

... WELCOME TO THE SHADOWS ...

The club was packed. Punks pogoed on the ground floor, wire-thin and barely-clothed ravers danced to techno on the upper balcony. They all moved to a different rhythm—some listening to entirely different music through headphones or implants, others too drugged out of their minds to know or care. Four of the club-goers moved in sync, methodically and alertly making their way towards the bar in back from different directions.

The bar opened onto a street-level patio. A phalanx of intimidating orks in business suits, fashionable yet generic, cordoned off one wing of the patio, watching the four closely as they approached. Behind the bodyguards, a lone human sat at a table on the edge of the patio, sipping wine as if he enjoyed his private patio domain. His expensive suit and shoes practically cringed at being seen in such a dingy setting. The four wordlessly slid past the orks, glares extended on both sides, and sat down at the table without introduction.

The suited man nodded to each, a thin smile unwavering on his lips, and introduced himself simply as Mr. Johnson. "I have a target. He's arriving at SeaTac tomorrow morning, 0500 hours. He's already arranged for transportation to downtown with one of the air taxi services. I have complete schedule information, of course. I need you to be that air taxi, and to drop him off at a location to be specified once you have him in the air. Unharmred, of course. He's not a willing participant."

The four exchanged a series of lengthy glances and throat mumblings, a telltale sign they were quietly discussing the offer over their private wireless mesh network. Not a word was said aloud. Sure is a rush. Sec there will be tight. I might have an in. Air-Taxis? Rad! Let's rock!

After a few seconds, several nodded, agreeing with the voices in their heads. One of the four leaned forward, the nanotats on his bald head clashing with the color of spotlights bleeding from the dance floor, and asked the all-important question. "Compensation?"

Johnson paused, downed the last of his wine, and put the glass softly down on the table. "20,000 nuyen, twenty-five, seventy-five. Keep it totally clean, and there's an extra five K."

Another of the four—this one a lanky elf—spoke up. "Passcodes. What do you have for the air taxi's system?"

The suit looked annoyed for a moment, his posture changing, finger traveling along the rim of his empty glass. "Nothing. I know the service, the times, the info about the target; the rest is up to you."

The elf looked at his team again, silently messaging. Shouldn't be that hard of a hack. Delay his taxi, insert ours, get the guy, and bug out like it was Chi-town. It's gonna be a long night, though.

The others nodded silent approval. The bald one leaned forward again. "We're in. Beam the info to him,"—he indicated the elf with a jerk of his thumb—"and we'll see you in the morning."