck.

+30 EXP
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There were many reasons why I decided to finish off Commander Poltrix. It wasn't just because I wanted the experience points.

With my escape, it would leave behind several people who had close contact with me. I'd be surprised if they didn't interrogate them once this incident was over, and I'd rather not have them reveal anything. This was especially true for Poltrix as we had fought. He knew my capabilities, so he was a huge security threat.

The man himself was quite the specimen...but it definitely wasn't personal.

With the deed complete, I stood up and handed the knife back to Thorne.

“Keep it. I use this anyway,” his wrist blade extended out, following his words.

With that settled, I followed him out of the room along with the other soldiers that my guardian angel had sent.

*If he's taking action directly, does this mean I'll be meeting him after this? It'll be nice to finally get a name instead of just referring to him as my guardian all the time. It makes it sound like I'm a minor who needs babysitting or something...*

As we made our way through the silver corridors of the facility, I witnessed the aftermath of the fighting. Holes were blown open, bodies laid around every so often, and the smell of fighting was in the air.

Our journey was smooth—at least for the first few minutes before we were ordered to halt. The advance team had encountered resistance, and I was told to stay back.

I complied, as I knew I wasn't equipped to fight right now. I wasn't the most useful on an open battlefield without power armor. I had no delusions about the facts. Even if I did have my gear, our equipment was severely outmatched against entities at their level. It was better for me to sit back and observe.

I believed it wouldn't be long until we reached similar heights, so this experience would prepare us for when the time came.

Thorne was doing the same, silently sitting back along with me. I had thought he would want to charge in as well, but I guess this experience had tempered him somewhat as well.

"How wide do you think the gap is between us and them?" I whispered over to Thorne.

"...Tech-wise, a lot. However, skill-wise, even more so. It's like they're all veterans with decades of experience."

"Well, they do seem to have decades to build up their foundation. I doubt any of the big corporations got to their position overnight."

I also believed that the huge difference in skill was likely due to the use of various training implements like the hypnopedia devices. I had yet to create one for combat skills yet, but I could see the potential of it in training our personnel.

It was something to discuss later on when we got back to Elevate City. Right now, I'd rather not leak anything, even to our allies.

Gunshots rang out, and the fighting seemed to intensify all at once before it became silent again. Then the bearer of bad news came.

"Turn back! They collapsed the path. We have to hurry before they do the same to the other corridors!"

"Head to the new point I highlighted on the map. We'll blow a hole and make our own path," Platoon Leader Loo declared.

I was glad he was cautious, despite having the advantage so far. I completely agreed with him that eliminating any chances of getting ambushed was the best move here.

There was no time for further discussion as I followed everyone jogging back down the way we came. I knew playing defense was easier, but I didn't think they'd resort to destroying their own base too.

As we ran, I moved myself over to the platoon leader to voice my concerns.

"They seem to be buying time. Do you think they have reinforcements on the way?"

"Who knows, but we won't stay to find out."

Our party went around to another path, and this time we didn't stay back to wait for our vanguard to give the all-clear. Time was of the essence, and we sprinted toward the sound of fighting.

Thankfully, by the time we arrived, the fight was over. I just made it in time to witness our allies gunning down the last enemy power armor at point blank.

We didn't bother stopping and continued running. The base was occasionally shaking, and with all the research labs here, I didn't want to find out what other trump cards they may have in store.

We soon made it toward the residential area for researchers and posted up against one of the hallways.

"Set the charges here. It should connect us to the other side," the platoon leader commanded.

While they planted the explosives, I continued scanning around with my Argus. I found several of these rooms had occupants in them. Even the one belonging to my former superior, Cora.

*Hmm, it makes sense they're hiding in their rooms. After all, they're used to doing what they're told. To be honest, I think they were similar to be in terms of being a captive. I doubt they had much freedom, considering the amount of sensitive knowledge they had access to.*

"...What are you planning, Rollo?" Thorne's voice woke me up from my musing.

"Hmm...I was wondering how much room our ride out of here has?"

"...Are you serious? You want to bring along others?"

"Well, the ship you guys saved was occupied by all the test subjects I freed, so it'd be great to bring them along. And if we're doing that, we might as well bring a few more. Think about it. We always had trouble recruiting a competent research team. I'd rather not wait years for us to set up a school."

"...Don't you have that training thing going on that Claire had used to learn about cybernetics?"

He was talking about the cassettes.

"That can't replace real first-hand experience. It's still great to get someone up to speed, but research isn't that easy."

"...Let me ask."

The platoon leader seemed busy, but it Thorne was connected to their comms channel. He fell silent for a few moments before directing his gaze back to me.

"He says as long as they don't slow us down, he doesn't care. His priority will still be you."

“Okay, then let’s get to it, then. Better finish up before they finish blowing a hole through the walls.”

I ignored Thorne, who was shaking his head, and went straight to Cora’s room.

Then I knocked.

As expected, no one answered. I knocked two more times before I plugged into the door and unlocked it myself.

When the door opened, I immediately saw a woman inside pointing a gun in my direction. However, it was apparent she was anxious, as she saw no one.

I maneuvered myself beside her and pushed the gun down as I spoke.

“Calm down, Cora. I’m not here to hurt you.”

“What the fuck do you want with me? I’m just a grunt around here. Leave me alone!”

She struggled to regain control of the firearm, which caused me to disarm her. It was only once her ability to cause harm was neutralized that I turned off my active camouflage.

“Cora, look at me. It’s me, Rollo.”

“Fucking get off me. I swear I’ll—...huh?” She looked even more bewildered upon recognizing me. “What the fuck, Rollo? What is this? Shouldn’t you be in your room? And you appeared out of nowhere and everything like some spec—Wait, are you a spy from some other corp?”

“Hmm, not exactly, but close enough.”

Her eyes widened in terror.

“I didn’t treat you that badly, right? Please, don’t kill me. I’ll tell you what you want.”

“No, no. I said I wasn’t here to hurt you. I wasn’t lying.”

“Then...why are you here? To poach me over to your company?”

I didn’t want to waste any more time explaining, seeing as she arrived at a similar conclusion, so I nodded.

“What do you say? Want to jump ship?”

“...Do I have a choice?”

“Of course. Decline and I’ll be on my way.”

She stared me down, and I could see she had many things she wanted to say. After a moment, she nodded.

“Fine, fine. Once they made the connection that I was in charge of a rat, I wouldn’t have much of a career left anyway. God damn it! I just got my promotion too. You better put in a good word with your employer for me, Rollo. I’m tired of being at the bottom rung my entire life!”

“I’m sure you’ll be satisfied. Come on. I’ll have to restrain you for now, but I’ll make sure we treat you right.”

With that, I slapped on the bracelets restraining devices onto her and exited out of the room. Thorne had been visiting other researchers, so I was glad when I saw several other scientists beside him.

They all had downcast expressions, though. It likely had something to do with the fact Thorne was carrying a person in each of his arms as if he were carrying two sacks of potatoes. I could only sigh at the display and carry on, as we had no time to address anything.

I left Cora with our allies and went off to recruit several more researchers before a loud boom signaled that time was up. A path had been blown open for us.

From there, we met minimal resistance. We didn’t make it to the hangar, but instead, to some escape pods. Anticlimactically, nothing went awry before we launched ourselves out into space, directly toward the large warship outside.

*Now I don’t suppose my guardian angel will be there, but I hope they do have a line of communication with him. It’s about time we had a talk. He owed me that much, at least.*