

[The Hammers arc] [4] [Kasper] [9604]

Year 9604

A group of terrorists managed to sneak into Fallen Crater, Venus. There were a group of six people in casual suits. They looked nothing like terrorists on surface. Their IDs were clean and there was nothing that made them suspicious.

They casually approached a power plant and went around to reach one of its rear emergency doors.

"Nice defense, but it is breakable, nothing's perfect." One of the guys mumbled while tinkering with a security panel on a back door. The others were changing their clothes and putting on face masks.

It soon slid, opening a way into the building.

"Time to roll. Let's go in. Do it quietly."

The others nodded at him as they silently dashed inside.

"We will need to locate the nearest access terminal."

As soon as all of them were inside, a man who appeared to be in charge took out a holographic device from a small backpack and turned it on. It displayed a hologram image that appeared to be a layout of a building floor.

"We are here," He pointed at an edge. His finger followed a line and stopped at an icon. "This terminal should be the safest to use."

The others nodded at him.

He checked his watch and pointed at two people in order. "I want you two to go to this other terminal just in case." And he pointed at another icon further away, adding, "We rendezvous thirty minutes later at this spot."

The men nodded.

Meanwhile, Kasper picked up a call in his office. "I am here."

"Sir," A distinct voice spoke in distress. "Someone is accessing one of terminals through a local power plant. We cannot stop him at the moment. We need you down here."

"I will be there."

Kasper was one of the Hammers. Unlike the more prominent members, he worked in shadows most of time. His task was overall security of Fallen crater.

When Kasper arrived, he could easily see how serious the security leak was. The security staffs were busy as ants, trying to find a way to cut off the attacker.

"Report." Regardless Kasper's voice was clam.

An officer replied in distress. "Someone is attacking the system. The guy is flooding the entire system with trash signals. We can't even locate where he is."

"Give me a station," As soon as Kasper said, an officer moved away from his station and let Kasper have it. He soon began to work with the keyboard at a breezing speed.

By Cecil's order, every system on Venus had triple redundancies, meaning it became very hard for systems to fail completely. On the other hand, that also meant that the system was easier to get into.

Fallen crater was powered by four main power plants in each corner of the city. Those were the main power plants and, even if one would become inactive, it would not matter. In fact, the city needed only one power plant to function. But the group was using one of the power plants to hack into the system.

A beep sounded, and the officers cheered. "Ok, I've located the attackers... They are in the power plant #1. Send the guards but do not enter the plant unless I give the order."

"Yes, sir."

However, the lights went out, and emergency red light went on.

"What's going on? Give me a report!" A chief security officer demanded his men. He was especially hard on his men since Kasper, the head of security department, was present.

Kasper sighed. He realized he was too late. Being an ex-hacker, he felt his pride being ruined, and also felt he became old.

The chief officer returned. "Sir, we've lost the intruders again."

"At least we know where they are. Send the guards out regardless," Kasper said.

"Yes, sir!" The chief officer saluted and went back to order his men.

There were ten men, saluting at their leader.

"Good job, my men. We cut their main and backup powers. We also disabled their security system. This power plant is now isolated. It's time to start the job."

The leader activated a holographic projector. A square of beam was shot at a wall, which was a complete 3D model of the power plant. He stood by the 3D model and pulled out his laser pointer, pointing at a floor far below the ground.

"We are at B7 floor. There weren't much difficulties so far. Our primary object is to steal the data they've got, especially military-related data. In order to do that, according to the information we've obtained, we need a direct access to one of their backup frame. Because of their complex systems, we were informed that we'd be able to access one of their backup frames from this power plant."

He then pointed at B27 floor.

"Our goal is to reach B27 floor. I am sure they are aware that we are here by now but reaching B27 itself should not be an issue. We don't know how long it might take to crack into their system and that is the issue here."

He paused briefly because he heard distant rumbling from above.

"They are here," He declared. "Let's move. We shouldn't waste time."

Meanwhile, a squadron had made it to the power plant. They were order to wait and they did. To their surprise, Kasper arrived shortly later with additional guards.

"Sir?!" The squad leader exclaimed with a surprised tone. "Sir!"

"Let us enter. Their destination should be B27."

"Yes, sir!"

Nobody knew how many the intruders were. They didn't even know what their true intention was. Kasper's hunch was that they wanted to access classified data and he wasn't worried despite of a fact that they seemingly had an easy to each B27 way before them.

When asked by a guard, he smiled and replied, "The system may look easy to crack into on surface, but we've thought about cases like this. Fear not, we are covered. We are going down there to recover their bodies."

The guards were confused. Kasper felt he was being too vague as well, but it was all he could tell them at the moment.

The intruders were making their way down to B27 swiftly.

"This is a little suspicious, this is too easy," Their leader mumbled with doubts. Then he recalled who was in charge of the security.

"I recall the chief of security department is an ex-hacker.... Is he challenging me as a hacker? Does he think I cannot crack the frame?" He soon scoffed. "You will see about that."

Kasper recalled his younger days as an active hacker. He was proud, very proud. He felt like he could crack into any systems and he was proven to excel at it.

One day, he decided to hit a big target. He chose to hit on the mainframe on Venus. He cracked into Venus data stream. He thought he got in without being detected until federal officers knocked his door. He was arrested for an obvious reason and was taken to a jail.

It was no big deal for him. He would just have to spend few years in a prison. However, he realized he was in a trouble when he was brought to Venus president.

He was handcuffed and was on his knees. He looked up, there were two people who appeared to be royals in front of him. He recognized the first one right away. She was Illy O'ren. However, he did not recognize the other who was wearing a robe and had a light brown bob hair.

And it was him who spoke to him first.

"My name is Cecil Klisis," And he introduced the woman next to him. "This is Illy O'ren, the current president of Venus."

Kasper chuckled. "Why are you introducing yourselves? Just send me to a prison already."

Cecil would stare at Kasper for a moment. His glare made him very uneasy progressively.

Eventually, he told Kasper, "You believe what you saw?"

"What do you mean?" Kasper was confused by Cecil's statement.

"You were able to break through the outer barrier. I want you to try going further."

Kasper laughed out loud. "What kind of request is that? Do you really think you can fool me like that? Get a life!"

"You have nothing to lose, don't you?"

Kasper stopped laughing gradually. Cecil had a point. He had nothing to lose, but maybe a few more years to his sentence in the worst case.

For being an ESP, a few more wasted years meant little.

"Sure, why not. I'd love to try it!" Kasper gave Cecil a devilish and confident grin.

Cecil looked at the guard who was forcing Kasper to be on his knees and gave them a nod. The guards looked at Illy O'ren for her approval and she also gave them a nod. The guards stepped away from Kasper after unbinding him.

"Come this way, follow me."

Cecil led Kasper to a computer in a confined room. It was already turned on, and everything seemed to be ready.

"Your belongings are here, so you may install and use any software you wish," said Cecil.

Kasper said nothing as he laid his eyes on his belongings. He felt being used but realized he did not really have a choice. He sat in front of the computer and began

to manipulate it. A few hours later after installing his favorite applications, he finally began.

His thought was disturbed by a tap on his shoulder.

"Sir, Lady Kisia is on line. She'd like to speak to you."

Kasper touched a spot right below his left ear. "I am here."

"You should have at least informed me what was going on."

He wasn't going to argue because she was right.

"Yes, I should have. Do you want to tag along?"

"Is it serious? Do you need me there?"

"I could use you. This could get ugly in the end."

There was a moment of silence from Kisia. "For them or for us?"

Grinning, Kasper replied, "For them."

As soon as he said, Kisia appeared out of thin air next to Kasper. And as usual, her hair was disheveled hair as if she had just woken up from her bed.

"Hello," Kisia greeted.

"Hi," Kasper replied casually.

While both of them were members of the Hammers, they weren't exactly friends. They knew each other's appearances and that was as far as their relationships went.

Speaking of relationships, Kisia was close to Maeve and was Gair's platonic friend. Kasper wasn't a friend to anyone in the Hammers however. This was partially due to his geeky personality. His best friends were computers.

When they arrived on B26, Kasper stopped others.

"We wait here."

The guards were, again, confused by his order. "Sir?"

"We are going to wait here. We will know when to rush in."

Kisia seemed to know what Kasper was saying while the guards remained clueless.

The floors were mostly empty places. The building being a power plant the floors were filled with capacitors and such. A gun fight could prove deadly in such an environment.

Some of the guards sat down and started to consume their rations. Kasper and Kisia stood next to each other, leaning against a cold metal wall.

"Can I ask you a very personal question?" Kasper asked.

"Shoot."

"Why is your hair ... always disheveled?"

Kisia chuckled weakly. "I guess it's my style. I didn't used to have this hair style though," she touched edges of her hair and recalled how she had her head blown.

"Anyway," She changed the subject. "I suppose they have an escape plan ready."

Kasper relied calmly. "Probably. My guess is that we are going to see some shuttles landing not far from here." It was his loose guess but that was exactly what was going to happen.

Kisia considered Kasper's hunch and she agreed. "I am going to contact Gair to warn him."

Kasper didn't respond. It was none of his business. His sole task was ensuring the security of Venus system.

Meanwhile, the intruders had been on B27 for some time. They had already located a console room and was trying to hack into the system.

His men were thoroughly consistent. They knew what they were doing.

Everything was going on as they initially planned. By the time they successfully hacked into the system and download what they needed, their escape shuttles would be waiting outside and take them away to safety.

As soon as Gair received Kisia's message, he immediately ordered Vakha, who was in Venus orbit, to block any traffics until ordered otherwise.

"What do you mean we can't dock at Venus outpost?!" An angry merchant exclaimed on main screen within Vakha's bridge.

Vakha wasn't exactly a rhetoric person and his replies were unacceptable to merchants.

"Oh, come on. We have a situation. Just sit still for maybe few hours to days." He said.

"Do you have any idea how much money is at stake?!" The merchant continued to push his case.

Shrugging, Vakha looked visibly careless and even said so, "Do you think I care, jackass?"

"W, what did you say?!"

Vakha stood up from his captain's throne and pointed at him. "Do you want me to fire upon you, fatass?"

His bridge crews looked at him. They were getting concerned. The merchant himself looked taken back by Vakha's temper. Normally, he'd preach about his legal rights and such but knowing the Crimson wizard ruled the planet, he chose not to because he knew he would really be fired upon if he pushed on.

"Fine, fine!" And the he closed the channel.

Vakha sat back into his throne and scoffed.

The leader of the intruders was filling with doubts. He was seeing signs that it wasn't working out. The first sign was all the negative reactions from his team's attempt to hack the system.

Nothing seemed to be going through.

"It doesn't make sense. It's as if their mainframe is isolated. It's as if it doesn't exist on the grid."

Everything had a hole or a crack or a weak point, small or big. Nothing was perfect. Everything had a way to get in.

And in his entire life, that had always been the case. He wasn't always successful but he at least found weaknesses or holes, but it wasn't such a case this time. This time, there was nothing. He felt as if they were trying to access something that didn't even exist.

Realizing he was running out of time, he kept on trying still desperately. All of a sudden, he felt electric was flowing on the keyboard he had his hands on. And before he realized and could get his hands off, a black lightning with red glow which appeared to be originated from his keyboard smote his arm.

He screamed, not from pain but from shock. He was bounced and crashed into a wall. He immediately glared at the monitor, ignoring the intensive pain that almost made him pass out.

On the monitor, there was a line of words, saying "Puppet ver 7801c".

Next thing he realized was there was nothing below his elbows. Disbelief filled his eyes.

Kasper slowly raised his head and looked around, sniffing the air.

"Did you sense it?" He said while continuing to sniff the air.

Kisia had no idea why he was sniffing but she did feel it. “Yes, I felt it.”

Kasper remembered the night vividly when he lost both of his arms. He was attempting to crack into Venus system as requested by Cecil. He wasn't feeling good about it and was quite careless in what he was doing.

At one point, he felt electrified and next thing he realized he was missing both of his arms below elbow. And there he saw, a line of words disappeared on a monitor before he passed out from shock and pain.

It said: “Puppet ver 7121z”

Smiling bitterly, he stared at both of his hands which were implants. His arms could not be regenerated.

Kisia had her share of bad memories as well.

When Kisia was being trained by Cecil Klisis, she happened to be curious of Cecil's blade and touched it when she was told not to. A chain lightning smote her right arm and she had to install an artificial arm as restoring her arm from DNA information wasn't possible.

Kisia felt slight itching from her artificial arm. If Kisia was a hyper human, her career would have ended.

“Alright, men,” Kasper raised his voice. “We go in now.”

For the intruders, their leader was their brain of operations and with their leader unconscious and severely wounded, they stood not much of a chance. However, they were highly trained nevertheless and managed to fall back with some casualties. Some of them actually managed to escape the power plant only to be stuck because their escape shuttles couldn't make it.

When the leader regained his consciousness, he found himself in a bush. Apparently, his men had him hid there. When he was trying to get up, he realized what he had experienced was truth. His arms below elbow were gone. Amazingly, there was no more pain or bleeding. Grasping for air due to the shock, he carefully inspected his surroundings. He realized he was just right outside of the power plant. He wasn't seeing any of his people around. He figured he was abandoned. He had very little choices but to surrender to authorities.

“Your name?”

The job of interrogation fell to Kisia because she lost in rock, paper, and scissors. The leader was tired and exhausted. Knowing that he failed and had little chances of ever getting out alive, he decided to spill his beans easily.

“My name is Elemist.”

“And who hired you?”

“You can I can't tell you that.”

“Why not? You will be stuck here for many years. Might as well tell me everything and join us.”

Elemist doubted what he had just heard. “You say what?”

“Join us. You aren't bad. We could a man like yourself.”

Normally, Elemist would laugh it off but given his condition as well as situation, he had to consider the idea. He failed his mission and his career was pretty much over. He could show loyalty and rot in a prison for many years but he wasn't going to do that to his employer who hadn't even met in person.

Kisia changed the subject. “You know what you saw, correct?”

The answer was obvious. The program called Puppet. Elemist knew about Puppet. Well, every hacker knew about the legendary OS Puppet. But its development just stopped more than a thousand year ago. The puppet that was available to the public was Puppet version 0.5 beta. What he saw a moment ago was Puppet version 7801c.

“You know what you saw, right?” She repeated the question.

“Yes, so what? What do you want from me?”

“Who hired you?”

Elemist groaned. He felt as if he didn’t have much to lose by telling her what she wanted.

Suddenly, Kisia spoke, “Maiwa O’ren?”

“Who?”

“Nevermind. I guess not.”

Elemist eventually spilled his beans upon few conditions. He wanted safety ensured on his men who were captured and he wanted freedom within Venus at least. He acknowledged that he would not be able to leave Venus.

His request were granted and he was treated shortly later. For Kisia, knowing who hired him wasn’t an important matter. She knew the system was impossible to be hacked as long as Cecil was present, for Puppet was Cecil’s creation. Her goal was to recruit Elemist.

Later he became Kasper’s right-hand man. Elemist’s men also eventually worked under him, creating a highly trained special-ops squad under Kasper.

- Fin

