

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: V makes his choice.

-x-X-x-

“... I won't risk any of the girls on Arasaka Tower. We deal with Smasher first on our own terms away from his fortress. Then, we finish things up with Yorinobu.”

As V makes his decision, Alt merely inclines her head and smiles.

“Sounds good to me. Did you have something in mind for how to lure Smasher out though?”

V just smirks.

“That part? That part is going to be easy.”

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Adam Smasher had been Arasaka's attack dog for a long time now. Decades upon decades. He didn't stay out of loyalty, however. It was more a matter of convenience, inertia, and old man Saburo always knowing when to provide him with lots of people to kill.

At this point, killing was one of the few things that brought Smasher true satisfaction anymore, and even then most of the flesh bags he killed were woefully inadequate and ultimately disappointing. Truth be told, the borg couldn't remember the last time he'd had a decent fight. There was that one dust-up back in '76, but really... that kid wasn't anything special, he just had a fancy toy.

This is all to say, Smasher is fairly confident Yorinobu killed his father... he just doesn't really care. After all, where Yorinobu claimed poison, Smasher's advanced optics had immediately noted the cracked glass and the bloodstain in

the monitor above Saburo's corpse. The Emperor had been laid low by his own son... and it just didn't matter.

Nor did it matter that Yorinobu seemed to be on a self-destructive warpath in trying to dismantle Arasaka from the inside. Promoting Smasher of all people to Head of Security for the entire megacorp was just one of many questionable decisions, but again... Smasher didn't care. Either he'd succeed or someone would stop him, but for now it was at least something new... something engaging.

That's why, when he gets a call from Hanako Arasaka, Smasher is almost tempted to ignore it. After all, the Princess of Arasaka is all but meaningless at this point. Just another fuckable meat bag being puppeted around by old men who have made a faction with her as their figurehead. Hell, Yorinobu might tell him to kill her any day now...

In the end, he only actually answers because he's otherwise bored. Maybe the Princess will entertain him. Maybe not. As the call connects and her face fills a corner of his eyesight, Hanako Arasaka looks... irritated, annoyed, and downright worried.

"Smasher. We have a problem... one that I think you are the only company asset suited for dealing with at this point in time."

He's expecting her to start talking about Yorinobu, to maybe even try to lean on Smasher's nonexistent loyalty to her dead father and his company to try and turn him against her brother in this eleventh hour. Which is why it's a little surprising and a fair bit more engaging when... she doesn't do any of that.

"Our loose ends have gotten together and are scheming against the company. You might remember some of these faces..."

Smasher stays silent as Hanako sends him over a small data packet, one of just images. The images though... are interesting. He recognizes Rogue, of course. He also recognizes the male merc as well. 'V', the one who got away that night

at Konpeki Plaza. However... he has no clue who the short stack and pixie cut are.

His silence causes Hanako's face to scrunch up in incredulity.

"Don't tell me you've already forgotten?! Focus, Smasher. It was less than a year ago... the short one... you've already *killed* her once before. And the other... she's one of ours. Another that escaped us."

When Hanako starts trying to order him around, he very nearly ends the call right then and there. But then she mentions him killing and he peers a little closer at the images. Only then does he remember... those two women with Rogue and 'V'... they were with the kid with the fancy toy.

"We're having a moment here! Fuck you!"

Yes... that was the one. He'd landed on her. Crushed her. Killed her in an instant. Idiots with a death wish and the 'courage' to scream in the face of their impending demises were a dime a dozen in Night City, to be fair. Her shooting and shouting at him as he'd pasted her against the ground hadn't made her any more special than a thousand others he'd killed in the exact same manner over the decades.

However... Smasher had to admit that he wasn't used to his kills getting back up and walking away. No, he was confident he'd killed the little bitch. The only thing that might have brought her back... heh, but the eggheads had assured him that their little experiment with a physically applied version of Soullkiller hadn't worked. Or at least, it hadn't managed to trap any of his kills while he was using it.

"Smasher? They're clearly conspiring against Arasaka. More than that, I suspect they're conspiring against you personally."

Him personally? Amusing. Maybe even interesting. It wasn't often that so many people who fought him and somehow lived to tell the tale got together in one place. And yet... and yet...

“Why should I care?”

Hanako looks nonplused by that, staring at him in quiet disbelief. Letting out a deep, dark chuckle, Smasher shakes his head.

“If they come for me, they come for me. So be it. Until then, they’re nothing more than gnats. White noise in the background.”

For a moment, he thinks the Princess is about to hang up on him. She definitely has this blank look on her face as she stares at him silently that makes him think she’s thoroughly done with his shit. Heh, if so good.

Only... no. After a moment, her shoulders slump.

“I need this dealt with sooner rather than later, before they manage to do damage to Arasaka while trying to get to you. They will eventually come here to the Tower... but given what happened last time Rogue Amendiares and some of her friends came to the Tower, I’d rather avoid a repeat.”

Smasher snorts at that, though Hanako’s next words actually bring him pause.

“My brother never told you what he stole from our father, did he? What brought Saburo to Night City that night? If he had... you would care a lot more right now.”

The fuck was she going on about?

“Get to the point.”

Hanako’s eyes flash at his brutish disrespect, but he has a reputation backing him up that makes her just sit there and take it... as she fucking should. Not just sit there and take it, but also actually obey, in fact.

“Yorinobu stole the prototype for the Secure Your Soul Program. A Relic of over fifty years of age... containing the last engram of one Johnny Silverhand.”

... What?

“When that mercenary V and his crew infiltrated Konpeki Plaza that night, they weren’t there to assassinate my father... that was just happenstance. They were there to steal the Relic for interested parties. In the time since, I have been able to ascertain the Relic’s location... through a series of events I do not completely understand, it has ended up in V’s head... and in turn been activated.”

Smasher absently notes that Hanako is still in denial about who killed Saburo, even after all that she’s uncovered. Admittedly though, he’s far more focused on the rest of what she’s saying, because it sounds like she’s fucking saying that there’s a copy of Johnny fucking Silverhand running around.

Hanako wordlessly sends him another data packet, a video this time... and Smasher watches the short clip in silence. It’s that mercenary V... except he’s wearing Silverhand’s fucking clothing, walking Silverhand’s fucking arrogant walk... and most importantly of all, wielding Silverhand’s fucking gun of all things.

Smasher would recognize that Malorian Arms 3516 anywhere, especially since it was something he’d had his people hunting for decades at this point. Sure, he had Silverhand’s car, but he’d always felt like the gun would be an enjoyable trophy to have as well. More compact, for one.

The craziest thing is... V uses the Malorian just like Silverhand would have, flicking it out in a way Smasher would recognize anywhere even after more than half a century.

“I hope you see the issue at hand here, Smasher. I do not want another nuclear weapon detonated on my family’s property. And I imagine you do not want Johnny Silverhand walking around, living and breathing, enjoying life... in any form.”

Tch... the Princess had him there, he had to admit. Silverhand changed things. Letting them come to him in Arasaka Tower so he could deal with them all there

was fine... unless they were just going to nuke the place again. And while he didn't doubt that Rogue had grown softer and softer in her old age, Silverhand was like a fucking bug trapped in amber. He wouldn't have changed one fucking bit...

"Tell me where they are. I'll deal with this."

Hanako looks relieved and even pleased, but Smasher could care less other than her usefulness to him in this moment. After all, he doubted that she would survive the coming days even if the rest of the executives DID eventually band together to stop Yorinobu. Because once Yorinobu was gone, Hanako became less and less useful, even as a figurehead. And she definitely had lots of ideas in that head of hers that would make it much too difficult to continue controlling her going forward.

No matter. Smasher didn't do politics. All that really mattered... was the killing.

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"He's coming. Hanako managed to convince him to hunt us down."

A tremor of anticipation and trepidation runs through the group at V's words. Alt watches over all of them, smiling slightly.

"Those of you without a personal bone to pick with Smasher... I'd prefer you stay back. I'm not going to stop those who want their pound of flesh though. Still, even with the battlefield in our favor, this is going to be dangerous. He'll spearhead the assault but he'll also bring reinforcements with him. Those will be dealt with by Alt, Sasha, and Beatrice with Panam watching their back."

As the other three women mentioned nod, Alt just smiles a little wider. She would technically be doing more than just dealing with the small fry. She would be doing everything all at once, as was proper for someone of her... capacity. Still, she doesn't say a word, letting V continue to go over the plan one last time.

“Meanwhile, I’ll meet Smasher head on with Rebecca and Rogue backing me up. Lucy will be our Netrunner Support... with her own processing power boosted by Alt and Sasha’s help in the background.”

In most worlds, going up against Smasher and a bunch of Arasaka underlings with a crew this small would be suicide. Going up against Smasher personally with just two other edgerunners as back up would most definitely be suicide for the vast majority of people.

V wasn’t even that chromed up either. He’d gotten some stuff from Viktor early on, and then some more stuff done in preparation for this fight, but ultimately... he was still mostly organic, especially when compared to Smasher.

And yet... and yet, Alt really wasn’t worried. Because there was nothing average, normal, or standard about this particular group of people.

Rogue is looking around at all of them with some minor hesitation, probably feeling like the odd woman out, so as V nods and everyone breaks away to begin their final preparations, Alt walks over to Rogue’s side and chuckles.

“I wonder... did you ever imagine you would be doing this after all these years?”

Rogue gives Alt a healthy side eye at that.

“... I’ve fantasized about luring Smasher to his death more times than I could fucking count. Planned it in detail a few times with different crews as well. Just... the right moment never crystallized. It wasn’t ever worth the risk.”

Alt hums and tilts her head to the side.

“Yeah? How about now? This the right moment, you think?”

Rogue huffs, lowering her voice so only Alt can hear her.

“Well let me go down the line. We have here today multiple AI masquerading as humans who were once extremely capable Netrunners. Then, we have a couple

of pretty decent Netrunners, even if they're still flesh and blood. We've got a dead girl with a bone to pick against Smasher for killing her once already, and we've got me, who has more experience surviving against Smasher than anyone else still alive... unless Blackhand is actually kicking around out there still somewhere. Oh and if all of that wasn't enough, we have the man who claims to have killed Smasher once before, only to travel back in time to do it all over again."

Despite all of the patently insane things she's just said, Rogue gives a casual single shoulder half-shrug as if to say 'it's nothing much'.

"If this ain't the right moment, then nothing ever will be. And at this point, I'm too fucking old to keep waiting for anything better to actually come along. Still... I doubt all of us make it out of this alive. Only question is... who are we going to lose?"

Alt narrows her eyes at that, her smile growing thinner.

"Nobody. We're not going to lose anyone, Rogue. V will make sure of that. You don't have to worry."

Rogue lets a crooked smile spread across her face.

"I'm not worried. I'm ready."

Ready to fight? Or ready to die? Before Alt can ask for clarification, she's stopped by an alert... their enemies are almost here.

"Incoming! Smasher onsite in thirty seconds!"

Plenty of warning to give everyone a chance to get into final position. When Smasher finally makes his entrance, coming down through the roof of the warehouse they've chosen for this and landing on the concrete floor hard enough to crater it, only one person is out in the open waiting for him, in fact.

V stands there, Malorian Arms 3516 in hand... and tilts his head to the side in a pure Johnny Silverhand motion, the smirk on his face reminding Alt strongly of the deceased rockerboy as well.

“Took you long enough.”

And then everything gets very violent VERY fast.

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A/N: I'm not going to tell you what this chapter's vote is about, though you might be able to figure it out via context clues. I WILL say that it is NOT a POV vote. Huehuehue.

Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!