

Tristan welded the extra power pack to the Sorto Executioner 643 while blaster shots flew around their cover. Alex popped up occasionally to return fire and remind security they were still there. The SE was a good rifle for what he was turning it into. Sorto's Executioner line of weapons boasted a high power transfer capability, which translated into the kind of shots that left holes in reinforced polycarbon walls that surrounded them, and the overturned hover sled with the ship's power capacitors secured to them.

Those were the reason none of the guards fired at Tristan and Alex through the sled. The capacitors were charged, and if one detonated, it would trigger the others and the resulting detonation would vaporize three floors up and down, as well as everyone within that range.

The mechanic Tristan has terrified as he shoulder the sled on its side had yelled that information for the guards to hear as he ran away. Alex had given him a mildly annoyed shake of the head, then took advantage of their position to take down guard who broke their own covers of doorways and wall corners while Tristan set to work.

The useful thing with capacitors that took so much power was the same that ensured Tristan's current safety. Their detonation were impressive. Because of that, the SE had safeguard in place that kept the capacitors from reaching critical containment levels, as well as a discharge trigger if the energy in the capacitor somehow spiked.

Tristan had disabled them, and with the fourth power pack connected to the rifle, when he was ready, all he'd need to do was activate it, lob it at his target, and get out of range.

He didn't expect Carter Hart to be within range to be hurt, but he counted on the destruction of so much art to be a killing blow of its own.

He put the strap over his shoulder and his Azeru in hand. "Ready?"

With a nod, Alex broke cover, and Tristan covered him until he had secured the doorway and gave another nod. Tristan moved, firing at anyone he saw while keeping the sled behind him as an added deterrent. He shot the guard in the doorway, as well as the one who was exchanging packs a few steps in it. Then he was providing cover fire for Alex.

"Do you need more packs?" Alex asked, holding another SE from the doorway he'd acquired.

"It's at capacity. More power will only risk burning out the relays and reduce how much the capacitors charge."

Alex dropped the rifle and fired at the intersection. "You know, making a second one would let you use this one to deal with that intersection."

"We're too close to the panic room. There are no guaranties I'll be able to find enough by the time we reach it."

“There will be more guards than we’ve encountered at this point.”

Tristan broke cover Azeru in one hand and a Phyder DF-054 in the others and it previous owner’s arms tied around his neck. He added shoots at anything that peeked around the corners to Alex’s. When he rounded it, he fired at the surprised faces, and felt the residual heat of the shots his improvised shield took. By the time he turned to deal with them, Alex was sliding under the shot and bringing those guards down.

Alex cut something off one of them and raised the bandolier of impact grenades. “I guess you didn’t have to make you own.”

“We can use them against those who will be guarding the panic room’s entrance. I don’t trust them to cause the needed destruction within the art displayed.”

* * * * *

Tristan pulled a wire out of the control panel and connected it to his datapad, ignoring the explosion on the other side of the blast barrier. Those had been smart in the part of the guards, since they were designed to stop anything short of hull penetrating cannon fire. Unfortunately, they hadn’t stopped the grenades Alex threw over them. So now, Tristan had a safe place to work from while Alex shot anyone he saw, and threw the occasional grenades while he still had some.

There had been a chance the design had been installed within the objective decade since Tristan had last gone over the new products within these types of security systems, but he’d counted on how long it took to build the expansive cities Carter Hart had, and that he would have started with the tower to mean he would have gone with whoever was the best well within times Tristan was up to date on his research.

And he’d been right.

Carrion was still considered the best when it came to high security access controls, and while Tristan hadn’t found the identifier within the components, and he wouldn’t; another way Carrion increase the difficulty in breaking their locks. He recognized enough of the layout to recognize the Furmur designed they’d used through most of their locks seventy to a hundred objective years ago.

Because of how popular they had been among luxury cruisers, the Furmur design had needed to include one safety feature no ground locked system needed. It needed to let people out, in the advent the inside was exposed to hard vacuum. It hadn’t been profitable to create a variation for the wealthy that remained ground side and since there would be no vacuum, it had been judged secure enough. After all, it was nearly impossible to recreated the sensor reads the security system would accept.

Nearly impossible had meant three thousand hours of running permutation until he cracked the permutation algorithm used to encrypt the signal.

“Get ready,” he told Alex as he send the void alert.

He activated the SE rifle as he stood, then wound back to throw it as he stepped into the forming opening and froze, arm in the air, looking at the books on display before him. Some were open, under a case. Others lined a low book cases, while others were in frames, their covers displayed as work of arts.

They were all old.

Or forgeries, a voice whispered. There to trick him.

But Carter Hart wouldn’t settle for forgeries. If he did, he wouldn’t have invested as

much as he did in getting merc to retrieve the painting.

He turned and threw the SE toward the guards. It exploded before reaching them, but the blast was powerful enough no one fired afterward.

“What the fuck?” Alex demanded while Tristan tried to process what had happened. “The plan was to blow up the stuff in there.”

“Books.” But it made no sense. Books were things, and Tristan didn’t care about things. He had learned to respect what some held, but they shouldn’t come before the job.

The disbelieving look Alex gave him forced Tristan to push the issue aside. The job needed to happen.

“Later,” he said, because he needed to push forward. “This is still a sealed area. Carter Hart can’t leave unless he exits this way.”

“But we can stay out here waiting,” Alex said, voice controlled. “There’ll be more guards incoming.”

“Then we go in and close the door behind us. Then it will simply be a question of flushing Carter Hart out.”

“While not destroying anything in there?” Alex asked, and Tristan found himself at a loss as to how to answer.

“If the objects within the room need to be destroyed,” he forced himself to say, “I will deal with it. We have a job to do and I will not let this interfere again.”

With a nod Alex stepped in, and Tristan followed after disconnecting his datapad from the door’s control panel. Without the sensor input telling it the room was exposed to vacuum, the door closed.

And immediately, Tristan knew something was wrong. Too much outside light came from an archway. There were no windows within panic rooms, they compromised their security.

He ran, going over what the tower’s layout Alex had gotten told him. That room was the closest to the outside wall, but there was... he didn’t know what should be between it and the outside, a corridor and rooms, but he hadn’t pulled the information on them. Now, he suspected he should have.

Before he reached the archway, the whine of an engine started. Something powerful that had no business being inside a building. The pitch rose, indicating it gathered power, and as Tristan stepped into the room, the sleek ship burst out and into the air.

Three other ships, old, antiques, collector items, like everything within the panic room.

“Did he just escape?” Alex asked in disbelief.

“No.” Tristan ran for the Krestron. He didn’t recognize the specific design, but the manufacturer had stuck with one over look for most of it’s existence, which ended two decade after Tristan had gone to space. The Krestron Fleet Chaser had still been popular among mercs because it was being phased out by the military, and therefore affordable. It was the first ship Tristan had studied.

One person interceptor, like this one, with open cockpit access. He jumped on the wing that made it excellent within atmosphere. The clear cockpit dome was open in the center—a different design than the Chaser.

“I’ll chase him down,” he told Alex as he stepped onto the seat, then settled himself

in. "You'll be safe in here until I come back." He pulled the dome down, cutting Alex's response off. Then tapped in the ignition sequence and...

The engine started.

He located the power controls, the direction control as well as...this model also came with weapons, and they were fully charged.

Tristan smiled. As he set the ship to go. Carter Hart had provided him with the tool that would kill the man.

Then Tristan was shoved against the back of the seat as the ship launched itself out of the tower.