

The Misfit System

(Chapters 3-5)

Novus Peregrine

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Chapter 3: Finding Footing

Vicky was thankful that this city, like most larger cities she knew of, had shops that stayed open far past the usual nine-to-five. The Mission Completion of **Save a Life** might have awarded her far too few points for anything useful in the System Store, but it had also dumped the promised 500 'eddie' into an account attached to her internal agent. Combined with an additional 145 eddies in the roll she'd taken off the attempted rapist, it was more than enough to buy herself a basic outfit. Though getting a single complete outfit that would somewhat blend in had erased nearly 300 eddies.

The end result honestly wasn't bad looking, though a little bland at base. Pants that were at least *pretending* to be denim, a sport-style halter top, and a half jacket. All were in black, with no major features...until Vicky had used **Illusory Raiment** to provide a red pattern of 'tear' style fades to the pants and matching red highlights to the jacket. She'd had the idea while looking through various other styles in the shop and was pleased that it had worked out. Now, with just a quick reapplication of the power, she'd be able to flip looks fairly well.

All, without, you know...running around nude under the illusion.

Honestly, the running around secretly nude thing wouldn't have been *too bad* if not for the lack of shoes. The streets of Night City were *not* clean, and she would *really rather not* think about some of the things she'd stepped in. Particularly while in that back alley dealing with the rapist. Seriously, if not for her new body's basic toughness, she'd be looking for the fastest place to get a tetanus shot!

Of course, now that she'd taken care of her most immediate need, she was left attempting to figure out what the next set of immediate needs were. To that end, she'd found a food place that was open, some diner-like establishment, and spent a bit more of her dwindling eddies on...something pretending to be food. It wasn't *bad*, exactly. Maybe on par with the surprisingly high-quality MRE she'd eaten in the **Dimensional Bunker**, but

whatever was in the ‘burger’ she’d ordered sure as hell wasn’t natural beef. A quick search with her agent had produced an equally quick explanation that most ‘meat’ in Night City was *cloned*.

Well, as a good American Girl who’d had proper beef before, she could tell them that they hadn’t quite gotten it right. The taste was *almost* right, but the texture certainly wasn’t. The cheese was a bit better and the tomato an insult to every tomato that had every tomatoed. Thankfully, the fries, at least, were properly fry-like. Then again, enough salt and bad-for-your-everything fry oil could make even extremely dubious potatoes into half-decent fries.

Still, the food wasn’t the point of her stop. This body didn’t actually need all that much of it to begin with and would have been fine for a full day just from that MRE she’d eaten earlier. Instead, what she’d really been after was an out-of-the-way corner somewhere no one would think it odd if she stared into space. Given how common cyber eyes seemed to be, and the fact that several of the people she’d seen on the way in were doing *exactly* the same thing, she figured she’d assumed correctly that no one would take note of her.

Of course, her super-spy plan to buy herself time to ‘figure out her next move’ had hit a snag when she’d sat down and realized she...didn’t really know where to start.

She’d almost lost control enough to tear up when it had hit her that she *didn’t have anywhere to go*. Or, for that matter *anywhere to be*. So far, she’d been in ‘immediate survival’ mode, but that was starting to collapse on her a bit. **[Misfit]** had mostly solved her Food, Water, and Shelter issues when it had chosen **Dimension Bunker** to keep her safe on arrival to this new reality. The **Bunker** had a water supply and food stores, ones that apparently replenished themselves via the power of the System that **[Misfit]** was now the administrator of.

Yes, the Bunker had a time limit, but it only needed to recharge for eight hours every day. Less than that, actually, since it could remain active for 24 hours first, and would only need the eight-hour recharge afterward. That meant she had a secure place to sleep, water and food that was probably safer than what she was eating and drinking now, and even a place to get clean with the small survival shower it housed. Technically, she could live off just what it provided perfectly fine.

She even, via her internal agent, had access to an information source. Even if the ‘Net’ here was far less directly useful and far more limited than what she was used to, being far cruder at the surface level, with a lot beyond that shallow surface being paywalled. Still,

in reality, her agent meant that nothing was preventing her from doing at least basic research on this new reality and then...doing *something*.

The trouble, of course, was what the *fuck* was that *something* supposed to be?

Even with her memories still holier than Swiss-cheese in places, she had a vague idea that she'd had her life as Victoria Dallon at least *mostly* charted out. She'd been just about the graduate high school, having just turned eighteen recently, and had an impeccable GPA. She'd already been taking university-level courses in parahuman studies at Brockton-U, and hadn't had the slightest fear they'd turn away her application to expand that to full degree coverage.

Even the fact that she wanted to do Uni only part time, so that she could focus on being a Hero more, hadn't really been an obstacle. Not when she was *by far* the most visible member keeping New Wave relevant. That fact would have appeased her mother and Aunt Sarah both, so long as she *did* take classes towards knocking out a useful degree while doing the Hero thing. At worst, she could always have signed up with the Protectorate even if they *did* protest. But it was unlikely to have come to that.

She'd even had...no, she hadn't had Dean.

Fuck, no! Don't cry, Vicky! Even if you'd just remembered that the boyfriend you thought you'd marry someday died recently...recently to you at least. Come on, *focus*. Not the past. The past is gone and it can't help you. What are you going to do in the *future*?

Wrenching her mind away from a downward spiral with another bite of the not-a-burger, she forced herself back to the very million eddie question that had started her little crisis in the first place. She was in an entirely new world, with enough time having passed that there was no real hope of getting back to the people and places she'd known. There were no Endbringers to fight and no formalized system of Heroes and Villains either. Even just her brief research so far had turned up the fact this world was *darker* in some ways than even Bet had been.

Less in an 'existential end of all things' way than in just 'dystopian nightmare.'

Seriously, so far as she could tell, they hadn't just taken Orwell's *1984* as a guidebook. No, they'd read it, laughed at how quaint and primitive the concepts inside were, then asked someone to 'hold their beer' while they 'showed you how to *really* get it done.' Some vague searches turned up the fact Night City was one of the worst offenders...but that it was far from a true standout. The only real difference was that Night City didn't bother to lie about what it was.

She already hated the place intensely, and the world she'd landed on almost as much. It was *everything* that had been wrong with humanity itself on Earth Bet, with seemingly none of the rare good points that proved humanity could unite with sufficient motivation. If Bet had been a soldier marching to its death, knowing the fight was doomed by needed to be fought anyway, than this reality was a druggie who'd gotten bored and let itself get strung out 'trying to take the edge off.' The Corps here seemed to want power for power's sake, the regular people seemed either hopeless or already part of the system, and...

No. This was not a productive line of thought.

Hate where she'd ended up or not, it was where she was for now. It was possible she might be able to find a power, or combination of powers, that would allow her to jump dimensions again. But if she did, she doubted it would be cheap or easy to figure out. Which meant that, *for now*, Vicky was stuck in this little slice of hell. The question wasn't how much she hated this place, it was *what did she want to do while stuck in it?*

The answer, when she reframed the problem like that, was clear enough to cut through her previous misery.

She'd wanted to be a *hero*, to help people, and this city sure as hell had plenty of people that needed help. Besides, she now had a System that *required* her to take 'missions' anyway, so picking and choosing from those missions to take others like **Save a Life** was an obvious way forward anyway. She could...no she *would* help some people, like that girl that had almost been raped.

She would be a hero on her own terms, even if this world didn't *have* heroes.

Even if it was pretty obviously the equivalent of spitting on a volcano to try and put it out, she could help the people *right in front of her*, and gain more strength to help still more in the process. Eventually, she'd probably piss off the wrong people, and maybe she'd have to find that way out, to escape to another dimension. Or, you know, maybe she'd die in trying to do the right thing. That wasn't something she was afraid of any longer, she'd already sort of died once, after all. Either way, it was a way forward she could live with, even if other people might call her crazy.

Honestly, the fact that most of the people in *this* shithole of a reality almost certainly would was comforting. She figured if *they* thought it was nuts, it probably had to be the right thing.

Finishing up the last bits of her food, which she'd lingered over long enough she'd be getting the stink eye if the place was actually busy, Vicky settled on the next thing to do

immediately. She had hours yet before she could trigger **Dimensional Bunker**, and she was going to want 'eddie's' for better variety of food and clothes sooner or later, if not else. So, time to take comb through the available missions and see what else she could do to earn some. If it just so happened to let her get a clearer pulse of the city in the process? Then all the better...

Chapter 4: Depths of Depravity

Taking a longer look at the list of Missions available from the **[Misfit System]** had been seriously disturbing. Vicky hadn't thought her opinion of Night City could get *lower*, but the Missions tab had given her a lot more names and such to search using her agent. More, it had also revealed that the more information **[Misfit]** had to work with, the more Missions would appear. Something which had led both her and **[Misfit]** down a multi-hour rabbit hole of recursive research as they'd hidden on a roof top.

The number one type of information that had opened up new Missions was discovering new groups that could *really* use an Alexandria-grade punch in the asshole. The Valentinos and the quick research she'd done on them had seemed tame...and they *were*. While they weren't squeaky clean, they were legitimately more community focused and didn't seem to get up to much beyond protection rackets, grand theft auto, and drugs. Research on the *other* gangs had irrevocably solidified Vicky's viewpoint that the Valentinos were probably one of the 'least bad' options. In fact, it had shifted that opinion to listing them as the *least bad* gang period. Far from good, but the *least horrific*.

Well, there was seemingly a very new gang called the Mox, whose sole reason for existence was to protect sex workers from abuse. So they were probably less bad than the Valentinos. They were also, apparently *super* new and fairly small, though. Only even making the list of 'major' gangs because they'd somehow managed to hold out against the Tyger Claws during a series of mass riots. It interested Vicky more than a bit that, despite **[Misfit]** apparently creating Missions based on what it understood of Vicky's morals and goals...there were several to *help* the Mox.

That was something she'd have to review the idea of at a later date. She wasn't quite ready to admit that the best hope for anyone in the city was a *gang* of all things. Not having grown up dealing with the ones in Brockton Bay and reading how much *worse* some of those here in Night City were. Which, of course, brought her back around to the *horrifying*. The Tyger Claws were basically the ABB all over again, only with deeper pockets and a 'well-known' connection to Arasaka. Human trafficking, brothels, casinos, and drugs. Enough to

make Vicky's blood boil...which made it particularly bad that they *weren't* the ones that were the worst of the worst.

One of the two that *were* the worst of the worst was also among the oldest gangs in the city, a group called Maelstrom, who were focused on heavy cybernetics use. Apparently downright cult-like about it, they pushed their members to 'chrome up' until they went 'cyberpsycho.' That wasn't the truly horrific thing, though. No, that was the fact that the cult-like gang routinely kidnapped random people and forcefully implanted them with dubious cybernetics, apparently just for fun. Add in the fact they blatantly focused on the violent side of crime and it made for one heck of an ugly picture.

Of course, the fact that Scavs existed made even Maelstrom pale in comparison.

Less a single gang and more a loose network of dozens of different groups of sick fucks, the bastards were apparently considered monstrous *even by the other gangs*. To the point that it was as often the gangs that wiped them out as it was mercs, NCPD, or Corpo Security. The sick bastards were entirely focused on kidnapping people to rip out their cyberwear and resell it, with a side business of selling harvested *organs* too. There was actually more information freely and readily available about *them* than any other gang, as *everyone* hated them and considered them a plague on the city.

From what she read, Vicky had to reluctantly admit that she'd found something *worse* than the E88. Not by much, maybe, given that the E88 regularly killed non-whites for gang initiations, and were known to kidnap and brainwash capes too. But, at least if the information she was able to get was *accurate*, then the Scavs were genuinely worse. Not by much, and the difference was almost academic as far as she was concerned, but it was still sickeningly true.

It also meant that she now had a completely fair target for a larger campaign of Heroism.

The very moment they'd read about the gang, **[Misfit]** had filled an entire series of Missions that focused on them. There were some for every other gang they'd read over the details of, as well as some of the corps too. But there were *more* for the Scavs than any other group. Including everything from Rescuing people from them, to outright kill count Missions that Vicky couldn't *quite* bring herself to protest. After all, even in Night City, these people were considered monsters, with what passed for authorities outright having the equivalent of Kill Orders on them, complete with bounties.

Actually, that was something she was going to have to look into as well. Apparently, weirdly as fuck, the NCPD outright contracted jobs out to freelancers when they couldn't be fucked to bother showing up themselves. That would be at least a *little* more legitimate,

and give Vicky some leads to follow to find acceptable Mission targets. It was, of course, a subscription service though. Which meant she needed a Mission or two to make money first.

Well, it shouldn't be *too* hard to find more trouble. She just needed to pick up another simple Mission and find some people in desperate need of a beatdown...

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While part of Vicky had wanted to immediately go on a crusade against Scavs, the more realistic part of her had won out. Scavs were open season for *everyone*, and as such could be expected to *hide* better than most of the gangs out there who flashed their colors more openly. With a series of similar Missions available for each gang, she'd thus gone through a quick process of elimination.

She had nothing against the Mox at all, as she understood them, so they were the first she dismissed as an initial target. After them, 6th Street and the Valentinos were quickly eliminated as well. Neither were clean, but both *mostly* stuck to protection rackets, theft, and drugs. She absolutely wasn't going to leave them alone, in the long run, but they were a lesser evil compared to other targets. The quick process of elimination left Maelstrom and the Tyger Claws, as well as a few smaller gangs like the Animals that didn't hold specific territory.

The roaming gangs would be too hard to *find*, knowing as little about the city as she did, so she wouldn't bother with them unless she literally stumbled across them. Both Maelstrom and the Claws each carried risks, one in the form of heavy cyberwear she wasn't sure she could deal with yet, the other with Corp connections that could bring a lot of heat. Ultimately, she chose to focus on the Tyger Claws, as they reminded her too much of the worst of the ABB. Besides, she didn't really *have* a footprint here for their Corp backers to track. Not yet, anyway. The fact that her new body would also *blend in* better in Japantown didn't hurt, either.

It was thus that she had her second Mission. Not quite as simple as the first, but with a better payout.

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Find and Eliminate a Tyger Claw Operation

Gangs run rampant through Night City, and the Tyger Claws are one of the oldest and most pervasive. Focusing on 'entertainment,' they run a good portion of the brothels and

casinos of the city, along with doing more than a little human trafficking, extortion, and assassination. It's time someone made a point to them that they aren't untouchable. Find one of their operations and shut it down, hard.

Reward: 1000-50,000 Eddies (size of operation dependent), **System Points:** 50-500(size of operation dependent), **Loot** (Target Dependent)

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The broad range of rewards was understandable, given the vagueness of the Mission. Prodding **[Misfit]** had gotten her the impression that the Mission would refine itself, showing updated values, once she found a specific Tyger Claw operation to shut down. Which honestly worked well for her, as it would hopefully serve as a warning about just *how deep* the trouble she found was. Though **[Misfit]** had warned her the reach of the **[Misfit System]** wasn't absolute, and as such the danger wouldn't always be perfectly represented.

It was honestly still more intel than she'd ever had back home, really. Though the people here were also a lot more willing and able to kill capes. So it was a bit of a mixed bag, really. Still, so long as she chose carefully, she thought she could do this. Perhaps it was a *bit* reckless to attempt it when she was still so unfamiliar with her new body, but...well...reckless had always been something everyone said she was anyway. ~~Besides, there was no one to miss her if-~~

No! Don't think that way.

Ruthlessly squashing the dark thought, she focused on watching the city. Japantown had been far enough away she'd decided to take the 'NCart,' buying a weekly pass with some of her remaining eddies. It had unexpectedly turned out to be the first thing in the city that had legitimately impressed her, rather than depressed her. The passes were cheap and the public transit system covered most of the city quite well. Better than any public transit she'd ever encountered before, honestly.

Who knew all you had to do to get decent public transportation was sell the soul of your entire society to the Megacorps?

Vicky snorted a bit at that thought as the NCart slowed for the first stop in Japantown. The maglev transport was impressively smooth as it came to a halt, and Vicky flowed out with a handful of other people. As she'd expected, the vaguely-Asian appearance of her new body blended in a lot better in this part of town, with the only second or third glances she was getting being the same sort she'd been used to back

home. Not the ones she'd gotten for being an open cape, but the ones purely related to the fact she was pretty.

Those types of looks *could* be just as dangerous, sometimes even more so, but there was visible security around the NCART station itself. Like everything else, NCART was Corp-owned, the Corp itself being called Night City Area Rapid Transit. From the brief look she'd seen when she skimmed the options for how to get around town, the Corp had a lockdown on virtually every form of 'public' transportation throughout the city.

There were undoubtedly downsides to that, but one upside at the moment was that the Corp took security seriously, as it was bad for business for customers to be grabbed right out of their stations. She'd actually seen a snippet in a forum tipping people off that a reliable way to ditch any Scavs that might be following you was to hop the NCART maglev between districts. Corp security would actively cover you against attempts to be grabbed, purely because it was bad for business, and the Scavs knew it.

Of course, that largess ended a few hundred meters beyond their property line. But that was fine. Vicky was far from helpless and was sticking to the main throughfare for the moment anyway. If Japantown was anything like Heywood had been, it wouldn't exactly be hard to spot Tyger Claw members loitering. Following some gangers leaving the main streets would give her a place to start, if she didn't spot a better option. She'd done that quite a few times back in Brockton Bay to find something more important than random gang violence to hit. Admittedly, it would be a *bit* harder to do that without her old ability to fly, but she'd tested the **Exo-Air Step** ability that had replaced it several times earlier. She could get up to a roof fairly easily and use roof-hopping with said ability to follow someone on the ground.

She ran into a *slight* problem almost immediately, as she realized that she'd underestimated the popularity of the district with both rich locals and tourists. The main throughfares were choked with them as they gravitated to everything from clubs to openly advertised love hotels and brothels. 'Braindance' clubs, bars, even a series of sex-shops and biosculpt clinics that didn't shy away from advertising 'being your best you' with glamor models wearing very little and suggestive language about upping your tit size.

For a while, Vicky just let herself be pulled along by the crowd, honestly a little fascinated despite herself. This...this was unlike anything she'd ever seen, or even *heard* of, before. Even knowing that many of the businesses here were likely owned by the Claws and the rest paid them protection, she could admit that the entire place had a *vibe* to it that just sort of pulled you in.

Still, eventually Vicky managed to pull herself back from her fascination and started paying more attention to the Tyger Claws hanging around. She'd been *right* that they weren't exactly being subtle. Yet the vibrant colors and Asian art styles the gang used actually blended quite well into the entertainment district, and there was no open antagonism on display. Why would there be, when they were likely only showing the flag specifically to keep trouble *down* while their legitimate businesses drained the wealthy of their eddies?

Still, not for nothing had Vicky been the most active member of New Wave. She had more than enough experience to start picking out who was there for show, who were more hangers on or posers than real members of the gang, and who was going about *business*. Eventually, she localized the Redwood Market as somewhere with far fewer tourists and far more 'active' Tyger Claws who looked like they were kitted out more for working than show. The open-air market was mainly food booths and peddlers of everyday items, rather than joytoys and shiny trinkets. The vast majority of those filling it screamed 'locals' more than 'tourists.'

That *did* mean that she lost some protective camouflage, but she'd quietly tweaked **Illusory Raiment** twice already to better match the locals. She got nothing more than a few appreciative looks as she moved confidently through the market as a result. She'd strapped on her M45, which really *did* look perfectly mundane, before ever entering Japantown. Combined with the confident way she moved, she didn't *look* like an easy mark, and thus even her looks only got glances. The subtle effects of **Exo-Attention Field** aided in keeping those glances from lingering overlong, and should keep doing so, as long as she didn't do anything dramatic to stand out.

Taking advantage of the fact that her 'blend in' strategy was working, Vicky began picking through the items of the various peddlers here, while letting her enhanced hearing try to pick up useful bits from conversation. Most of what she overheard was useless, of course, even from the Claws she managed to overhear. Even the wasted time wasn't entirely useless, though, as she spent some of her dwindling eddies on a few loose ends. Things that would honestly be useful, like a small bag and a refurbished 'external shard reader,' the latter of which would let her bridge the gap between the local cybernetics and the stuff her new body used.

Eventually, her efforts *did* bare fruit, as she was able to catch a snippet of interesting conversation. One Tyger Claw complaining to another that 'some gonk got caught skimming glitter, and I've got to pull a double shift until they vet someone new.' A quick search with her internal agent proved her suspicion correct. 'Glitter' was a drug that was so addictive and *dangerously lethal*, that it was actually illegal even in Night City. Not that

there seemed to be any sort of crackdown on the stuff, given that it was apparently publicly known that the Tyger Claws were the makers and distributors of the designer drug.

Perfect. If the Claws were smart, and everything she'd seen so far said they were, then they likely had multiple places to both make and store their product. The complaining 'Claw was almost certainly set the guard the place, which wouldn't be somewhere near the main streets. Depending on how big the specific location was, there was a solid chance she could stage a raid, trash the drugs, and fulfill the Mission in doing so. She mentally tagged the man, then blinked as that actually *tagged* him visually to her, something she hadn't known she could do. Doing her best not to show her surprise, she mumbled a curse and angled away to find a spot to watch him from.

She *really* needed to spend some more time getting a handle on her new body, as that 'tagging' seemed to be a built-in tactical system of some sort she hadn't had a clue about. She'd come this far, though, and wasn't about to leave the Mission incomplete. Besides, as much as her immediate needs were *technically* met, having a decent quantity of eddies would make everything else easier. Just perusing the peddlers here had been enough to open her eyes to the number of useful things she didn't have yet. Then there had been the NCART pass expense, which was certain to repeat, and she was eventually going to need more than one set of clothes too.

Having come up with suitable justifications, even knowing they *were* justifications, Vicky continued on her current course. She found a blind corner to use **Air Step** to reach a roof, watching and waiting as the 'Claw she had tagged finished eating and bitching to his friend. Thankfully, that didn't take long, and the pair split. The friend headed for the main streets, while the tagged 'Claw headed for an alley that led deeper into the less glitzy parts of the district.

She quickly discovered it was *significantly* more difficult and inconvenient to follow someone from rooftops. Something which made Vicky double down on her promise to eventually get her flight powers back. She'd already wanted it, since it had been *by far* the coolest, most useful, and best power for working through things when she was stressed. Her newest observation simply provided a more *practical* reason to want the same thing.

For now, she tucked that desire firmly into the back of her head and followed the 'Claw she'd tagged. She almost lost him at one point, when he went past a couple of buildings that were too tall for her current mode of travel. But she managed, in the end, by performing a slightly risky switch to the other side of the narrow street. Something which proved a bit lucky when he took a turn down an alley to that side a few minutes on anyway.

Thankfully, that alley proved to also hold his final destination, with the 'Claw stopping to look around before tapping a code into a keypad and shuffling inside the door that opened for said code. To the man's credit, he'd even looked *up*, which was fairly unusual. Unfortunately for him, Vicky had turned off **Illusory Raiment** and was nothing more than a dark spot on a dark roof of a equally dark alley as a result. She supposed cyber eyes might still have spotted her, but given the way his swinging gaze hadn't even hesitated, she was placing her bet on the idea he hadn't.

Of course, that still left the question of what to actually do now.

Vicky hummed lowly to herself as she considered the building he'd gone into. It was only a three story affair above ground, lower than the one she was on by a story, which meant she could see from here that it had a pair of skylights. Deciding she likely needed a closer look for **[Misfit]** to give her much to work with, she checked as carefully as she could for cameras, spotting just one on the roof in question. Pulling on **Illusory Raiment** again, she used it to create a full facemask and recolor her hair auburn. Hopefully, the power worked on cameras, as she didn't exactly want to make a long-term enemy of the possibly the largest gang in the city.

Not until she had more resources and possibly allies, at least.

Surely not *everyone* in his shithole of a city could be a monster.

Minor bit of disguise in place, she crossed the narrow alley easily with **Air Step**, landing out of the line of sight of the camera. Said camera was set to cover a roof access door and, almost accidentally she thought, likely covered one of the skylights as well. The other was well out of its line-of-sight, thankfully, and she carefully crept over to it for a peek inside. Predictably, it was dirty as heck, but there was also a cracked panel of glass she was able to slip fingers into. A set of tough gloves were one of the things she'd picked up at the open-air market, and her base strength was more than enough to farther break the skylight glass.

The sounds of the city covered the crunch of her taking careful chunks out of the safety glass, until she had a hole big enough to not just see through, but wiggle through. She'd stopped to take a look part way through, even sticking her head fully into the building to scan around, but been disappointed. The building was some sort of generic multi-story workshop/warehouse, and all she'd been able to see was a raised catwalk level directly below her and an open space in the center. Thus, she slipped entirely into the building and crept over to look down over the railing.

Finally, there was something that gave her more information, as she was looking down at a non-descript panel van. The building had a garage door to the opposite of the

alleyway door she'd seen her marked 'Claw go in through, which was how the van must enter and exit. Just as importantly, there were three 'Claws down there. Two were loading the van with crates, likely glitter, while the third was the 'Claw she'd followed here. *He* was keeping a careful eye on the two working. Combined with what she'd heard at the market, he was likely there as much as trusted oversight so no one else tried to skim glitter as he was to protect the place.

Deciding she'd likely come far enough for **[Misfit]** to have compiled more data on the Mission, she carefully backed into a dark corner and checked it again.

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Eliminate the Tyger Claw Glitter Cooking and Distribution Hub

Gangs run rampant through Night City, and the Tyger Claws are one of the oldest and most pervasive. You've located one of the many small labs where they manufacture the drug **glitter**, and distribute it to various places to be sold to wealthy risk takers chasing an ever-stronger high. There are ten members of the gang in the building tonight, and quite a bit of stored glitter, as well as the lab itself. Take down the gang members and destroy their product. Bonus possible are available for destroying the lab itself as well.

Risk Assessment: Medium

Reward: 5000 Eddies, 200 System Points, Loot (Eddies, Glitter, Weapons)

Bonus: +2500 Eddies and +50 System Points for Destroying the Lab

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A definite upgrade in Mission quality and danger, without quite being too large for her to handle. Hopefully, at least. That 'Risk Medium' was new, and likely meant **[Misfit]** had some idea of how tough the various Tyger Claws here were. Prodding **[Misfit]**, it half-agreed with that, before sending another cautionary impulse that it indicated the assessment *also* represented how likely it was reinforcements would come if she triggered an alarm. She frowned at that, realizing that in a world as thoroughly connected as this one, that was a serious concern. It *also* brought up a point she'd been trying not to think about until now.

Specifically, what 'Take Down the Gang Members' implied.

A nudge to **[Misfit]** assured her that she didn't actually need to kill the gangers. The Mission was to disrupt/destroy the business, which she could accomplish by stealing or destroying the glitter. She was almost certain she'd killed that rapist earlier tonight and honestly felt a bit conflicted on that. So far as she could remember with her memory still

more than a bit scrambled, she hadn't killed anyone before, even if there had been some extremely close calls.

Heroes were supposed to be held to a higher standard.

On the other hand, the sick fuck had been trying to rape a teenager Vicky was fairly sure had been a minor.

The truth was that she felt more guilty about *not* feeling very guilty than she did about killing him. Even back in Brockton Bay, she'd always known deep down that she was more worried about the personal consequences if she accidentally killed someone than she was about actually killing some of the people Amy had needed to heal. It *wasn't* universal. There was one genuine accident early on she could remember feeling horrible about, since the guy had been young and nothing more than a pickpocket.

Some of the others, though...well, she'd interrupted most of them during attempted murders or rapes. The whole reason she'd lost her cool and hurt them more than intended in each case had been *anger* induced sloppiness, not lack of control in general. The one that stood out the most, and which she'd honestly hesitated over having Amy heal, had been some sick fuck that had been stalking a ten-year-old black girl. He'd has his pants down and was reaching for the scared kid when she'd found them and...promptly lost it.

It was *really* hard to feel guilty about almost killing him, and even now she had trouble seriously attaching the term 'murder' to what she'd almost done. For that matter, she couldn't find it in herself to attach that word to the rapist from earlier. If he truly had died, she'd *killed him*, yes. But she wouldn't call it murder. To her mind, murder was killing that lacked sufficient justification, and she'd had *plenty* of justification in his case.

That didn't mean she was eager to rack up the sort of body counts she was depressingly sure were common in this city. That was doubly true for a bunch of thugs she didn't know much about. Sure, they were processing and shipping glitter, a dangerous and illegal drug, but that was a pretty steep hill down from an active rape attempt. She had no idea if some of the 'Claws here were just getting by, with the gang being the safest place to get yourself employed doing what amounted to manual labor.

Of course, there was an added complication to her hesitation.

She didn't exactly have a lot of great options on hand for non-lethal takedowns.

Something she'd learned the hard way back in Brockton Bay was that, frankly, Super Strength *suckkkkkeedd* for 'non-lethal.' Movies would have you believe just hitting someone with the right amount of strength in the back of the head could drop someone 'safely' unconscious, where the reality was even mild concussions were dangerous. She

hadn't *meant* to kill that rapist in the alley earlier, even if she couldn't quite regret it. Worse, the situation was thrown into even greater confusion by the commonality of cyberwear in this new reality.

If she tried to hit someone hard enough they'd go down *normally*, only to find they secretly had a metal skull, *she* could die from the mistake. Which meant that she was going to have to make a conscious choice going into this on exactly what level of force she was going to use. Too little and this whole thing could go *sideways* fast. Too much and she wasn't sure she'd be able to live with herself afterwards. Biting her lip, she drew in and exhaled several deep breaths, knowing she shouldn't linger *inside enemy territory* while figuring this out, but needing to sort it so she didn't regret it later.

Okay. So...attempt as many takedowns from ambush as she could, and try to keep those non-lethal *if possible*. Once things got *loud*, though, don't hold back. Maybe don't deliberately aim to kill on purpose if she could help it, but don't hesitate to use enough strength, or even her gun, to end things quickly. As soon as things 'got loud,' she was going to be working against a timer, and the 'Claws absolutely *would* have borgs strong enough to seriously threaten her. She wasn't as strong as she used to be, nor quite as tough, even if she had some new advantages to make up a little for that lack.

Nodding firmly, having made her decision, Vicky started to move. First, she carefully and quietly circled the catwalk, managing to spot two more of the Tyger Claws, giving her an idea where five of the ten were. Then, just as carefully, she made her way *down*. None of the 'Claws seemed to be on the uppermost level, and the two that would be easiest to ambush were the new pair she'd spotted entering a side-room on the second floor. The three out in the main area could all see each other, so taking them down without any noise would be difficult, at best.

She had to avoid multiple swiveling cameras before reaching the door the pair had vanished through, but when she finally did she realized she'd gotten lucky. The two were in a *security* office, and one was about to leave. Better yet, there wasn't a camera that seemed to cover the open door. Fading into the shadow of a pillar nearby, she waited for the man to come out...and sprung.

Her new body was *faster* than her old had been at any time other than flying, and still strong enough to drag the surprised man away after she'd chopped him in the throat to prevent him from telling. He was bigger than her, but not augmented enough to be half as strong, and he utterly failed to escape the sleeper hold she'd put him in. Even it wasn't exactly *safe*, but it was one of the *safer* means she'd been taught to take advantage of her durability and strength in the past.

He must have had *some* sort of cyberwear helping him, as he stayed conscious longer than he should have, but he ultimately slumped. Hopefully, he didn't have an internal agent, or he might have gotten off an alert, even with the fact he'd been clearly panicking. Thankfully, there wasn't any sign from the other 'Claws that he'd done so, and Vicky was able to sneak through the half-open door to the security room. This time, with too many options of how the man could respond, she risked a carefully modulated blow to the back of his head, then slumped in relief as he went out like a light. No metal skull on this one, and he was still *breathing* at least.

Two of ten down...and she had access to the security cameras now.

Forcing herself to take the time to make proper use of that fact, she managed to find all eight of the remaining 'Claws. The three in the loading area were the only ones on the main level, with the additional five actually being in a basement level...with a lot of chemistry equipment. Two were obviously guards, but the other three were working the stations, with proper PPE on even. Almost certainly, those were the three *making* the glitter at this particular lab. None of those three appeared to be armed, though it was hard to say what sort of cyberwear they might have.

Pursing her lips, Vicky tried to think up a plan. She...wasn't really an expert in stealth, and had probably been lucky to get even just the two she'd already gotten from ambush. Certainly, she didn't think she could do anything that would let her surprise the five downstairs, as the place was clearly laid out with proper security and sightlines in mind. That meant her best bet was probably just to rush the three up here. Only one was armed, and the two doing the loading might not even fight or fire off alerts anyway.

It was a gamble, but the best plan she had.

She was *really* going to have to look into some powers that would either help with non-lethal takedowns or aid stealth, wasn't she?

Shaking that thought off, she firmed up her decision, double checked the two guards she'd knocked out. A little bit of extra effort to secure them was made, since she didn't have a clue how long they'd be out. Then, she was moving again, sneaking down to the ground floor, aiming to come out from a door behind the pillar the man she'd originally followed was leaning on as he watched the loaders like a hawk.

Despite her self-depreciation about her stealth skills, she managed not to get spotted until she had the man dead to rights, the two loaders facing away. She swung around the pillar...and kneed the man in the nuts. She winced a bit as she felt a distinct squishing that said he might need cybernetic replacements for *those* now, yet it did the job.

The man of having his balls basically exploded in the not-fun-ways was enough to utterly paralyze him and a follow up blow to his head sent him out like a light.

Her luck failed then, as the returning loaders saw the man go down and tried to run.

Thankfully, they'd both bolted for the same rear exit, and she was *much* faster than them. Equally thankfully, they hadn't screamed for help, so taking the first one down with a fist to the head than using another sleeper hold on the second *hopefully* hadn't alerted the guards and techs down below. Working quickly, she secured the three men...no, two men and one beefy woman, one of the loaders, and took stock.

Technically, she could probably finish this job by just setting all the drugs on fire. She was pretty sure that would kill everyone she'd been sparing up until now, though. Not to mention there was no telling how many people in the surrounding neighborhood might get exposed to potentially *very* toxic smoke. She needed to do *something* before going after the lab down below, though, just in case that didn't go as smoothly.

Moving over to a crate, she tore it open to see just what form 'glitter' came in and was annoyed to see it packaged in inhalers, just like the handful of proper meds she'd seen in the city so far. Damn. Fire or theft might genuinely be the only way to deal with it in bulk like this. Even flooding the place might not affect the sealed inhalers. Maybe the lab downstairs had a suitable method for disposal? That didn't solve her immediate desire to damage the drugs going out for distribution, in case things went poorly below. As for stealing them, that was impractical, obvious-

Wait, actually...

"Misfit? Can I put things *into* the **Dimensional Bunker** without fully summoning it?"

The impressions she got back made her smirk. Apparently, she *could* do that, so long as the timer wasn't in cooldown. She couldn't take things back *out*, so it wasn't a replacement for something like a Bag of Holding. But she *could* put things *in*, and the cooldown timer had run down fully while she figured out this Mission. Technically, it was only putting the issue off for later, but she quickly began to use her far greater strength than the loaders she'd knocked out to shove the crates into the **Dimensional Bunker** space.

The Bunker wasn't huge, only roughly 12 feet by 12 feet by 12 feet. A little over that, technically, since it was actually 4 meters cubed. The *height* gave it more volume than one would think, though. Enough that a single panel van worth of crates wasn't an issue. She wouldn't be able to do the same with any more glitter she found down below, but at minimum she now had *this much* of the material out of the picture.

Nodding with satisfaction, she also took a moment to *disable* the van itself via judicious application of *ripping parts out of the engine*. After that was done she decided it was time to head down. She'd honestly probably taken longer than she should have, dealing with the drugs and van. It was entirely possible someone would check on this group at some point, after all. Particularly since someone had been caught skimming recently. For a moment she considered for a moment doubling back to check on the security room, but that thought about possibly being on a time crunch was enough to put her off the idea. She'd just have to hope that the two guards were more-or-less where they had been before.

Heading down the stairs, she considered her options carefully...before steeling herself and pulling the gun she'd yet to use. The simple reality of it was that the lower level had been set up with a killzone. She *might* be able to rush her way through it, absorbing an initial shot or two with her **Exo-Shield**. But said shield wasn't *that* strong, not even close to her previous shield's level, and even her original had possessed a weakness to rapid gunfire. In the end, given what these people were dealing in, it wasn't worth the extra risk to herself just to keep her conscience entirely clean.

No, she'd use the gun on the guards at least. Though she might try to non-lethal the chemists. It was always possible they weren't working here entirely of their own volition like the guards would be.

Determination thrumming through her veins, she stopped just outside the door to the basement and activated the one Exo-ability she hadn't tried yet. She nearly gasped as the effects of **Exo-Buffer** hit her system in a hot rush, bringing the entire world into focus even as everything seemed to slow down. Forcing herself to act, since she was on a timer now, she kicked the door in and burst through it, gun already up and tracking on where the two guards had been before. She noticed again, as she did, that she *must* have some sort of intent-triggered tactical suite, as both guards and their guns were instantly highlighted in her vision.

One of them had moved, but the other was exactly where she had been on the security cameras, and Vicky's pistol came in line with her head before the woman could even react. The M45 barked twice, Vicky's Buffer-Enhanced strength more than able to keep the recoil under control. The first shot caused *sparks*, indicating that the woman had an armored skull, but the second punched through an eye socket and the woman went down. Technically, it was possible to survive shots like that, but it wasn't likely, and Vicky wasn't going to double tap again when there was another enemy still unaccounted for.

Despite her speed, it was that enemy that got a shot off on her first, a spread of shot from a tactical shotgun hammering into her shield. A warning flared in her brain as her

shield was brought from full to 20% by that hit, and she pushed off sideways to avoid a second shot, even as she snapped her pistol on target to repeat her earlier feat. The man must have had some sort of cyberwear that improved his own reactions, as he managed to dodge her first shot. But that wasn't enough. Vicky didn't stop at just two shots this time, brute forcing the M45 around to track on her target and emptying the entire remaining clip.

Her third shot caught the man in the torso, but he only flinched and she barely avoided his own return fire. Her fourth and fifth took him in the head, and his armor there wasn't as strong as the woman's had been. He went down bleeding from the headshots, almost certainly dead, though his own last shot clipped her. Her shield crashed out, but it had bled enough of the energy from the graze that it failed to even penetrate the mildly-armored coat she'd bought.

Vicky ignored it and turned to the three chemists...only to find them cowering under a table.

"Please don't shoot! We don't even want to be here! Our families just owe debts to the 'Claws!"

Throttling her combat reflexes, Vicky replied, altering her voice as much as she could with a harsh command.

"Down on the ground, hands behind your head. You move, I shoot you anyway!"

All three instantly complied, and Vicky looked around the room. There was more glitter here, but not in inhalers. More importantly, there was a lot of delicate and expensive looking lab equipment. Grabbing the dead man's shotgun, she emptied it...then used it and her strength to smash the fuck out of everything important looking, ignoring the cries of alarm from the chemists as she did.

Already having noted the place had a sprinkler system, she proceeded to use a beaker of something marked flammable and a burner to set it off, though she kept the fire away from the raw glitter. The water soaking it should be enough to wreck the product that had already been ready. Particularly as she ripped the covers off the containers holding it, careful not to breathe any in.

Satisfied that she'd finished the job, she didn't bother to speak to the chemists again, simply taking advantage of her still-buffed state to accelerate back up the stairs. On the main level, she took to the air with **Air Step**, rapidly hitting the catwalk and darting out the opening she'd made in the skylight. Minutes later, when the buff finally ended and left her sore as fuck...she was already several blocks away from the building, back near a main street.

She quickly switched her outfit look with **Illusory Raiment**, getting rid of the mask and making her outfit look much more like party clothes. Dropping down into an alley with a wince at how sore she now was, she was out onto a main throughfare a minute later, pleased as she took in the results of her Mission, flashing on a screen before her eyes.

Mission complete, bonus included...

Chapter 5: Processing

Vicky chewed her lower lip, staring into space as her half-eaten MRE grew cold, thinking over everything that had happened since arriving in this reality.

She'd done a little shopping before finding an out-of-the-way landfill to dump most of the glitter out of the **Dimensional Bunker**, keeping only a handful of inhalers in some vague thought of possibly analyzing it in the future. It might be good to know if things like glitter would even *affect* her current body. She *thought* the answer was 'probably not,' given it had apparently been designed for hostile environments. But it would be better to know one way or another, rather than find out she was wrong the hard way. Whatever her body was, it wasn't a robot or android, being *mostly* biological if obviously modified. So drugs might remain a concern.

Some poking and prodding by **[Misfit]** had told her a little bit more about how the Bunker itself worked, proving she could actually open and close it more quickly than every eight hours. It only required the *full* cooldown when the full 24 hour maximum was used, though it required an absolute bare-minimum cooldown of half an hour, making it still not exactly great as a 'bag of holding.' Thus, she'd been able to open it, retrieve the glitter, and exit while only triggering the shorter cooldown.

That minimum half hour, actually more like an hour in truth, had been used by Vicky to do aforementioned shopping. Another two sets of clothes, a few shelf-stable foods she had yet to try, some proper bodywash and hair product, and other various sundries were the majority of it. The single most expensive purchase had been a tablet with offline capacity and a download library which included a fair bit of history and general education materials.

Even *finding* such a library to download, that could be used without a connection and service fee, had been excessively hard. It was also out of date by at least a few years, even after finding it and paying over a thousand eddies just for the privilege of off-line data. It was probably worth it, though, given that the **Dimensional Bunker** was cut off from any

sort of external signal. She'd at least be able to do research on a decent number of things, free of ads but likely still loaded with propaganda, while in the safety of the Bunker.

Not that she'd done anything with it yet.

Nor were her purchases the focus of her current contemplation.

She'd been in Night City for less than a day, conscious time at least, and she'd already killed three people. Only one of which she was *certain* had deserved it. Worse, in a way, she'd effectively killed all three of them for *money*, even if that part hadn't even really processed to her at first. The **[Misfit System]** was easy to think of as exactly what it looked like, a game-like reward system for doing 'the right thing.' Yet, had what she'd done even *been* the right thing?

Well, stopping the rapist had been. That one she was certain of.

She was a lot more fuzzy on her actions against the drug lab. Intellectually, she could argue that the drugs she'd removed from play had likely saved more lives than stopping the rape. There are been thousands of doses of glitter, which almost certainly represented dozens of deaths. Either to overdose or addiction. Objectively, getting rid of the drugs was a correct choice.

The question remained if it was a choice that justified killing two people.

There were plenty of easy arguments that it had been, of course. A pair of Tyger Claws trusted to guard the operation were unlikely to be 'innocent' of other crimes. From what little she'd be able to discover so far the cops in Night City were kinda a joke when it came to holding criminals from major gangs. Kinda like Brockton Bay had been, in that respect, at least. The number of lives she was probably saving. So on and so on. There were *plenty* of easy justifications.

Which didn't mean it had been *right*.

Vicky hadn't exactly been her mother, whose law career had caused her to push the idea of due process as near enough a cardinal virtue, or at least so it had seemed to her at times. Enough of her memories were *less* scrambled now to be fairly certain that Vicky herself had never quite agreed with that point of view. She'd seen how *utterly ineffective* 'due process' was at making anything better, after all. Maybe there were places that it worked, more or less at least, but Brockton Bay certainly hadn't been one of them.

She suspected that not-so-little detail was even truer in Night City than back home.

Which, she reflected as she stirred her mostly cold meal and forced herself to eat a bit more of it, didn't necessarily mean that *ignoring* due process was any better. In Brockton

Bay she'd at least *sort of* been able to walk a dubious line between the two. No one thought twice of an Indie Hero like Glory Girl breaking the legs of a few obvious criminals, caught in the actual act of committing crimes. Even the gangs, for the most part, had accepted that as the price of doing business, even if they'd whined about it on PHO in a sad attempt at PR.

The problem, which she was only *just* starting to get a proper handle on, was that a few broken limbs *wasn't a serious deterrent* in Night City. Break a leg? Pop something called a 'Max Doc' and it would be healed in a day instead of weeks, at least well enough to walk on. Lose a leg? Shell out a thousand eddies and you'll have a shiny metal one. Make it ten thousand and it will be 300% better than your flesh one had ever been. Heck, if you had the money, might as well chop off both and get Super Legs that would give someone a minor Mover rating while you were at it.

Sure, something like a broken bone might be a major problem for the poor of the city, but even low-level gang bangers were likely going to recover from anything non-lethal she did to them in a day or two. Worse, even if they didn't? The impression she had so far said that life was so *cheap* in Night City that the gang they came from wouldn't even notice the loss. Not unless you killed someone a lot higher up. Even then, it would mostly be *inconvenient*, rather than the problem it would be if you'd removed a cape from a gang back home.

As far as Vicky could tell, the only way to hurt the gangs was either to carve a bloody path through them, or to wipe out their money making operations like she had with the glitter lab. It would be *nice* if she could do the latter *without* doing the former, but she'd already run into the limits of that. Nor was she actually sure it was the right path. *Would* it be better to simply kill at least the worst offenders, since there wasn't a reliable way to make sure they'd go to jail?

Vicky found herself unconsciously gnawing at her lower lip again instead of eating, and gave the cold food up as a bad job.

The reality was, she probably wasn't going to settle on an answer in a single night. Thankfully, she had at least a *stopgap* solution available to her. She hadn't been able to completely avoid killing tonight, or rather *last night* at this point, since it had been near sunrise when she'd retreated to the Bunker. But that inability had been entirely due to *lack of options*. That meant that, in addition to more research to find out if she was *right* about the level of local law enforcement corruption, she could *also* try to *give herself those options*.

She didn't have a *lot* to work with, but it might be enough to find something workable.

Between the two Missions she'd earned 300 System Points. Which, unfortunately, wasn't all that impressive. The initial 'starter package' that **[Misfit]** had managed to finagle for her had contained 2500 System Points, though it had needed to sacrifice 1500 of those for **Dimensional Bunker**. The Bunker was, by far, the most expensive System-given ability she had. That *didn't* include her body or the Exo-Spine related abilities, as those had been pieced together from parts of **[Fragile One]** and loose things it found in the **[Nothingness]**. They had been replacements for her previous powers, and had been put into place *before* **[Fragile One]** became **[Misfit]**, the **[System Administrator]** for the **[Misfit System]**.

It was once the **[Misfit System]** had initialized and **[Fragile One]** became **[Misfit]** that **[Misfit]** was suddenly subjected to the *rules* of the System. **[Fragile One]** had known it would happen and done its best to eek out every advantage *before* then, such as the starter package. It had still meant that, in order to keep Vicky safe, it had needed to make the **Dimensional Bunker** part of the starter package. Which had used up the largest chunk of her starter points. That had left Vicky with only a thousand System Points to spend to solve her immediate problems once she'd woken up. From which she'd gotten only what amounted to a summonable mundane handgun, a mundane-for-setting but secure communications device, and the **Illusory Raiment** ability.

Of those, **Illusory Raiment** had cost the most at a full 400 points. The defective **Ethereal Weapon** and thankfully-not-defective **Communication Device** abilities had been 300 and 200 points respectively. Personally, Vicky thought that should have been reversed in her case. But that didn't take into account that she could have made the single **Ethereal Weapon** she was allowed to summon-on-command a fully-loaded rocket launcher if she'd been familiar enough with one.

Either way, she had been left with 100 points unspent and had now 400 points in total. Enough, in other words, to buy either another relatively minor-but-useful power like **Illusory Raiment**, or possibly mundane items through something like the **Communication Device** ability. Which meant that the real question would be to try and figure out how to either increase her *stealth*, or else give herself a better non-lethal option, if she wanted a stopgap fix for her current path. One that would let her do some good while still struggling with the morality of her situation.

Opening the interface of the Misfit System, she got to work figuring out what her options might be for either case...

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