

When we finally stepped out of the elevator, we were greeted by several self-driving golf cart-esque vehicles, each with enough room for two people and cargo. We climbed on board, and Samwise entered a destination into the vehicle's navigation system. Moments later, the vehicle pulled away at a surprisingly fast speed, startling a few of us in the process.

We sped along the massive underground space, eventually passing by a few of the larger production buildings. We got a glimpse inside each factory, which was filled with hundreds of molly makers, and staffed with even more MRVNs. I could only imagine that it continued on the other floors, a level of custom production capabilities that was hard to fathom.

After passing two of the four massive production buildings, we entered the large-scale production area, where we could see giant molly makers printing out panels that appeared to be the exterior of a building, most likely for the meeting structure being built at the Ridge. Each one was printed pre-packaged inside a protective shell, and would likely need a custom teleporter to be sent to its destination.

After production, came storage, with one area allocated for each side, each divided into two parts. One stored finished products hot off the presses from production. At the moment, that area was mostly empty, save for more parts destined for Rocky Ridge. The other half consisted of massive blocks of feed for the thousands of molly makers. These were stacked high with hundreds of thousands of tons of metal blocks, probably left over from carving this massive space in the first place.

Finally, we passed through the storage area and arrived at the deployment zone. Most of the area was taken up by dozens of Cargo VTOLs, hundreds of [shades](#), and a few dozen [heavies](#). The shades were armed with mag rifles, all of which were updated to current standards, while the heavies held large [magazine machine guns](#) and [shoulder-mounted launchers](#). Some of them had larger rifles, like sniper rifles that were larger than a person. Those were designed to pick off armored aircraft or other hard-to-hit or heavily armored targets. In truth, with the right data being fed into them, they could likely take down a jet clear across Night City.

Coming around the corner into the deployment zone, we could see several buildings, relatively small, simple structures with wide doors, styled after [Quonset huts](#). Each one was clearly labeled "Weapons," "Gear," "Power Armor," and more. We pulled alongside the buildings, each of us stepping off the golf carts.

"Alright, everyone... suit up," I said, gesturing to the buildings, before stepping towards the power armor building.

Once we were inside, those of us going on a mission started getting into our armored underlayers, a few MRVNs helping Gloria. She had logged several hours in both the under armor and the power armor between the last few days, but putting them on was still relatively new to her, since she had only done it a few times. Once our underlayer was on, we all climbed into our mechs, the powerful machines sealing around us, moving perfectly with us as they activated.

After we were all encased in protective and enhancing armor, we armed up, passing out weapons and ammo, followed by items like grenades, med kits, and other equipment. I was particularly excited to *finally* try the [fusion sword design](#) I had first made so long ago. As with a lot of my early tech, Samwise had been slowly upgrading and updating the designs behind the scenes as new tech arrived, which meant the sword was now more like a greatsword, but matched perfectly with our power armor. I happily wore it clipped to my back, just barely resisting the urge to try it out on a spare shade.

Out of everyone, Gloria had the most extensive kit, including two types of medical scanners, extra stimpaks, a few armor-piercing stimpaks that Samwise designed, as well as a more mundane, but still extensive, first aid kit. She was also rocking a [massive mag shotgun](#), something Samwise specially designed for her. Apparently, she was most comfortable around a shotgun and had a reputation for being a terror when holding one.

Personally, I had never seen the point, not when my mag weapons already covered everything shotguns were designed to do. Massive slugs? Grab a mag cannon. Wide bullet spread? Grab a submachine. Perhaps I was being overly critical, and my lack of real combat training was showing. Either way, even if I didn't understand, I wasn't going to deny someone their preference, especially not when I didn't need to be involved.

Judging how she was stroking her new weapon with an eager smile, I was glad I kept my mouth shut. I had to imagine it had been a long time since she had shot one, and she had missed it.

In total, it took twenty-five minutes for everyone to get locked and loaded, with around half of that time spent double-checking that everyone was stocked and that everything was in working order. When we were done, everyone gathered together.

"Alright, guys. This is the next step," I said. "Murtaugh is going to be guiding our unmanned forces, while we attack the [All Foods Factory](#). That's where most of the leadership will hopefully be. Once we crush that, we move on to the docks. I have a feeling that the docks will actually have more people, but either way, we need to take each location seriously."

"What sort of resistance are we looking at?" Gloria asked, her voice crystal clear through our entangled-photon communication system. "It's been a while since I've fought Maelstrom."

In the game, the All Foods Factory was part of a mission you did in the early game, as part of the introduction chapter. That meant you were under-equipped and under-chromed, unless you were really pushing the game's mechanics. That meant that the fake meat plant was filled with redshirts with crappy weapons and paper armor.

It was very unlikely that that would be true here. This was where the leader of the entire gang called home. There was no doubt this would be filled with the most dangerous psychos they had.

"It's unlikely we will run into anything we can't handle, but this won't be a walk in the park," I pointed out. "Maelstrom is a gang of borderline or straight-up cyberpsychos. They will

have a lot of chrome, a lot of it custom, and that means they will be tougher to kill. I also expect some borgs, and while it's not likely to be common, be on the lookout for some stray bits of advanced cyberware, guns, or other combat tech. Maelstrom has a habit of stealing from people they shouldn't and getting away with it."

"What about the warehouse district?" Jackie asked.

"Since civilians are almost guaranteed to be low there, our shades and heavies will be handling that raid," I explained. "Once we finish clearing the plant and the docks, we can head over to the warehouses to make sure everything is set. After that, we wait for the MRVNs to show up. Once things calm down, we will split up and lead teams of shades to lesser Maelstrom locations, pushing them from our territory. Any more questions?"

I looked around at everyone, and when no one spoke, I gave a thumbs-up.

"Then it looks like we are good to go," I said, before looking over at Samwise, David, and Sable. "You guys are more than welcome to watch from the security hub at Rocky Ridge. Or you could catch some sleep, lord knows we'll need it over the next few weeks. Either way, Sam will guide you back."

Sable nodded while David still looked annoyed that he couldn't join us. While Murtaugh started guiding our robot army into the Cargo VTOLs, Sable approached me, tapping on my chest.

"I know that's not actually you in there," she said, red nails catching on my armor plating. "But be careful. Keep your people safe and don't pull your punches just cause you're wearing a body suit."

She seemed a bit unsure as she told me to be careful, so I held back my joking comments, instead nodding seriously.

"I'll be back before you know it," I assured her. "Keep an eye on David for me. He is a smart kid, just a bit impulsive."

"Will do."

Before she pulled back, she made some sort of motion with her fingers, and as she tapped my chest again, this time she carved a small S on one of the plates, just about over my heart. When she was done, she pulled her hand back, a faint dusting of pink colored her pale cheeks. Rather than say anything, she turned and walked away, climbing into one of the golf carts with David and Sam. As they left, I raised my hand over the metal plate, smiling before turning to focus on the task at hand. So far, most of the shades and heavies had been loaded up, leaving us to pick from the remaining empty craft.

We piled into one of the empty VTOLs, the back hatch closing after us, the lights flipped on as we were sealed inside. Along one wall, a screen activated, giving us a view of what the "cockpit" was seeing, which for now was just the VTOL in front of it. I looked around the interior, reaching out to grip one of the many interior anchor points. This whole craft was designed to

carry and spit out entire cargo containers at once, so there was plenty of room for us, though there were not a lot of internal comforts.

"I need to make a version of these designed for people," I said.

"The screen is a nice touch," Jackie pointed out, standing right beside me in his power armor. "Might feel a bit claustrophobic without it."

"Thank Samwise for that," I said, tapping the screen with a thick metal finger to zoom out a bit. "Alright, everyone set?"

After a few words of confirmation, I nodded and sent a message to Murtaugh to start the deployment. Just a few moments later, we could feel the cargo shuttle hum with power. From the screen's perspective, I could see that we, as well as a dozen or so ships around us, floated about two feet off the ground, our grav plates active.

"Activating teleport in fifteen seconds," a robotic voice warned. "Please grasp and lock handholds."

As they rose off the ground, I could see under each VTOL was a teleport pad, the catcher that would bring the VTOL back to the deployment area at the press of a button.

Suddenly, all the VTOLs around vanished, a wireframe representation appearing on the screen to indicate their location. After a few more seconds, starting at the far corner of the group, VTOL wireframes began disappearing, one after the other, in a flash I recognized as a teleport. I carefully checked that my power armor was firmly locked onto a secure point, scanning around to make sure everyone else was as well, when Jackie caught my attention.

"Hey, Jackson," Jackie said as we watched the cargo transports disappear. "You said your teleport stuff only works when you have a catcher device... so how are we getting out of here?"

"Well... I assume Noah set up some sort of catcher system in the badlands," I responded, bringing my armored hand up to scratch my helmet, an instinctive movement I stopped about halfway through. "But that's a good question. I-"

Suddenly we all shifted, the sensation of a teleport washing over us, muted heavily due to the multiple layers surrounding us. What wasn't muted was the sudden sensation of no longer being the right way up. Instead, we were now pointing downward, with the screen showing a sheer cliff face. Immediately, we began to fall, our armors locking firmly to the latch points we had all grabbed. We continued to plummet, our grav plates keeping us from slamming into the cliff face before all of our thrusters kicked in, slowly blending out our fall until we were tearing across the badlands at a breakneck pace, only a hundred feet or so above the ground.

The group, once it was clear we weren't about to die, was silent for a long moment, pointedly ignoring the terrified screams we had just released. Eventually, once we had all recovered, Kaytlyn spoke up.

"I am going to break all of Noah's limbs," She said, clenching her teeth. "After stranding him in the desert."

"I certainly have words for Samwise," I agreed, my hearts quickly returning to their normal paces. "He could have warned us as well."

The rumble of the thrusters was significantly more noticeable than the grav plates, but they slowly receded to a tolerable level once we leveled out and reached a cruising speed. Ahead of us, we could see the wireframes of the other VTOLs, all headed straight for Night City, which was significantly further away than we had been at Rocky Ridge. In fact, a quick check of my mental map of the area revealed that we were coming from an entirely different direction, which was smart since I didn't want people to think that the small town was somehow providing all the materials we were using. It was better if people assumed it was getting delivered from somewhere else, which was actually true.

"So what are the chances we get spotted?" Kaytlyn asked casually, now leaning against the wall of the cargo shuttle.

"With the naked eye? Almost zero," I assured her. "And that includes cyberware. We've made some good progress with stealth systems. I don't really know what kind of sensors they might have in Arasaka Tower, but we will steer well clear of that. Besides, the stealth is more about helping them make excuses as to why they can't track us when we teleport."

Night City grew larger and larger as we approached, until finally we were flying over it. I flicked the screen's focus down so we could watch the streets below us, watching the few cars on the road make their way around their business. In only a few seconds, we were heading around Westbrook.

"The VTOLS will be splitting up in a few seconds," Murtaugh warned me through the comms. "They will pick up speed to land around the same time as you."

"Understood, Murtaugh," I responded, nodding despite the fact that he couldn't see me. "Bring us in safe."

After a final confirmation, the majority of the cargo VTOLs pulled ahead of us, leaving four behind flying alongside us. After a few seconds, we began to descend, though our ride shifted away from our escorts. The shuttles carrying the shades and heavies slowly descended to the roads and parking lots around the factory. There, the robots would pour out and form a perimeter around the building. Their mission was twofold. One, they keep civilians away, clearing out anyone who might be sniffing around or taking refuge anywhere dangerous. Two, they would be keeping the Maelstrom inside, killing anyone who tried to escape.

Meanwhile, our VTOL hovered over the building itself, slowly descending and maneuvering into place. Inside, all of us were watching through the display screen.

The factory was enormous, extending far beyond what was visible in the game, with several different manufacturing stages spread throughout the facility. It was all defunct, closed

down for barely a month before Maelstrom moved in and took it over. The closing and takeover was recent enough that some of the automatic functions of the facility were still working, half producing what it could with what materials it had.

I could only imagine the stench outside our carefully sealed suits, as no doubt thousands of pounds of fake meat was left to rot.

We could see the VTOLs suddenly revealing themselves just fifty feet off the ground, scaring the crap out of civilians and startling at least one Cop. Thankfully, Murtaugh was able to speak through the robot and knew precisely what legalese he needed to spout in order to keep the cops from swarming.

"Perimeter at seventy percent and climbing," Murtaugh said, the AI easily keeping track of us and all other assets in the field. "Suggest you make your move, Sir."

"Roger that," I responded. "Open us up."

The VTOL shuddered as the back hatch split vertically, opening up to the open air of Night City.

"Alright, everyone, time to move!" I said.

As I shouted, I ran towards the back of the hatch, passing by everyone with Jackie hot on my heels. Riggs was right behind him, and Rebecca was right behind him, leaping from the shuttle with a shout of joy. Gloria and Kaytlyn followed behind, both of them locked in and ready. Together we plummeted towards the building below, falling nearly forty feet before my boots smashed through a skylight and we [plunged into one of the larger open rooms of the factory](#).

Glass shattered around us as we fell, our jump packs keeping us vertical and slowing us down as we passed through into the large production room below. Before we had even hit the ground, Jackie and I raised our mag rifles and opened fire, the large, power armor versions tearing through a trio of chromed-out punks. Two of them had replaced their eyes the same way that most Maelstrom did, and the other didn't even have a mouth.

We moved forward as our boots hit the ground, shifting to seek cover along a line of crates, dumping a trio of bullets into a ganger with massive cyberware arms, holding a Carnage. Behind me, I could hear the others touching down, their weapons opening up, spitting metal slugs as fast as they could pull their triggers.

By the time Kaytlyn touched down on the roof, looking down into the large open space with her rifle, the two dozen Maelstrom bastards were finally awake, screaming and shouting as they returned fire. Several of them charged, holding various melee weapons, only two of them blurring as they engaged their Sandevistans or Kerenzikovs. The one who charged without the benefit of speedware was almost immediately cut in half by Gloria's shotgun, the woman turning and blowing the arm off of another ganger.

The two who engaged their speedware made a beeline for Rebecca, only for Jackie to zip out from cover beside me, his Sandy vastly outperforming the other two. He slammed his

axe, a much larger and sturdier version, into the metal skull of one of the Maelstrom goons. The third slipped to a stop beside Rebecca, prepared to cut into her with their cut-o-matic, only for the short power armor-clad gremlin to catch the saw, sparks spraying as it tried to cut through her armor.

Instead, she crushed the weapon like a toy before slamming the handle through the offending Maelstrom member's chest. She then finished him off with a point-blank shotgun blast, pulverizing the violent gangster.

I could only imagine what would have happened if she had taken him down with her mag cannon, which she originally wanted to bring. Luckily, we were able to convince her to go with the newly minted mag shotgun design.

Which I had to admit, I was starting to warm up.

Slowly but surely, the sounds flashes of gunfire were overwhelmed and replaced by the sounds of our weapons, until finally there was no one else shooting at us. As I looked around the room, confirming that all threats were down, I waved up at Kaytlyn, who jumped down from the roof, landing with a soft thump.

"Jackie, you're with me, to the elevator," I said, both of us already moving. "Gloria, Kaytlyn, push into shipping and clear it out. Rebecca and Riggs, the same for the office space. Jackie and I will push into R&D. Ready? Go!"

The pairs split off at a jog, with Kaytlyn and Gloria jumping up to the second-floor level, Gloria shoulder-checking through a thin door, while Ravecca and Riggs disappeared as well. Jackie and I quickly pushed into the elevator, riding it up just past the second floor, where, in the game, V and Jackie meet with Maelstrom higher-ups.

If their leaders were here, that was where they would be.

For a moment, we waited for the large door to open, but when that failed, I pulled a thick coil of rubber hose from my back. I quickly unwound it and slapped it against the door, stretching it into a large vertical oval. I then tapped on a small fixture, which started blinking.

"Get in the corner, Jackie," I said. "Lock up your suit."

Jackie nodded, hunkering down slightly in the far corner of the elevator, only a handful of feet away from the door. His suit shifted as it sealed any gaps a pressure wave could leak through, locking his suit up in the process. He wouldn't be able to move, but he wouldn't be affected by the imminent explosion's blast.

When he was locked, I moved to stand between him and the door, shielding him as best as I possibly could, before locking my own suit, feeling the joints and flex points of my armor tense and harden. My doppelganger was disposable, so on the off chance this explosion managed to damage us, I would be shielding Jackie.

Only ten seconds after I pressed the activator, the breaching charge detonated, punching through the door like aluminum foil. I got to watch in real time as an explosion and blast wave filled the elevator, blowing out the shutter door and singeing the front of my armor black. The ball of fire and wave of dust was accompanied by shards of shrapnel, slamming into me with various levels of force. My suit threw up several warnings, but none of them more than damage plating, so I ignored them. Instead, I laughed, slid my rifle onto my back, and drew my sword, charging through the breach.

The other side of the destroyed door was red-lit chaos, though not everyone was affected. Three or four goons were stumbling around, clutching at broken or missing pieces of themselves. There was a netrunner lying back on a cooling dive chair, with a piece of the door embedded in their chest. There were also three obvious borgs, all three of which were already turned towards the door and ready, pulling guns and grabbing weapons, as well as two heavily chromed bastards using an overturned and smoldering couch as cover.

With a lazy flick of my glowing fusion sword, I easily beheaded the nearest stumbling goon, before charging forward. Jackie zipped in around me, dropping a pair of grenades on the couch, before immediately zipping away. He stopped behind one of the borgs, the one standing most off by himself, both his pistols drawn. The second he skidded to a stop, he unloaded, the massive mag pistols punching holes in the borg's back, though the target didn't seem to be significantly affected.

Meanwhile, Jackie's grenades detonated, and I ran through the shrapnel, jumping over the couch and stabbing forward with my sword, the fusion blade punching through one of the borg's chests. I yanked it sideways, cutting out through his shoulder before coming around and slamming the blade into his other side, cutting his arm off below the elbow and cutting into his torso before my blade was stopped.

The borg screamed, his arms disabled before he could even attack, and yet he still charged me, lowering his intact shoulder like he was going to ram into me. I activated my jump kit, boosted backward, yanking my weapon free and making some distance. The gangster must have thought I was retreating, so he kept coming, not expecting me to skid until my feet made contact with a locker, then using added leverage to push, leaping forward in a low dive, slashing forward with even more force.

My sword slashed completely through borg, cutting him in half along his waist, but as it did, I could immediately feel something was wrong with my sword. The fusion edge flickered and sparked before giving out completely. As I looked down at the blade, I could see it was cracked and broken, bent just at the handle. I knew the sword was built with just about the best materials we could manage, but it just couldn't handle the force I was putting into it.

With a curse, I dropped the sword, hopping over the bisected borg, forced to duck under a massive swing from the other. I tried to dodge his next swing, but the bastard I had just cut in half was grabbing at my legs, and I was forced to tank a punch. I managed to pull my pistol and press the barrel against the standing borg's chest as I leaned forward into the blow, not away

from it. I could feel my already damaged armor plates creak and bend under the force, but they held long enough for me to mag dump into the borg's chest.

The hulking, chrome stuffed Maelstrom member, the one that was still standing, rocked back under the barrage of high caliber bullets, which was enough time for me to raise my foot and slam it down on the first borgs head, once, twice, then three times, crumpling their metal head until they finally stopped trying to grapple my legs, slumping to the ground.

Immediately, its comrade was on me, trying his best to shove me back, but now that I was on stable ground, there was nothing he could do. I had a good half a foot on him, and while his punches were starting to get through my armor, I was still relatively undamaged.

After taking two hits, I was finally ready to hit back, so I backhanded his guard open as he swung wild, balled my fist, and slammed it into the patch of bullet holes in his chest. The weakened armor crumpled, and as I hit him again and again, it gave out entirely, allowing me to slam my fist into his chest and tear out a whole string of connected tech. Sparked jumped out of the hole, and his left side slumped slightly, staggering him just long enough for me to grab a grenade from my belt, prime it, and punch it into the hole in his chest.

The Maelstrom goon screamed and tore at the hole with his good hand, stumbling for the full five count of the grenade, before it finally went off. The resulting explosion tore out a whole chunk of his body, spraying the area, including me, with oil, coolant, and artificial blood.

I stepped back away from the mess that I wrought, psychosomatically breathing heavily in my power armor. I quickly checked both my targets, as well as the two smaller goons that Jackie had dropped grenades on during the beginning of the fight, before turning to see how Jackie was doing. The Night City native was half-sitting, half-leaning on a broken control panel, his borg smashed face first almost all the way through it. His axe was buried in the bastard's back, the borg still sparking occasionally.

"Took you long enough," he said, his smirk audible through the comms. "Thought I was actually going to need to help."

"We can't all be as badass as you, Jackie," I said, shaking my head, before looking around the room. "You ready to move?"

"Yeah, stimpaks already done," He commented, gesturing to his side.

Somehow, I had missed a chunk of his armor being damaged, and a bit of blood spatter around it. I stepped closer to inspect it, but he waved me off.

"Seriously, Choom, already healed," He assured me. "I'm not stupid, and I couldn't stop the suit from fixing me even if I tried. You can lead us through the rest, I'll cover you."

I nodded, and together we made our way around the room, heading to our next target.