

Chapter 15: Revelations

James couldn't help but smile when the private car appeared once again outside of the DV8 Cafe. He had to cut his conversation short with Milly as he needed to get back to District One. His interface was going crazy with messages that required his attention, and his initial plans of heading back to the apartment to relax were completely dashed. Liliana had asked him to meet up, and he already had the invitation from Nexus Rigs to discuss further refinements to the Chessmaster. It made sense to do both, so the Nexus Rigs HQ was his next destination. The shocked expressions of onlookers were something he wasn't ever going to get used to, but James gave them a friendly smile as he entered the car. Before he could so much as sit down, his interface flared up again with an incoming call from Milly. Without hesitating, James accepted the call and was surprised to see that his interface immediately synced with the car, causing Milly's voice to appear from all around him as the car took off into the sky.

I hope you didn't think that we were done that easily! There are so many things we need to go through first. I can compile a list of all the E-Classers that have done jobs for me in the past, but you need to help me out a bit. Can you remember anyone else that surprised you over the last number of years? Anyone stand out in particular other than Sniper-Girl? The more information you can give me, the better!

James closed his eyes as he thought back to the previous fights he had taken part in over the years. There were a few standout people that came to mind, but he didn't particularly like them all that much back then. "Should I filter out the assholes? It's hard to know how much of their personality was just them being a dick, or a result of their circumstances?"

You should absolutely filter them out. You kept your cool over the years, so they should be able to do the same. Besides, we're going to be managing these people as a team. If you thought they weren't a fit, there's a high chance they're not going to work well with a newly constructed team. Only focus on good guys for now.

Clicking his fingers, James opened his eyes and grinned. "There's one guy that used to dominate the games. Darius blacklisted him because he wouldn't pay his cut of the winnings. He never used weapons and only did close-quarters hand to hand. What was his name?" James tried to think back and could only remember some of the silly nicknames he was given just before fights. The fighting style he employed was a sight to behold, because it was very clear to anyone that watched that he knew some form of martial arts. "There were slaps, and kicks... but when he'd get pushed into a corner, there was no mercy. Like, he'd go for the low-blows and take the cheap shots, but they still looked incredible. Can you see if you have any martial arts guys on the books? He would have been active around six years ago, I think?"

He definitely sounds familiar. I'll put out the feelers and ask my E-Classers if it rings a bell. Who else could we look at? Anyone strike you as a good support? Having Sniper-Girl at range will be great, but do you have a 'Khance' equivalent that can keep the team alive? I've yet to come across any in here... so we might just have to

compile a list of soft-skills that we'd want the person to have, and then see if we could shape them into a healer type. What do you think?

James shook his head. "They'll lack that instinct. I honestly don't know, as it's not been something I've thought about before. I'm almost at Nexus Rigs, Milly... can I call you back later to go through this?" He looked out the window and saw the gigantic pulsating skyscraper of Nexus Rigs on the horizon. Their logo and architecture looked quietly confident amongst a sea of buildings that fought for dominance. James idly wondered how the Dread Tower would compare to its peers.

Of course, I'll get working on the logistics and drawing up some lists of E-Classers. Let me know when you get the verdict from the audit. I'd rather not be the last to know about the upgrades or loan that has to be taken out by the cafe. Enjoy your date with Liliana!

Without so much as another word, Milly disappeared from the call and James was left halfway through his immediate denial. "... it's not a date!" Shaking his head with a smile on his face, he watched as the car approached a landing pad that stood halfway up the building. The surrounding cars looked incredibly sleek and luxurious, and James, not for the first time... felt immediately out of place. At least until he saw a very confused-looking Khance standing beside one car, a familiar-looking man to his side.

"Chris Spectre, an absolute pleasure to meet you!" The familiar looking introduced himself with ease as Khance followed him towards where James now stood. Before James could respond, a warning light and sound appeared, ushering them away from the private car's takeoff area. All three of them moved away with sheepish smiles before resuming the introduction. Khance just gave James a brief wave, but Chris wasn't content with just that. He practically flew into a torrent of questions regarding the fight, his enthusiasm growing more and more with each breath. James wasn't sure if it was intentional or not, but Chris unconsciously started leading the way towards the Nexus Rigs entrance. A series of staff members stood at the ready, but melted back into their positions after receiving a wave from Spectre. It was as if he said that he could handle it from here.

James couldn't help but smile at the unbridled excitement that came through Spectre's voice as he spoke. Most peculiar was that the man could answer most of his own questions before James had the opportunity to answer. "That moment on the beach was hilarious! What gave you the idea of the summoning circle? Did you notice the runes on the entrance of the Paragon's Tomb Raid? It was the same markings that teleported them into the instance. That's likely what Fibber used, but I haven't had time to properly look at it." He laughed at himself as he tried to figure out the answers. James glanced over his shoulder at Khance, who merely shrugged in defeat. Chris didn't miss that interaction and paused in his interrogation. "I'm sorry! I can get a little swept up in it sometimes. I will say, though, that you're much better company than this guy!" Chris nudged Khance gently before immediately apologising. "I'm only joking, man. Let's get inside before we get blown off this platform!"

Chris fell quiet for a few moments as he navigated them to the reception area of the building. A friendly woman smiled at their approach and pre-emptively welcomed the new arrivals. "Dayna will be with you shortly. She has asked to have you attend our Sky Bar on the top floor. She will start the showcase later this evening, which she has passed on an open-invitation to you both." The receptionist smiled warmly at both Chris and Khance, before her eyes flickered over to James, who stood awkwardly on one side. Chris gestured at both himself and Khance. "You're more than welcome to join us. I know Dayna would definitely love to corner you for a chat!" Behind him, Khance repeated his shrug to showcase his indifference to James' decision.

"Thank you Chris, it's been a pleasure to meet you... but I've made plans to meet with Liliana, who works as an Engineer here?" James finished his sentence as a question to the receptionist who looked a little surprised at the revelation. Khance also raised an eyebrow at the mention of her name. "Liliana? Does Dayna know she's working as an Engineer?" Chris looked between Khance and James with a wide grin. "I feel like there's a story here, and I'm definitely on board for it! Sorry, could you inform Liliana we'll all be in the Sky Bar?" Spectre requested from the receptionist, who happily started tapping away at a series of unseen buttons.

James didn't have time to protest as Chris already set off toward the elevators. Khance just chuckled as he followed him, jutting his chin in Chris' direction to indicate that they should both just follow on after him. With a quick check of his interface, to make sure that Liliana wasn't waiting somewhere else for him, James followed the two men and realised that Chris had resumed his interrogation. "Are you a fan of Artifice? Was it Khance that got you into it?" Spectre laughed as he gestured at James' outfit before sharing a smile with Khance, who looked to be a little uncomfortable. James finally found his voice and was honest with him. "Haven't had the pleasure, and didn't actually know that Alex played it? Is that how you two met?" He asked, which resulted in Spectre looking surprised. Khance reached past him and repeatedly tapped the button to summon the elevator to their floor.

Chris looked between the two of them before exhaling slowly with his trademark smile still fixated on his face. "Looks like I've gone and put my foot in it, haven't I?" Before he could continue, Khance turned back to him with a grimace on his face. "No, you haven't. You can stop talking at any time." James stood awkwardly between the two of them, wondering why there was suddenly an air of animosity. Spectre wasn't one to let it go though as he turned to James. "You're really here to see an Engineer?"

The elevator doors opened and Khance was the first to walk through. His shoulders were slumped in defeat as he let out what could be described as the longest sigh of exasperation. Spectre ignored the display as he joined the Paragon in the elevator, with James last to enter. The lecturer from Reaper University swiped his wrist against the control panel and selected their destination. James glanced over at Khance with a look of concern as he answered Spectre. "Yes, I'm here to see Liliana. She wanted to run me through some potential upgrades for the Chessmaster... and I think maybe a contract renegotiation with Nexus Rigs." As soon as he said the sentence, he realised how presumptuous it sounded and tried to correct himself. "Nox renegotiated earlier, so I guess it was just going to be a chat about my performance the other night!"

Chris clapped his hands and gave James a genuine smile before he leaned in close. "Milk them for all they have, they've plenty of money!" His laugh was infectious as he gave Khance a sidelong glance. "I could have sworn you were here for Dayna's intervention! I had to lie to this guy and pretend that we were going to be doing a tutorial today, just to get him to come along." Chris used his thumb to point at Khance over his shoulder who whirled around in a mixture of shock and horror. Spectre wasn't done though as he looked straight at Khance with no hint of a smile on his face. "Are you prepared?"

A moment of awkward silence enveloped the room before Chris burst out laughing. "Man, you should have seen your face! You need to relax more. We're just going to have a chat!" James was incredibly confused by the back and forth between the two of them. With a glance to his right, he saw that they weren't going up to any sort of Sky Bar, but instead going down towards the factory floors. Khance also seemed to have noticed at the last moment as he turned to Chris with a strained voice. "What the hell are you up to, Spectre?"

As the doors of the elevator opened, Liliana, Dayna and Sarah Dryksell all turned around at the same time to see the new arrivals. Behind them was the most beautiful rig that James had ever seen. Chris took a step forward towards the women, and turned to look Khance dead in the eye. "Oh, yeah... it actually is an intervention. Liliana invited James so you wouldn't feel outnumbered." With that said, Spectre raised both his hands and walked off to the side, making way for Dayna who appeared with a warm smile on her face. "Alex, it's good to see you again."

Before James could say a word, Liliana appeared at his side and linked her arm with his before whispering in his ear. "Sorry about this! Mom loves dramas, and this is just classic Dayna." The Wildcard could hear Milly's voice in his head, wishing him well on his date. His eyes were staring at her arm around his, when finally, her words reached his brain. "Wait! You're Dayna's daughter?!"

The words came out a lot louder than he had anticipated, which caused every set of eyes to snap to him at that moment, including Dayna's. Liliana's mother laughed at his reaction as she welcomed him into her home. "Welcome to Nexus Rigs, Mr. Sylvester. You're just in time for dinner."