

Chapter 112: Business Trip

I stole glances over at the vice president of Ferrumus Corp, Bi Sun, as he continued to stare at the screens before us that showed various drone footage from around the world.

He hadn't answered for a few minutes since I mentioned a potential cooperative opportunity that would also undermine one of their rivals, Virtue Corp.

I didn't want to rush him, so I could only wait patiently while taking sips from my glass.

It was only when my cup was almost empty that he finally broke his silence.

"I believe there is some merit to hearing what you have to say. I must warn you though, our company has been quite busy recently with recovering from the war and our size sometimes slows our decision-making, especially when it comes to these non-urgent matters."

I swallowed as I processed what he was saying. I believe he was saying, in the typical corpo roundtable fashion, that his company was divided on the matter regarding their rivals and this wasn't something he could decide alone.

"Shall we arrange a meeting for us to discuss in detail, then?" I asked.

"Acceptable." He took another sip of his drink. "I can arrange a meeting in two days, at our branch headquarters. Here are the details."

I quickly read over the file he sent for the time and place. There wasn't anything special consideration I had to take note of except for how to get to the meeting place. Inside the file, there were security codes and a warning to arrive no earlier than fifteen minutes.

It was so detailed because Ferrumus Corp's branch headquarters wasn't actually in Aegis, but in a separate space station that orbited Earth. Without following the instructions with the relevant security codes, any ship that approached them would be blown to pieces. That wasn't even something I had to be worried about right now because I didn't even have a ship to bring me there in the first place!

Not long after he sent me the meeting details, his daughter ran back toward him from the neural pods. Seeing how it wasn't likely for us to speak further, I silently slipped away and went back to our group's seats.

I nodded at Amos, who seemed relieved nothing had gone wrong while I communicated with Thorne about our upcoming plans. We silently spent the remaining time there until our shuttle came to bring us back.

As soon as we boarded the shuttle, I turned to Amos.

“Do you know any pilots we could hire within a day or two?”

I had tried searching for a ship to get to Ferrumus in two days while we had waited for the shuttle, but all rental services needed to be booked a few days in advance to schedule a pilot. If we wanted to fly there on such short notice, we would have to convince one of the other ships to ferry us there or find a pilot ourselves and rent a ship.

“Hmm...”

He wordlessly sent over a payment request for five thousand credits for consultation fees. Once I paid, he sent over several contact information.

With nothing better to do while our shuttle ferried us back, I got to work and began reaching out to our potential pilots.

Two days later, we headed for the rental company in the early morning. We were all decked in either power armor or spacesuits as we prepared for our trip today.

When we got there, a tall woman was already waiting for us outside the rental office in a skintight spacesuit.

“Nice to meet you in person, Priya.” I swiftly greeted our pilot for the day.

“Sir,” she said as she sized us up, especially at our power armor.

She didn’t seem to be a talker, so we quickly went inside to finish the procedures of the rental. It wasn’t complicated on my end when I had ample funds to place as a deposit and our pilot had the proper licenses, but our pilot insisted she inspects the ship herself before we finalized the deal.

The employee at the office led us past a security gate where there was no artificial gravity on the other side. We barely had time to adjust to the lack of gravity as the employee didn’t loiter and headed straight to the nearby elevator, where they entered a bunch of commands into the terminal before hurrying us in. I watched the elevator go up several floors and then laterally for some time before it came to a full stop.

The doors opened to a spacious hanger where a small ship was floating in the center, with several chains keeping it in place. Priya didn’t wait a second before jumping off the ground, floating up toward the gunmetal grey ship.

She brushed her hand across its hull as she made her way around it, using the propulsion system in her suit. It shot out gusts of air through various exhausts on the suit to help her navigate through the zero-g environment. She circled the ship once before heading toward a hatch and turned back to the employee who had guided us here.

“Open it up.”

Even through the helmet of the spacesuit, we could all feel her impatient gaze. The employee quickly floated up toward her and entered the passcode into a terminal next to the hatch. As soon as it opened, Priya rushed in, followed by the helpless employee who had to keep watch over their company’s equipment.

The figure of both of them disappeared, and we didn’t dawdle any longer as we moved to catch up. I also took this time to test out the modified jetpack I had equipped our power armor with to propel myself up.

The powered armor was connected to my SAID, so to activate the jetpack, all I needed was a simple mental command.

I felt a vibration as it ejected an electric pulse that pushed me upward. I made sure to start on the lowest power setting, but it was enough to propel me at the same speed as the previous two. I glanced down at Thorne and sent him a quick message to try it out as well, and the two of us took a minute to test it out before we entered the ship.

Although we had rented one of the smaller ships, it was still sizable compared to the aircraft that operated in the atmosphere. These spaceships were designed to travel longer distances that typically took days to months, which meant they were at least equipped with several crew cabins and a mess hall.

When we passed through the hatch, we found ourselves in a corner of the cargo bay, right next to a corridor that led further into the ship. The walls had proper labels, informing us where each path led.

Taking a look around the cargo bay, we saw Priya just about to finish her inspection as she circled the spacious hold. She floated by us without a word and made her way further into the ship, following the signs for engineering.

We were truly out of our element, so we left it entirely to her to inspect the ship as we quietly followed. We still had ample time before our meeting in the afternoon, and it was better to listen to the professional in these cases.

The inspection didn’t last as long as I thought. Half an hour went by and we exited the ship. Priya turned to me and declared the results.

“All good, sir.”

I held in a sigh of relief and turned to the employee.

“Thank you for your time. I will sign the document now.”

I sent the employee the completed forms, and they quickly sent me the access codes and handed me a physical key to the ship.

“Thank you for choosing to do business with us, sir. As written in the contract, this ship will now be your responsibility for the next week. If you encounter any issues, do not hesitate to contact us and we can have a repair team en route at the best market rates.”

I nodded along and let her list off several other warnings and precautions before watching her exit the hangar. They had made me sign a week-long contract at the minimum or else they wouldn't rent it to me, so I don't plan on bringing any more business to them. Even if I found myself needing repairs, I would search elsewhere. With the rental complete, we wasted no time and boarded our new ride along with our pilot.

Normally, only the crew came through this hangar and they would go pick up their guest at a specified boarding area, but since we were already here, there was no need for the redundant fanfare.

Most of us settled in the mess hall, where there was ample space for us to sit together, while Priya and Brian went to the cockpit. There was only enough space there for two there, and Brian had been interested in watching. We needed someone to keep an eye on the external hire, anyway, so that left the remaining five of us together.

Our pilot truly wasted no time as we quickly heard her voice over the ship-wide intercom.

“All crew, ready for takeout. ETA of the trip is one hour and eight minutes.”

We all fumbled around our seats and strapped ourselves into the hard metal chairs around our table. There were a few pods beside us that looked similar to the virtual reality ones, but they were only used when the ship was performing high-g maneuvers. As our trip was short, we all stuck to the seats around the table.

A minute after her announcement, we felt the ship accelerate, and I quickly pulled up the footage from the cameras attached to the exterior of the hull. I watched as our ship ventured into the expansive darkness of space, leaving Earth behind. Behind us was the dock we were departing from, which seemed more like a honeycomb from this distance.

I tried spotting other ships, but the vastness of space combined with the darkness made it hard to spot anything.

“Peng is bored.” A voice rang out from across the table.

“Shut—” I held up a hand and interrupted Andrew.

“Why don't we all play something? How about some card games?” I suggested.

The people around the table exchanged glances before they all nodded. I booted up the virtual program, invited all of them, and began going over the rules.

It had been a tense week with all of us venturing into unfamiliar territory, so it was nice we could somewhat relax here. There was no one else onboard, and they didn't have to be on the lookout for anyone popping up suddenly.

I settled on a game of poker, as I wanted to brush up on my ability to hold my facade before going into a negotiation with a big corp like Ferrumus. Maybe it was just wishful thinking that a game of poker would help, but I really wanted it to go smoothly so we could go home and end this stupid war we were dragged into.

I couldn't grind any experience points up here and I wanted to get to the next level so I could round off another skill to plus ten.

I bought up my status screen once I folded an early hand.

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|--------------------------|--|
| Status | |
| Level: | 23 |
| EXP: | 2130/2300 |
| Musculoskeletal: | 211 |
| Neural Reflex: | 65 |
| Visuomotor Coordination: | 87 |
| Endurance: | 59 |
| Sensory Perception: | 127 |
| Upgrade Points: | 0 |
| Upgrades: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Stealth +7● Hacking +5● Cybernetic Engineering +10● Stealth Technology +10● Software Engineering +8● Electrical Engineering +10 |
| Enhancements: | SAID: Zenitech Sebastien v2 Bio-Coprocessor: SocialCorp Lightning II Optics: Mirage Tech Clear-Sights mk.12 Cyberarm (Left): Nova Tech Heracle Mk. 3 Cyberarm (Right): Nova Tech Heracle Mk. 3 Auditory: SocialCorp Echo IV |

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| | Vocal: SocialCorp Orator III Cardiovascular: BioGen Lifepump 5 Sensory: Halls Corp Argus Elite Custom Additional Processing: Halls Corp Custom ST Miscellaneous: Halls Corp HSU Custom Shade |
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Just as another round was about to start, an alarm blared out from the intercom, bewildering all of us. None of us were trained in how to operate a spaceship, so if anything went wrong, there wasn't a whole lot we could do.

Priya's voice soon rang out.

"There's a ship that's—" We could hear the distress in her voice before it got cut off by the violent shaking of the ship that threatened to throw us onto the floor.