

Chapter 158: Warning

I stared at the man before me blankly at his introduction. He said he was the majority stakeholder of AeroDynamic, which practically meant he was the owner and the person in charge of it.

I was completely caught off guard.

Coming into this meeting, I was expecting to talk with Jewel, their representative who attended the social event with me two days ago, not their leader.

Why in the world would the owner of an A-Class corporation want to speak with me?

In just an instant, numerous possibilities flashed through my mind. Thankfully, I quickly reoriented my mindset, as I knew to prioritize the meeting before me first.

“...Nice to meet you, Mr. Adiar. I am Rollo Halls. Will Jewel be joining us today as well?”

“Oh, please call me Titus. It is currently my vacation, after all. And no, Rollo, Jewel will not be joining us.” Titus directed a meaningful look at me.

“Then...May I ask why you wanted to see me? I'm flattered, but I'm not sure if I can live up to your expectations.”

Titus smiled and shook his head.

“Enough with the pleasantries. Let's have a straightforward conversation. What we're going to talk about stays between us. I took the trouble of arranging this meeting because of a certain personage.”

“A certain personage?”

Immediately, one man came to mind. The man who had saved me a while ago when I fell for a trap that led me out into the wasteland. I was blinded by the quick payout, thinking I had become invincible somehow, and almost paid the ultimate price for it.

This mysterious savior of mine had always been at the back of my mind. That was because I knew he was someone much more powerful than me, and there was no point in fretting over it when I couldn't do anything about it. Not unless I gave up the idea of starting a business and went to the ground, which wasn't a lifestyle I looked forward to in this world that beat you while you were down.

However, the revelation of the secret benefactor being able to even move power players from an A-Class corporation only made it more surreal. As far as I knew, I hadn't done anything back then to have drawn their attention.

Nowadays, an argument could be made for Lanus, my AI, drawing the heat to me, but it had only been completed recently. I hadn't even thought to create an AI back when he saved me.

The more I learned about this enigmatic figure, the less I understood his intentions.

"That's correct. Let's just say someone has been watching over you, looking out for your best interests, of course. Unfortunately, they are currently busy with something far away, and their hands have been tied. They wanted to pass a message to you, 'Stay low, and survive until I come back.'"

My facade couldn't help but crumble as I took on a frown.

"Are there any other details you can give me?"

Titus ruefully smiled as he sat back and shook his head.

"...If there really is danger approaching me, then couldn't the personage's allies, such as yourself, help me while he's gone?"

Again, he shook his head.

"It doesn't work like that with matters on this level. Our enemies aren't incompetent and can account for every action we take. When corporations at our level take action, they'll have checks in place against every known quantity."

"...Can you at least tell me who is after me?"

"It is hard to say. There is a long list of suspects. The only thing we know is that an opportunity for them to take action has arrived, and they will definitely take it. However, it is unlikely they want to take your life. It wouldn't benefit them in any way. You should plan accordingly with that in mind."

So they're just going to give me a cryptic warning with no info and call it a day...

"Is there really nothing else you can tell me? Like why I am even being targeted anyway, or why the personage you represent even 'protects' me if you can even call it that."

"I would love to answer you, but unfortunately, I don't have the answers you're seeking."

"Is there any advice you can give me, then?"

The man crossed his legs and brought his arms together before he answered.

"Endure. Whatever comes, your priority is to survive, and our personage will clean up the mess once he returns. Whether you have to beg and crawl or hide in the darkest corner of the world,

you should do it. Time is your ally.” His movement stilled for a brief moment. “But time is also something we have currently run out of.”

With those finishing words, Titus grabbed the circular device that had been projecting a field around them and returned it to his pocket. He then directed one final meaningful glance at me before taking his leave.

I could only watch as he went back to his family, who then began to depart together.

“Who said what?!” Claire cried out in my office as she tugged on Thorne’s sleeve.

“Titus Adiar, the effective leader and owner of AeroDynamic.”

“The company we bought our VTOLs from?” Thorne added with furrowed brows.

“Yea...”

After receiving that warning from Titus, we quickly rescheduled our plans, and I purchased the next ticket back to Elevate City.

People on the highest level were making power plays, and we were somehow caught in the middle of it. It was no laughing matter and our very lives were now on thin ice, if there was any truth to Titus’ words.

I chose to believe him, as there was no advantage for him to lie in this case. He was just so far above us that he wouldn’t need to resort to these roundtable tricks if he had malicious intentions.

“There are basically only two choices here...” Thorne muttered.

“Don’t leave us in suspense and say them, then!” Claire yelled out.

“Umm...Before that, do you know if we’re being targeted overall or just you?”

He looked me straight in the eyes.

“Here, I’ll write down a transcript of our conversation, but from the words he used, I believe it is the latter.”

I pulled up the logs from my SAID and wrote down the conversation on a physical piece of paper.

Thorne and Claire took a quick glance at it before Thorne burned the note.

"I see...Well, don't take me the wrong way, but if only you're being targeted, it makes things easier. The two choices I had were either to hunker down and weather the storm, or run and hide somewhere you won't be found. Since they are only going after you, the latter option may be better."

"If only I hide, won't they just target you guys and the company to draw me out? Even if I ignore that, it would mean everything we had built up so far would go up in smokes."

"Hunkering down against these foes will just end the same way, but with you dead as well!"

"...Titus said they likely aren't going after my life, so it should be fine!"

"Are you really going to bet on the mercy of other parties and let them decide your fate, Rollo?!"

"Thorne's right! Where there's life, there's hope. We cash out and hide out somewhere like Lion City for a few months. How long could your guardian angel possibly take to return?" Claire said as she slammed both hands down on my desk.

"I understand where you guys are coming from, but it feels wrong to give up without trying first. We could still search for allies to help us like we did for our alliance with Ferrumus Corp."

"With what leverage exactly do you have that will be able to move the top-tier corporations? Last time, we had an entire alliance to back us up, but we're on our own for this."

My gaze instantly went downward toward where Lanus, our AI, was.

"Not that! It'll just open a whole new can of worms!"

Internally, I completely agreed with Thorne and Claire's sentiment, but for some reason, I was having doubts. I felt like if I gave everything up now, I wouldn't have a chance to make a comeback for some reason. It was an intuitive gut feeling and not based on anything concrete, but I still had trouble ignoring it.

"Rollo! You have to realize this isn't worth risking your life over, right? It's not like you're in a rush, so we can just rebuild your company later."

"...There's no telling if this will happen again. Something is going on within the upper echelons. Some among them, for whatever reason, want to target me, and I don't think anything will change as long as we're in the dark about it."

"That is more reason to hide for now and investigate later when your so-called protectors come back! We can then slowly build up our strength, secretly this time. Then you can even try to ask your protector himself for answers. I don't know what's the matter with you right now, but you're too hung up on what we have right now! There's nothing wrong with grinding our way back up."

Hearing Claire's words, I felt like a splash of water was poured over me. Grinding experience points were how I built up what I had. It had awoken me to the fact I had inadvertently taken our

fast progress up the corporate ladder for granted at some point. I had felt like an unstoppable main character.

My smooth sailing so far had blinded me to the fact it was the norm to slowly expand a business, and also how we were all at the whims of those who were more powerful.

I didn't know why I was so stupid to believe our adversaries would come one at a time and would be at my level, where I could then overcome them one by one. I should've known anyone, even one of the big corps, could take action against me at any time.

This isn't a video game, where I only face enemies at my level. Wake up, Rollo! Shelve any useless ideas and focus on surviving!

As long as I had the system, I had a way to make a comeback. I could bid my time and make an explosive comeback instead.

"Understood. Let's begin packaging what we need and assign someone to take care of the company while we're gone. If we're lucky, we can come back to it unscathed. I also think it's a good idea if we finish up the power armor to bring with us."

My two friends immediately jumped into action at my words. Claire immediately barked out her plan.

"Thorne, you go pack what we need and arrange for transportation. I'll go organize the personnel shift and...find us people to replace us as the acting management."

"Okay, but where are we going? Lion City?"

"...That is kind of predictable," I said. "As impenetrable as their defenses are, I don't think they'd let me hide out in their city and draw trouble to them. How about... somewhere in Europa? There's enough countries there to get lost in."

The three of us exchanged glances and nodded in unison.

With a preliminary plan set, we all went into motion. I also quickly left the room and went to my workshop to get started on the preparations. I had recently hired a simulation expert, and it was time to put him to work so we could leave with the best equipment we could muster.

What else can I add to the power armor in a short time that can help us fend off top-tier corpo spec ops?

Issiah - ??? Corporation

"Sir, we have an update."

“I see...What have we learned about the person of interest, then?”

“Not much, sir. We couldn’t find any traces of hidden supporters or anything. All the reports were...clean.”

“Current conjecture?”

“With Abby’s help, our most likely conjecture is simply... that the person is a genius.”

“That doesn’t explain why that man had taken such an interest in them, though.”

“Apologies, sir! I’ll go dig deeper into it right away.”

“...Wait! There’s no need. Take this chance to bring them in. We’ll ask them ourselves.”

“But sir! That would al—”

“It’s fine. We don’t have to do it directly. Get Henry and his company to do it.”

“...Very well, sir.”