

Chapter 78: The Moon

On a Monday morning, I stayed in my office for once to get a head start on all the paperwork, so I could take it easy during the week. A lot of my work mainly consisted of reviewing documents and signing them off with my stamp of approval. It sounded simple, but when you were reading the hundredth page worth of boring text, it mentally wore on you.

“Rollo, can you sign off on this one first?”

I looked up and identified the person who barged into my room as Thorne. He held out a terminal to me, adding more to my pile of paperwork to review.

Well, it doesn't really matter to me what order it's in.

It took me a few minutes to read through it.

“The budget request for augmented tendons seems normal to me, but are you sure this other one here is the document you wanted me to approve?”

He took back the terminal and quickly skimmed through it. “Yes, this is the right one.”

“...Are you serious? Why are you suddenly forming a company volleyball team? How did you even arrive at that all of a sudden?”

“Well...it was a chance to satisfy what Claire wanted without having to fork out a ton of credits.”

“What Claire wanted?”

“She was talking about marketing to increase the download of her new app and how you wouldn't approve the funds for it.”

I did remember her pestering me about it. Our funds are tied up with the expansion and upgrade of our equipment. We are also saving up to purchase our real estate instead of renting and leasing all the time. We just couldn't spare credits to invest in something with little potential return when there are many other high-profit options.

“And you arrived at signing up for a corporate volleyball team, how?”

“The event has good visibility on live streams. It also worked out as I was looking for something to train our men in coordination with something at stake instead of just repetitive practice all the time. It's the ultimate team sport, after all.”

“...Sure. If it'll give Claire one less thing to pester me about, why not?”

After having had my fill of authentic fried rice, I headed over to the gymnasium in my new Wraith, urban model.

Our production of vehicles wasn't high at all, with us only able to produce two vehicles every three days. There were just way too many parts involved. Our mining operation was still in its early stages, and the lack of funds for a large factory.

I pulled up to the place Thorne had been renting and headed to their court after noticing I had arrived a little early. When I went in, the first thing I saw was the uniform they were wearing. It had our company logo right next to our app's icon, which was simply the name EcoHalls in a fancy font.

Maybe I should take charge of naming from now on. I don't think I can handle seeing any more clothes filled with a variation of my name on it.

I found a nearby bench and took a seat as I watched them finish up their practice for the night.

"Remember to work on your hand signals and get used to constantly changing the system we use. Just like we do in the field, we need to change it often lest our enemies are able to read them. Setters, get used to making split-second decisions where you have no time to consult anyone. You need to always keep track of your teammates and your opponent's movements. Liberos, you..."

I half listened in on Thorne's speech while I went over some documents on my optics.

Now that I was listening to his logic, maybe there are quite a few skills you can pick up from volleyball that are relevant to field operations.

By the time I finished going over the reports from NLA, Thorne had just finished reviewing with the team.

"You need to take a shower or something?" I asked as he approached.

"I'm good. I barely ever break a sweat nowadays."

"Hmm...It could be the cooling system I had set up for the cybernetics inadvertently affecting your sweat glands. I should take a look at that on our next checkup."

"I already promised Claire I'll let her start doing that from now on. She says she's been making great progress, especially since she has your medical exam soon."

"If she wants to, sure. But your setup is a little too advanced for a beginner to do anything more than the basics. Remember to call me too when she goes over it."

Once Thorne got into a new change of clothes, we headed toward the restaurant we had booked for tonight, The Moon, owned and operated by Authentic Corp.

It was inside a SocialCorp hotel and was one of the highly recommended restaurants that still appealed to the public rather than exclusively high-level corpos. Even so, all the guests were mostly corpos with a few occasional mercenaries that could afford to eat here.

We found Claire waiting in the lobby with Leo, Lana, and Lucy. Claire and Lucy were today's main characters as we were celebrating all the work they had put into the app and establishing the intelligence department.

"Took you guys long enough. Come on, let's hurry up. I've heard really good things about this place and can't wait to try it!"

We kept pace with the excited Claire and made our way to the basement level of the hotel.

A woman immediately greeted us as we walked in. "You must be Mr. Halls. Please allow me to take you to your private room."

She then led us across the main hall, which was decorated with numerous thin crystals hanging from the ceiling. They acted as curtains that respectfully divided the different tables in the main hall from each other.

The path then snaked inside, with a private room behind every bend. At the end of the path, we were greeted with the sight of an artificial lawn, where a lone house stood in the middle of it. It was reminiscent of a traditional Japanese house made of wood and sliding doors.

The entire place was spacious, as if we were outdoors. Especially with the projection of the sky and moon hanging over us.

When we stepped inside the house, I immediately spotted the bald man seated at the wooden table.

"Rollo, how punctual of you! Everyone, please, be at ease and take a seat," Joey, the owner of Authentic Corp, said as he welcomed us with open arms.

"Thank you for today, but you didn't have to go out of your way to greet us."

"Don't worry about it. How could I not when I found out you had made a booking at one of our restaurants? I won't bother you guys further. I hope you guys enjoy your dinner tonight. Let us talk again soon."

Not long after he left, everyone in our party visibly relaxed and began wandering their eyes around the room.

"This place must cost a fortune with all the wood used. Is your wallet going to be okay, Rollo?" Claire asked.

"Joey waived the room fee, so if you don't go all out, I'll be fine."

“What? This is a rare opportunity. I’d be stupid not to splurge when given a chance like this. Come on girls, let’s order everything on the menu.”

“...”

At least in high-class places like these, their menu had limited selections.

Soon, several servers knocked and entered the room. They brought us delicately put-together dishes. When I tried some, I was instantly blown away, along with any apprehension I may have had.

I was finally able to sample authentic sushi and beef, that didn’t lose at all when compared to what I had in my old world.

We enjoyed ourselves so much that we almost didn’t want to leave after our meal was done. We ordered an after-meal drink and sat outside, facing the moon as we drank. We knew it was fake, but the atmosphere it evoked was very real.

“So, you guys starting to parse through all the chatter that goes through the app yet?”

“We have the automated filter just completed yesterday. We still need people to go over the reports it flags, though.” Lana answered.

“Yeah, it was a nightmare adjusting the filter. It really made me wish there were still functional AIs to manage it for us,” Claire added.

“Stop that. We’ll get the consortium on our asses if any rumors about us being interested in AIs gets around.”

“Yeah, yeah. You wouldn’t understand, since you were sealed off in your workshop the entire time.”

We listened to Claire complain some more before it was time for us to leave. It felt like we had already overstayed, seeing we were there for over an hour after our meal finished.

“You guys want to go take a stroll?” Claire asked the moment we left the restaurant.

“Stroll? Around here?” I gestured out the window toward the concrete jungle we were in, being in downtown Elevate City.

“No dummy, let’s go to the waterfront.”

And so we did.

We went out in a convoy of several Wraiths and Vanguard. We parked at the port before we strolled along the ocean. Even though it was in the dead of night, the lights eternally lit up the entire city, especially in the areas near the main roads.

It wasn't the relaxing stroll I had in mind as our guards cleared the way in front of us and tailed us from behind. One of the Wraiths could be seen driving slowly nearby as well.

We picked a spot without too many people, and the few that were there gave us a wide berth. There was a mix of regular citizens struggling to get by, to wealthier corpos, flaunting their wealth. At this point, I was definitely part of the latter to any onlookers, and I don't think I could say they were wrong.

We only slowed down when a group of people, who were heavily guarded like us, crossed paths with us.

Their uniforms marked them to be a group from a corporation called GrainScape Tech. I'd never heard of them before and a quick search informed me that they were a smaller supplier dealing in their namesake of grains.

Our two groups walked by, with the security teams glaring at each other while we sped past them without slowing. I could tell their large cyborg of a woman glared at Thorne the entire time, but we all ignored them.

"Not the friendliest of corpos, are they? Did you know that woman, Thorne?"

"No, not at all."

"I think those guys are trying to dig around on our website. I just got a few alerts and the timing couldn't have been more coincidental," Leo said.

"..."

Seeing how we were silent, Lana added, "Don't worry, it's not that uncommon, they're just posturing. If they were really malicious, we wouldn't have known so easily."

We all continued walking and cut our stroll short. We instead went to a dessert shop nearby to end our night.

Just as we were about to board our cars, an incoming call came through our company comms. Except it wasn't just for me, everyone received one as well.

We exchanged glances before we all connected to the call.

"Sirs, and Madams, the system just flagged a report you guys should see. We got intel on a possible attack against our assets on the New North American continent."

Claire broke the tension and sighed. "Are you guys going to be leaving me alone again?"

"...Depends on the situation. Vin has been expanding our forces, so they could probably handle it themselves if we are on top of the intel game. Let's hurry back for more details."

The entire group nodded and boarded the Wraiths.

“If only it would go as smoothly as you say.” I heard one of them muttering.