

Chapter 166: Ceres Station

Time was ticking, and I only had one night before I had to return to my cage.

Immediately after I parted from Cora's hotel, I inspected the people around me. There were mostly corpos with a few miners in the mix, but they kept their distance and moved along quickly.

I had the time while I stowed away on the spaceship to think up plans for different scenarios on what to do once I got onto this space station and it was time to carry out the best one I came up with.

The main objective was to get into contact with my allies, but I needed access to a terminal first. Out here in space, my wireless connection didn't seem to work, nor would I trust accessing the local network using my SAID.

That was why I searched for my mark, for someone who was distracted.

It didn't take me long to find a corpo, who was busy enjoying a cup of coffee walking by, and I quickly closed the distance while in active camouflage. I spotted his handheld terminal hanging out from his pocket.

With invisibility, it was a piece of cake to swipe the terminal, or so I thought. Just as I gently took it out of its owner's pocket, I spotted a strap attached to the inside of the corpo's jacket. Thankfully, my cyberarm had multi-tools, and I cut the terminal loose.

After evacuating to somewhere with less traffic, I instantly turned to my prize. The terminal was locked, but it only managed to stop me for a few dozen seconds before I was in. The first thing I tried was to access the greater web. I wanted to leave messages in the throwaway mailboxes my intel department used for informants.

However, something came up that I didn't expect. The network the terminal was connected to was isolated to this space station only.

In hindsight, it made sense the web wasn't freely connected between space stations. The delay was huge and made it inaccessible to the average person. After looking around in the intranet, I found several places called comms offices with specialized terminals that would facilitate long-distance communications.

The problem was that they were all operated by various corporations that I wasn't familiar with.

Either way, I needed to code my message...I just need money to make use of their services—Or hack a corporate network in record time and be back for my ride by morning...

I let out a sigh as I redirected my sights back to the pedestrians around me.

I know one of the obvious uses when one could access stealth technology is for stealing. I just can't believe I will still have to resort to it after becoming the boss of a corporation.

This time, I investigated my targets a little more thoroughly for where they kept their money. I knew most corpos still carried cash or else all their transactions could easily be traced. No proper corpo would want to make it that easy for their enemies or their superiors to track their improper usage of funds. I just had to find where they hid it on their person.

It was at times like these that I wished wallets were still popular. These sneaky corpos all hid their cash carefully, as if they were afraid of getting robbed...Well, I guess they had a valid reason for that.

As I inspected all the corpos I came across, I noticed almost every single one of them was armed. It made me do a double take of the station, half expecting firefights to be common.

Well, I guess can't be too careful around all the schemers these people work with on a daily basis.

I finally came across a fast-food restaurant where I spotted a corpo using cash for his transaction. My eyes followed to where he returned the change and I judged that his suit's inner pocket was doable, considering he was about to take a seat. A stationary target was a good target.

I waited until he got his food and began eating to take action. I elegantly went to pick his pockets, or so I thought in my mind, and retrieved a small stack of plastic bills. I didn't hesitate to swipe his firearm as well.

It felt off traveling the streets without being armed, and I frankly missed the weight of my trusty Suri.

I'm sorry whoever you are. Hopefully, I won't cause you too much inconvenience.

After exiting the store, I had my new handheld terminal direct me to the closest comms office. After navigating through the narrow corridors of this space station, I came across a store with no visible products inside, but many people lined up before the few counters at the center.

I hid in a corner and let my Shade rest. Then I donned the guise of a random passerby I recorded before joining the line inside the comms office.

"Greetings, sir. Please remember to download our app and fill out everything before your turn at the counter," a lady immediately stepped forward to greet me.

I did as instructed and opened up their website on my new handheld terminal. The line moved smoothly, and it was my turn in no time.

"Sir, please confirm the details of the order. Please note we do not offer refunds."

I double-checked the terms that went on about how they weren't responsible for any losses due to connection interruptions or lag before paying the clerk the fee to use their network.

Once I had access, I swiftly sent off the inconspicuous message I had compiled to one of the many dummy accounts that our company's intel department made use of. The message barely contained any details and even if it somehow got intercepted and deciphered, they would barely figure anything out.

With that done, my heart could finally be at ease. I stepped back out into the greater Ceres Station, or so I would have liked, but a nearby gunshot instantly put me on alert. I raced back inside the communication office for cover.

I once again lamented at the fact I didn't have any of my usual equipment. I instinctively wanted to deploy my Nyes, but I only had the pistol I pilfered. I quickly deployed a scan with my Argus instead and found some fighting outside between parties I had no information on.

I glanced back at the rest of the store, where the crowd was calmly taking cover, and the gates of the store soon came down to block off any potential threats. Now that I was stuck inside with this many eyes, it wasn't an option for me to turn on my active camouflage either. That would just get me scrutinized later. The risk of being exposed wasn't worth it.

Once the defenses were fully online, the clerks actually continued to process their customers while several security guards came out of the back.

Gunshots could still be heard on the other shield of the shutters, but on this side, it was business as usual. However, I kept track of the situation outside and I knew everyone here would be in for a big surprise soon. I quickly positioned myself toward the back of an area where cover was accessible.

The sound of something being lit up could be heard, and the sparks by the front doors soon drew everyone's attention. A thermite of some sort cut through the gates within seconds, and the doors came crashing down.

Several men decked out in combat gear without any identifying marks charged in and were greeted by a torrent of bullets from the guards and mounted turrets. The fighting this time got the crowd moving. Screams could be heard amidst the chaos of all the corpos diving for cover or making their escape.

I had taken up prime real estate behind the counters as a decent chunk of the crowd rushed to do the same. Now that I was stuck here, there wasn't a whole lot else I could do lest I turned on my Shade and escape. I didn't have any Nyes to monitor the fighting detail for me, so I could only hunker down.

The fighting only intensified for several more moments before an authoritative voice from the speakers. The voice immediately silenced the scene all at once.

“Cease this foolishness. Your target has already taken the back doors of our establishment. Leave. Now. Else you make an enemy out of us. Don’t think I don’t know who your employers are.”

With only a brief moment of delay, the two parties fighting disengaged at the man’s words.

The strange scene reminded me of school, where the teacher came in to break up the fights between kids. Except here, both parties had to drag away the bodies of their fallen brethren.

After the fighting ceased, the place was cleaned in short order and everyone went back about their day.

Not even in this space station is there any peace...

I shook my head as I headed out. The short encounter was a wake-up call to me regarding how vulnerable I was. Without my equipment, it became increasingly hard for me to navigate gunfights.

Unfortunately, just my Argus scanner wasn’t enough. Everyone was armed in such tight enclosures that it was hard to gauge what was hostile or not until it was too late.

As I glanced at the time, I found I still had half the night left until it was time for my ride back with Cora. There was no point in wasting any time. I still needed to make as many preparations as possible for when I received a reply back from my allies. The performance I just had wasn’t up to standard.

Since I have the time, I should make what I don’t have!

I searched around in the intranet and found a hardware store. It wasn’t anything like the big stores down on Earth, as real estate was obviously in scarce supply here. I entered into a room where I could touch the ceilings. It was around the same size as the comms office, but appeared much smaller due to all the shelves taking up space.

“Looking for anything in particular?” A husky voice came out from the woman behind the counter.

“Yes...I was wondering if I bought some parts from you. Can I make use of your facility here?” I glanced down at my remaining funds and counted a modest amount of nine hundred credits.

“For a fee, of course.”

She stared back at me plainly for a few moments before responding.

“Two hundred credits an hour.”

That is highway robbery...on Earth, at least. I have no idea what the prices worked around here. This type of stuff wasn’t listed on the intranet.

“Hmmm, how long until the end of your shift?” I asked.

“Nine in the morning, and just so you know, I’m not interested in going anywhere with you.”

I discreetly glanced over at the time in the corner of my vision and it showed two in the morning.

“How about four hundred for the rest of your shift?”

“Five hundred.”

Hmm, four hundred should be enough for the parts I need.

“Very well.”

Raven - Nova Tech

“Understood, sir. I will continue to monitor the prisoner.” Raven saluted to the person on the other side of the screen right before the call disconnected.

She then let out a sigh as she walked herself out of the room.

“Any orders from above?” a masculine voice resounded right next to her as soon as she stepped out of the doorway.

“Ah! Commander Poltrix, you surprised me.”

“...Apologies.”

“Oh no, it’s my fault for being distracted. And no, there haven’t been any new orders. We are to continue as it is.”

“You are to continue staying here just to monitor that annoying brat?”

“...Yes. Anyway, I’m going to check on him. He’s still in his room, right?”

The commander wordlessly nodded, and Raven proceeded to make her way toward the room assigned to their captive.

She had spun a story and told Rollo that he was being protected here for his own good, and she had to keep up the act. She was going to report that it was still too dangerous for him to leave the facility. At least that way, he would keep quiet and remain easily managed for the time being.

Raven soon arrived before Rollo’s room and took a moment to recompose herself before knocking.

“Hello, Rollo, can I come in?”

One second, then two seconds passed, and no one answered.

Even after five seconds or ten seconds, no one answered.

“Hello? Rollo?”

After half a minute of nothing, Raven opened the door on her own initiative. Her eyes widened when she found it completely empty.