

Together, Jackie and I tore through the R&D section of the facility, walking through several labs and demolishing the Maelstrom hiding within them. Their forces were scattered and disorganized, stuck between trying to retreat and hunker down for cover. Neither of them would have done them any good, but trying to somehow do both made them easy targets.

Several of the research rooms were set up as bedrooms, as well as a ripper station that looked more like a torture chamber than a place for medical procedures, especially since the on-staff ripper looked like they had fallen into a pile of broken cyberware at terminal velocity and decided they liked the look.

We even took down the leader of the gang, a fucker named [Brick](#), who I could only identify since he was shouting, "Do you know who I am?" as he ran from us, and was nice enough to answer when I called back, "No, who are you?"

The running leader attempted to use his people as meat shields so he could escape, only to get his body mulched as he managed to get outside and run headfirst into a group of shades. They made quick work of him, barely even hesitating to put him down.

When the building was completely secure, I fielded some questions from the police, who were *shockingly* accommodating considering we had basically engaged in a paramilitary campaign against Maelstrom. Sable had assured me it would be fine, and any questions I couldn't answer, I referred back to her, allowing the police to assume I was just some metalhead soldier with just enough information to keep from being shot at.

While we were executing the Maelstrom inside, the police had, relatively efficiently, cordoned off the area and encouraged civilians to keep their distance. They had apparently done the same for the warehouse district, though that was supposedly much easier to do since few people ventured through there.

About ten minutes after we were finished, a replacement power armor arrived for Jackie and myself, as well as two other spare sets. On top of that, another four VTOLs of shades and heavies were waiting for us to move on to our next target. The first four groups would remain behind to secure the perimeter around the factory, while our new escorts would accompany us to our next target, the Docks.

As we gathered, Jackie and I traded out our damaged armor, while I simultaneously checked in with everyone.

"How did everything go?" I asked, looking around the group. "Any damage or injuries? Any issues or thoughts?"

"These guys were chumps," Rabbecca responded, standing with her massive shotgun, her smaller frame making it look like we had a small kid stuffed into power armor fighting with us. "I used to be nervous about them being so close to my apartment."

"Don't forget what you're wearing," I pointed out. "Not many people can hold up to that level of tech. Still, we did manage to accrue some injuries, so don't get cocky."

During their time in pairs, Gloria had almost been hit by a grenade but managed to kick it away just in time, just a split second before it went off. Her armor still took the brunt of it, and she had been pretty battered by the explosion, even if she fought through it well. The extra pairs of power armor were for her, as well as Riggs, who had tanked a blow from a gangster armed with a [massive hammer](#) and a Sandy. He was a bit "bruised," but really the only damage was the armor plating in the area, which had cracked a bit. Once they met us outside, they quickly changed armor as well.

Once everyone was ready, we took off and vanished, literally, into the night, crossing a significant chunk of the city. We now owned most of what we were crossing, a baffling concept that was absolutely foreign to me, but still made me excited. To design, build, and create on such a large scale was thrilling in a way I honestly hadn't expected, really hammered home by seeing and flying over the land for the first time.

After our flight over our new land, the VTOLs were in position. The plan was for the cargo shuttles, containing shades and heavies, to land outside the docks, creating a perimeter for us to work within. This time, however, things did not go nearly as smoothly as before. Where we had the element of surprise in our first raid, Maelstrom knew we were coming this time, and seemed to have pulled in a significant amount of its people to defend their base.

Ordinarily, the gang stayed behind a barrier set up further into the docks, just over halfway through the pier, which wasn't actually a pier at the moment since the drydock was drained. On what was usually the non-Maelstrom side was a [cluster of cargo containers](#) and stacked up against the wall Maelstrom built, which was pretty stupid because it made climbing the wall laughably easy, even in the game, with its invisible barriers.

Further on the civilian side was a [yard of materials](#), organized and ready for some sort of large-scale construction project. Thick steel girders stacked taller than me, pre-formed concrete blocks, scaffolding, internal supports, liquid storage vessels, and all kinds of air conditioning and electrical equipment. It was the bones of some sort of building, all laid out in a large space.

And now, it was *filled* with Maelstrom, using the construction material as cover.

"Murtaugh, don't drop your invisibility when dropping off the shades and heavies," I warned him. "Give the Maelstrom a proper shock and give our forces the element of surprise again."

"Will do, Jackson," The AI agreed. "Lowering now. You should be in position in just a few seconds."

Sure enough, true to his word, we watched as the wireframes of the VTOLs descended. At a certain point, the thrusters began to kick up dirt and trash, but, to the waiting Maelstrom forces, it looked like it was coming from nothing. They looked around, confused, before the hatches suddenly opened, and our forces poured out, first the shades and then the heavies. The first wave tore through the Maelstrom gangsters who were out of cover, before the heavies started pummeling the rest, covering the smaller robots as they flanked.

That was when we finally got into position, and the back hatch opened. Once again, we repeated our airdrop into the middle of the base. All six of us landed in a slightly more open area around two red cargo containers. Immediately, we opened fire, with absolutely no lack of targets, we eviscerated nearly twenty of them within seconds.

"Gloria, Riggs, Kaytlyn, clear that building," I said, gesturing to the nearby small building. Jackie, Rebecca, and I will go clear around the outside! Go!"

We took off, the other team leaping and smashing through windows to breach the building, leaving my team to walk around the corner, dropping another half dozen bastards. A pair of borgs attempted to stop us, but they made the mistake of attacking us from too far away, giving us plenty of time to wreck them with sustained fire.

A third heavily chromed, but still partially fleshy Maelstrom goon dragged an [HMG](#) off a stack of crates, lugging it around and attempting to fire it at us. Well before they could, however, Jackie blurred, sweeping around his already dead previous target, now focused on the new threat. He put his pistols directly against the chrome-out goon's temple and ruined all their fancy neural chrome with a pair of metal slugs. He then grabbed the HMG before it hit the ground, spun around, and opened fire with it, wielding it like it was nearly weightless.

"Jesus, I have bad ass friends," I muttered, firing a burst of rounds at a Maelstrom taking cover behind a truck. "Rebecca, if you would?"

With a laugh, the pint-sized hellion ran around some cover, flanking my target and blowing them away with a double pull of her trigger. Meanwhile, I spotted and killed a pair of goons who attempted to kill her as she ran out of cover.

Of course, throughout this whole fight, all three of us tanked several dozen small-caliber rounds, as Maelstrom, armed with pistols and submachine guns, attempted to take us down. We ignored those attempts, instead focusing on those who were armed with larger, more dangerous weapons. Once we finished with their more destructive counterparts, we tore the rest of them to shreds.

Within a few short minutes, we had wiped out any external threats inside the base. Outside, the shades and heavies were still fighting the large gathering, but I know Murtaugh would do something if they needed help. Meanwhile, we could still hear gunfire from inside the building.

"Okay, they are still busy, so let's push up to [the boat](#) and clear it," I said, getting a nod from my two temporary partners.

I took the lead as we ran back the way we came, past our landing zone, jumping up on one of the red cargo containers. From there, one after the other, we jumped up and over the fence that marked the end of the yard. We were still in the Maelstrom territory, just another sectioned-off area.

"Let's go!" I called out, jumping again, scaling the scaffolding that reached up the side of the boat. "Clear the top floor, and then we can move down!"

I led the charge, running up the remaining ramp and onto the boat, speeding along the many crates and dividers built along the substantial deck.

I never made it this far during my play-through of Cyberpunk. For all I knew, this base didn't even exist in the game. So, when we were met with cargo containers that had been converted into what looked like rooms, some of them filled with crates of tech, while others resembled cobbled-together living spaces, I had no idea what it meant.

What I did know was that the entire deck of the boat was empty of Maelstrom. We checked every corner of the top deck, searching every cargo container we could get into, only to find a whole load of nothing.

It felt like the whole boat was empty.

"You guys picking up anything?" I asked, walking from aft to stern, peaking inside every cargo container and corner. "I'm not seeing anything."

"Negative here, choom," Rebecca responded. "Looks like no one's home?"

"Maybe they are below deck?" Jackie suggested, having boosted up on top of the helm, scanning the deck.

"That sucks, cause these suits sure as he'll ain't fitting down there," Rebecca said, waving me down to show me a stairwell downward. "Should we get out?"

"No, you guys stay suited up and cover the exits," I responded, shaking my head. "I'll go down with some shades."

It took a few minutes for the shades to make their way to me, as they had to knock down the front gate with the help of a heavy. Once they were clear of the gate, they rushed to the deck of the ship, where I was waiting, now standing out of my power armor. From my armor's pack, I pulled my pistol and a normal-sized submachine gun, which was kept in two parts for easier storage. I snapped them together easily, before looking to Jackie.

"Keep an eye out for anyone trying to run," I warned him. "I'll let you know if it gets too crazy."

"Good luck," He said with a nod, and I headed down the stairs into the bowels of the ship, three shades in front of me and two behind.

"Murtaugh, get our heavies in position," I said, now speaking into my watch. "And set up a proper perimeter now that the outer forces are dead."

"On it, Jackson."

My boots clunked against the floor as I finally stepped onto the first interior deck, the lead shades already clearing the nearest room, the back two covering us from the hall we had stepped into

"Okay, boys, let's do this room by room," I said. "No reason to rush this."

The ship was thankfully well-lit, but the hallways were narrow and the sections were divided by even tighter doorways. As we slowly cleared the ship room by room, it wasn't until we found a small cafeteria space that anything happened.

As I followed my escort into the slightly open room, the front shade was suddenly slammed into the wall, its shoulder and chest armor cracking. It tried to react to what had hit it, except it clearly could not figure out what it was. Unsurprising, considering it was completely covered in some sort of optical camo, barely shimmering as it moved. A second blow struck the robot's head, and suddenly mantis blades popped out of the shimmer, slicing into the exposed neck and even punching through the crack that had formed. The shade sparked and jerked before going limp.

"Fuck!" I cursed, raising my submachine gun and opening fire, dumping it into the distortion in the air, a dozen rounds tearing into it.

The blurred distortion staggered, and the shade it had attacked slumped to the ground as they pulled back. I continued to fire, emptying my mag and dropping my weapon to draw my pistol, pulling the trigger as fast as my enhanced ALEO frame could. Finally, the camo failed, and the Maelstrom bastard dropped to the ground.

"Adjust your aim for visual distortions," I ordered the shades. "Release safeties on conditional engagement."

The shades were, by and large, dumb throwaway robots, made to toss into combat with no remorse. Since they were so simple, I pretty harshly controlled what they considered to be acceptable targets, so they didn't shoot at things before they could confirm they were actively being engaged by an enemy. This made them less effective, but made me feel a hell of a lot better about having them around anyone, never mind civilians.

My order significantly expanded what they considered acceptable levels of confirmation that they had identified an enemy. This would make them extremely touchy and liable to shoot at nothing, but it also gave them a chance to take down cloaked enemies.

Technically, they had one level of lethality above this, but I wasn't prepared to go that far.

Before I could check out the prick who had just attacked us, one of the tables across the cafeteria shifted, as if someone had nudged it as they walked by. Instantly, the shades flicked their weapons up and fired several bursts, each a spread that went from the table edge and out. At first, I thought they had missed, but on the tail end of the final burst, a spark of metal and a splurt of white cyberware blood sprayed out, and suddenly they all opened fire again, this time

to devastating effect. Their target was cut down in seconds by the barrage, and the cafeteria went silent again.

I was busy reloading my weapons, watching the shades destroy the cloaked target, when one of the shades covering our backs opened fire, spraying down the hall, bullets sparking against the wall, doorframe, and then ceiling as another cloaked figure slammed into them. Instead of being stabbed at by mantis blades, this bot was pummeled. Blurred, translucent fists slammed into them again and again, shoving them against the wall with each heavy blow.

The shade's armor cracked, metal struts bent, and sparks began to shoot out from their internals, before the second shade finally opened fire, ignoring that its comrade was too close. The cloaked enemy staggered back, his active camo dropping enough that I could see his thick gorilla arms, his hand pulled back for another strike. I lined up my shot and sprayed him down, the bullets peppering him until he collapsed back.

"Jesus, this isn't going to work," I said, shaking my head as I connected to the rest of my group. "We are falling back, cover the exits! There are a bunch of cloaked Maelstrom down here, keep them from escaping!"

I could hear my team confirm the orders, Murtaugh already moving his assets around. By now, the battle outside the base was long over, and all attention was focused on us clearing the boat.

As I ran back the way we had come, the shades following behind, I sent a few more commands to Murtaugh. Suddenly, as I was stepping through a four-way intersection of hallways, someone cloaked grabbed me from the side. They used my momentum to spin me around, slamming me into the metal wall hard enough to knock my weapon from my hands. Meanwhile, another cloaked individual slammed the naval door I had just practically leapt through shut, spinning the latch to lock it. The sound of bullets hitting the thick door echoed for a moment as my shades attempted to get through, before finally going silent.

I was slammed into the wall again, before whoever had grabbed me de-cloaked, revealing a torn-up and chromed-out Maelstrom bastard, bulging with cyberware enhancements and covered in extra wires, servos, and hydraulics, bolted and welded to the plating under his skin. He was wearing [a mask](#) that completely covered his face. In fact, they all were, wearing the same crisp, clean, metallic masks with sensors along the sides. They clashed hard with their general look of amateur cyberware stapled on by a hack. It was clearly professional work, not something cobbled together with spare parts and slapped on.

"Who are you?" The bastard who was holding me shouted, slamming me against the wall. "Who the FUCK thinks they can mess with Maelstrom?"

"Oh no, you've caught me," I said, my tone bored as I raised my hands and half-heartedly shook them in mocking fear. "I'm so scared, I'll tell you everything."

"Good!" he said, his voice mechanical and harsh, like violent autotune. "Now answer the question!"

"He is fucking with you, Gonk," One of the other gang members said, one of three in the room. "Hit him again!"

The big brute of an abomination slammed me back into the wall again, denting it slightly. I could feel some of my back, as well as my armor, bending and denting as well, but so far, my internal systems were intact, if a little rattled.

"Ouch. Anyway, where did you guys get this stealth tech? It's impressive," I asked, tilting my head to look at the big brute's shoulder. "High-quality optical camo isn't exactly cheap."

"Ya like it meat? Raided a militech warehouse for a bunch of choice bits," the one standing back from the bragged. "Others might have gotten stomped, but you can't stop what you can't see."

I laughed, shaking my head, ignoring the fact that the jacked up bastard was starting to deform my armor under his massive hands.

"Maybe for you guys, but I bet you show up light road flare to thermal," I responded. "The only reason I can't see through it is cause I got out of my armor."

"He's full of shit," The one who seemed to be in charge said as he pulled out a pistol and aimed it at my forehead. "Still hasn't told us who the fuck he is! You got one more chance fuck, or I'm gonna get real creative!"

I let out a long sigh before mentally giving Murtaugh the order to go ahead with the plan. Since I was giving up clearing the place room by room, I told our AI general to bring the heavies around the exterior of the boat and switch to solid, armor-piercing bullets. The plan was to open fire and shred the interior from aft to stern.

Of course, I wasn't supposed to be inside when that happened, but you win some and lose some.

A few seconds after I gave the order, the eight heavies we had with us opened fire, spraying the boat with massive high-caliber mag rifle slugs. It was like eight fully automatic 25mm rifles, firing nonstop, raking across the hull of the ship, punching fist-sized holes into it. Instantly, the hall we were in went from calm to chaos, as the Maelstrom gangers were obliterated. All three of the goons who had been watching were destroyed in seconds, while the goon with a gun to my head was nearly evaporated by a burst that turned him into a spray of blood, oil, and scrap. The brute holding me up was also hit, a round tearing his torso nearly in half, as well as blowing off the arm that was holding me up.

Of course, I didn't escape unscathed either.

As I fell back to my feet, one of my legs was blown clean off, and as I tried to stabilize myself, I lost my left arm just below my shoulder. I just barely managed to avoid getting thrown

off my feet, but I was still thrown against the wall, my head cracking against a corner, putting a visible deformation in my head, shutting down my right eye.

After a near minute of trying their damndest to cut the bottom off the boat, the heavies ceased fire, and the dry dock went quiet. The room was a mess, and the brute who had been manhandling me had fallen back on most of it. He was choking and coughing, his body and cyberware failing as I watched. As he shifted and squirmed, his mask fell off, revealing the face underneath.

Well, it released the abomination that was underneath. Nearly his entire front face had been removed, replaced by black, bulging, tearing implants that looked like they had been grown through his skin. His whole jaw was gone, replaced by a metal contraption of spikes and pointed teeth that looked like they had been meant to tear apart flesh like a weapon. As he gagged and sputtered, the red glowing visual sensors flickering, I pulled out my pistol and aimed it at his head.

"You're one ugly motherfucker."

I said, before pulling the trigger, scattering the murderous, twisted man's memories around with his cohorts.

I leaned back against the wall, the gunshot having almost knocked me off balance. Quickly drop my gun and grab the wall as best I could, holding myself steady on my one remaining leg.

"I am so glad I made meat and metal doppelgangers," I groaned to myself, watching the liquid skin struggle to deal with my removed limbs, eventually retreating up to my thigh and acting like that was where my cybernetic limb ended. "This would have been so much messier in a synth body."

I barely had to wait a whole minute before a torrent of shades started prying the already broken and bent doors open. After a few tries, they managed to get inside, most of them continuing on to clear the ship, while one of them knelt slightly beside me, offering its shoulder for me to lean on. It took a minute, but eventually we made it outside, where Jackie and Rebecca were waiting, now joined by the rest of the team as well.

Gloria gasped when she saw me, about to start applying first aid, when she saw that my lost limbs were all mechanical. Then her eyes went wide when she saw my skull. As she rushed me, I held up my hand.

"It's fine, this isn't me, remember?" I reminded her, the older woman frowning as she examined my head, her large, power-armed hands gently checking the damage. "It's mechanical, Gloria. I'm fine, I promise."

She clicked her tongue and pulled back, but I couldn't help but chuckle, looking over them. My people were a bit battle-worn, with dents, dings, and a few cracked pieces of armor, but by and large they looked hale and hearty.

"Did you guys stay on the boat when they were shredding it?" I asked, still leaning on the shade.

"No, we jumped down just before they opened fire," Jackie explained. "Far as we could see, no one came up. Thermal was clean. You uh... You gonna disconnect choom?"

"No, just shove me back into my armor," I responded, shaking my head. "My connection is still solid, and the armor will still read my movements fine, even if my limbs are gone."

Jackie snorted and grabbed me from the shade, using his strength to help me into my power armor easily, even if it was a bit embarrassing for me. When I was sealed inside, I shook myself off a bit and nodded. We could hear the shades double-tapping the Maelstrom bastards in the boat, with occasional longer bursts of fire as more ambulatory gangsters tried to move or run.

Once we confirmed that the boat was empty and that the shades and heavies, or more specifically, that Murtaugh had the situation at the docks base under control, we hopped back into a VTOL and took off. Our destination was the warehouse, where we would take control of the situation and spend some time hanging out. It probably wouldn't take long for people to start poking around, and since the large empty warehouse district would be our primary build site for quite a while, I wanted eyes on the location, at least we could establish a beachhead of sorts. As we traveled, Murtaugh briefed me on the situation, including the situation at the docks we had just left, our current destination, and the All Foods Factory.

Apparently, the perimeters were being held, but already civilians were attempting to poke around, either looking to steal some choice loot or find out what was going on. Both of them were locked down and cleared. I didn't mind people trying to get info, as most of it would be publicly available soon anyway, and we wouldn't be doing anything bad at our construction sites. My one concern was the few shade wrecks we had at the docks and at the warehouse. I ordered Murtaugh to pile up every single piece they could find and throw them into a VTOL to get sent back and scrapped. It wasn't anything earth-shattering inside the shades, but what tech was inside them could be easily reverse-engineered, so keeping it out of anyone else's hands was top priority.

The Maelstrom corpses could be dragged away and dumped for all I cared.

We landed around the outskirts of the warehouse, where the police had already set up a cordon. I couldn't help but chuckle as the crowd of civilians, as well as the cops keeping them back, gasped when our VTOL suddenly appeared, landing with a burst of dust and trash.

All around us were the signs of a pretty brutal battle. Craters were dug into the ground, large holes had been blown into several warehouses, and there were still corpses piled around. A few dozen shades were working on taking care of their broken brethren, while others patrolled the area, their heads on swivels. The heavies were stationed around intermittently, as well as on the perimeter, their superior size and sensors making them daunting guardians.

The battlefield clearly showed that while the shades and heavies were effective, they were not unstoppable battlebots I had hoped they would be. I mean, they were basically free to

make, so losing fifteen to twenty percent of them for every fight was a price I was willing to pay, but I definitely had room to improve them over time and future tech trees.

As we patrolled around, essentially just showing that there were, in fact, people at the heart of this movement, Murtaugh filled me in on the problem. Apparently, because the robots lacked the momentum our group generated through surprise, precision, and overwhelming force, it was too easy for them to be pushed back. It only worked for so long, as the shades and heavies had the advantage of firepower and numbers, but they would still take casualties in the process.

Promising a redesign soon, we continued to patrol for a few more hours. Just as the sun was rising, the first delivery of MRVNs and equipment arrived, stepping out of their shuttles and immediately getting to work.