

Chapter 128: Silencing Mercs

Erza - Mercenary

Immediately after hearing her new teammate's distress call, Erza instantly got dressed and prepared her weapons on instinct. She eventually slowed down, realizing it was a good idea to inform the rest of their team as well.

After sending out the texts, her teammate promptly replied they were on the way and their ETAs, but both their leader, Trisha, and the purple-haired girl, Lara, were quite far away and would arrive later than her.

Erza let out a sigh as she couldn't help but think back to the early days in her career when Flo had called her out as backup almost daily. She would either get into a scuffle with other mercs while trying to one up them, or for other insanely stupid reasons when they were drunk.

So much had changed since those days, but some things never did. Mercenaries had to help each other in their time of need or else there would be none of them left.

Erza quickly hailed a cab and went to reinforce her new friend. When she got out of her ride a block away from the clinic, her surroundings were eerily quiet. There was no one dawdling around the streets, and only the sound came from the flickering of the lights.

The clinic was on the ground floor of a commercial building with once large panels of glass walls that were now shattered all over the ground. There were a few bodies lying around the clinic, but the lack of people definitely made Erza cautious.

The only explanation she could think of was the fighting had been intense enough to have scared everyone out of the area. Before she could play detective, she heard sirens in the distance. She remembered that the police in Lion City weren't a joke and quickly got moving while placing a call.

The call to her friend went unanswered as suspected, but to her surprise, a text soon came from the same person in question.

They're chasing me through the sewers. Pinging you my location now.

With the new location, Erza tried to download a map of the underground sewers, but was disappointed to find it wasn't publicly available. With no choice and seeing the location of Eli wasn't far away, she began sprinting down the street to get as close as her teammate first.

Once she got to roughly where the signal had come from, she began searching for an entrance and didn't hesitate to open up a manhole before jumping down. She could hear her feet landing on a wet surface before her optics changed to adapt to the low light conditions.

She didn't even get to wonder where to go next when the sound of gunshots reached her ears. She instantly ran toward the sound of it and was glad to notice the fighting was close.

The narrow corridors of the sewers soon opened up to a much larger tunnel, and it was also there where she spotted several people firing upon a lone girl taking cover within one of the side tunnels.

Erza didn't hesitate to bring out her trusty grenade launcher and fired off several shots toward the group targeting her friend. The high explosive round traveled a straight path toward the enemies and exploded violently.

She didn't need to check to know that the enemies were all dead, given that they were caught entirely off guard in such an enclosed space.

"Eli, where are you? It's me!" she quickly shouted out, in hopes the girl was still there.

The girl seemed to have stuck around as she poked her head out from the side corridor cautiously.

"Erza, is it clear?"

"Yeah, come out. Let's get out of this place."

The two women silently hurried out of the filthy sewers and swiftly called for a ride. They only spoke once they got into the back of the automated taxi.

"So, why did you call me instead of your leader, Trisha?" Erza asked.

For a moment, Erza had thought it may have been a trap, but the execution of it would be too bad if that was the case. They had much better opportunities to lead her off to a more secluded location and come up with reasons to convince her she didn't need to be as heavily armed as she currently was.

"That woman never answers after a gig. And before you ask, Lara wouldn't have enough firepower to deal with those guys, so you were my best choice."

"Hm, you knew the bunch after you?"

"...Yes, a bunch of mercenaries I've seen around."

Erza turned her entire body to face her and stared at her with wide eyes.

"A bunch of people in the business are after you? Why? You screw them over or is this some conflict about gigs?"

"No, no. Nothing like that. I'm not entirely sure why they attacked me...but I think it's because I saw them on their gig."

“The confidential ones?”

Eli nodded.

“Well, I’ve pinged Trisha and Lara with the location to meet up with us at, so we can discuss what to do there. Do you think that was the last of them?”

“Of their frontline crew. Either way, they had ample time to get the word out to their QG.”

“Then we need to hurry before they—”

Before Erza could finish her words, a car suddenly pitted their vehicle. The auto drive program was easily able to regain control of the vehicle, but the two mercenaries had to worry about the occupants of the other car who were lowering their windshields to point guns at them.

The two experienced mercenaries quickly ducked down for cover as bullets riddled their car.

“Targeting attack detected. Engaging evasion maneuvers as we head toward the latest police station,” the speakers in the car announced.

“Shit. Taxi, emergency stop now!” Erza impatiently yelled. “Let us off!”

The car responded and swerved off to the sidewalk before abruptly coming to a full stop. Erza wasted no time to smash the doors open before bringing up her grenade launcher to bear. Her high explosive rounds went into flames upon making contact with their assailant’s vehicle, but it only managed to push onto the sidewalk. The car remained in good condition, likely having been reinforced with armor by its owner.

Firing off several more rounds, Erza pulled Eli out of the car and began making a run for it. It didn’t matter if the enemies chasing after them were taken out or not, as there must be other teams lurking around if the enemy QG was half competent.

While going toward the police may get them off their backs, Erza also didn’t want to get entangled with them, especially when she had been firing off explosives in public.

The two cut across an alley toward another street before running down the stairs to the public transit station. They only slowed down to catch their breath when the doors closed behind them and the tram left the station.

“Whichever QG we’re up against, they seem to be prepared. Do you have any hideouts in this city to let things cool down?” Erza asked the out of breath, Eli, as soon as she recovered.

“No, let me ask Trisha—”

“Don’t! I think they got someone monitoring our comms. We’ll have to go off the grid for a while until the duration of their contract to silence witnesses expires.”

"Then what do we do?"

"...I'll find a public comms terminal to ask someone the enemy cy-specialist won't expect. I'm not sure how it'll go, though."

Flo - Halls Corporation

"I'm sorry, madam, but there's nothing we can do for you. The only way to enter into the inner city is to have a resident invite you or a business to vouch for you."

"How can I ask any of them to do that for me when you won't let me speak to any of them? Even a call will be fine!"

"If you have their contact info, then please go ahead. We, however, cannot provide you with the contact information of any of our residents. I hope you understand," the office clerk responded diplomatically.

The large woman with a red cyberarm could only grit her teeth and walk away, seeing how adamant the Lion City officials were about their rules. She had found out her partner was likely in the inner city, but she couldn't find a way in.

Flo stomped her feet the entire way from the government building to their car parked in a nearby alley. She hopped in and quickly explained the results to her companions.

Hearing their predicament, Andrew cleared his throat.

"Instruct—"

"I said just Flo was fine!" Flo irritated corrected.

"...Flo, I think we should just sneak into the inner city. We should be able to do it."

"And risk turning the entire city hostile against us and Halls Corporation? You do realize not even the big corps have a say in Lion City. It's not so easy to do as we like in their territory."

"...Then how else are we going to get in? I don't think we have any more clues to go on."

"...I'll think of a way. Thank you for your help yo guys. You can go ahead and return to help out the company while I work out a new angle."

"Are you sure you have the time to spare for that? We should call for backup instead!"

"What good will more muscle do...?"

"Maybe our boss can think of a way. He usually comes up with solutions on the fly. Maybe he can give us a surefire method to sneak into the inner city?"

Faced with the pressure of knowing every second affected her chances of seeing her partner again, Flo quickly succumbed after thinking about it.

"Fine, let me place the call."

"The inner parts of Lion City...That's not so easy to get into from what I know. We barely have any connections to that place."

"...If it isn't convenient for you to lend a hand, then don't. I'll ask someone—"

"Now, now Flo. I didn't say I can't help. I may not have many connections in Lion City, but that doesn't mean I don't have any at all. In fact, we planned on upgrading our rank within the consortium for a while now, and the Lion City Bank just so happens to frequently invite a newly promoted corp's representative over."

"Isn't that just to update your accounts?"

"Yes, but I'm sure they're open to further our relationship if they go to the trouble of inviting us over. I'm sure they have the power to invite guests into the inner city if I mention I would like to take a tour of it."

"Then...that's great! Are you sure this isn't throwing any of your plans out of place if you're going to promote your corporation all of a sudden?"

"We've been planning to go up two grades. I'm sure it won't affect much if we tone it down and just take one step up the ladder right now."

"T—Thank you so much, Rollo."

"No need. I'll see you soon."

With the call ended, Thorne muttered from behind me.

"Well, there goes Claire's carefully laid out plan she crafted with the finance department."

"Hm...You think she'd like to come along with us?"

"Well, if you can find people to replace both of you in your absence, she'd be happy to not have to cover for you again."

"I'm sure our new assistants have gotten used to how things work around here to manage for a few days."

I stared into Thorne's unconvinced eyes and sighed.

"Maybe I can get Leo and Lana's help as well. We should only be gone for a few days."

"Did you forget they are already occupied with investigating the case about our products malfunctioning?"

"Hey, they can delegate too! This company needs to be able to stand on its own two feet or else what's the point?"

"The point in what? You'll lose more control of it if we keep delegating."

The point is for it to become an independent money-making machine, so I get to sit back and relax. But I don't see that being possible unless we get as big as SocialCorp...

"You know what, never mind. Let's start packing our bags for Lion City."