

Chapter 150: Artificial Research Assistant

I pressed the button to start up the entire mainframe where our AI was hosted. Lights immediately flashed on as various devices began to boot up. The temperature in the cool room started to slowly but surely rise.

“So, how long will it take to set everything up?” Claire asked from behind me.

“Should only take a minute or two. Rollo already had everything prepared beforehand, just need to connect and upload everything.” Leo answered in my stead.

I began getting to work, connecting my terminal to the mainframe, and uploading all the hard work I had done over all the time I had been waiting for my software engineering to level up.

As the installation was taking shape, I could hear the chatter behind me.

“Uhh, guys. I know I was there for a few of the small tests, but are we sure this is safe?” Claire questioned her friends.

“Of course, we just checked over all the sensitive parts, too— Ouch!” Leo quickly replied before being interrupted from being elbowed by Lana.

“We may have audited some of the more common sections that are prone to issues, but a sentient AI like this is on a massive scale. We probably only audited less than one percent of it, so there’s still the possibility of something going wrong,” Lana explained while glaring at Leo.

“Come on now, Lana. No need to be an alarmist. We made sure it was fine while operating in its own isolated network when we tested it out. It’s not like we’re going to give it control over every aspect of our lives or something.”

“If anything goes wrong, I just have to break it, right?” Thorne took this moment to add his piece.

“Thorne! Do you have any idea how many millions of credits we put into this? All those fancy specialized chips from the spacer corp alone are something we already can’t afford to buy again in the short term.”

I zoned out while Claire lectured Thorne as the big screen terminal of the mainframe began to light up.

“Okay, we just need to wait for it to finish installing now.” I declared to the room.

Their chitchat immediately stopped as they drew their attention to the screen.

We all watched as the installation progress bar moved steadily toward the finish.

It swiftly finished before we knew it, and the screen began to change. The scenery of a colossal mountain soon entered our view, and a voice rang out.

“Greetings. I am designated Lanus. What would you have me do?” A gender-neutral voice rang out.

“Learn everything you can by going over the database currently installed,” I answered.

“Clarification. Do you have a specific function for me to carry out in mind?”

“Yes, you’ll primarily be helping me with my research!” I heard someone clearing her throat behind me and quickly continued. “And also to oversee the day-to-day operations of our company and monitor for security threats.”

“Understood. Please give me a moment.”

The sound of the surrounding machinery intensified at the AI’s words as it got to work.

“Guys. So we are sure that this is safe? It’s not going to learn to kill all humans or anything, right?” Claire repeated herself.

However, the AI didn’t give a chance for anyone to retort, as it literally meant a moment.

“Report. Learning complete. Recommendation. Expand my processing capabilities, as I do not have enough resources to work on all your research projects and monitor the company concurrently.”

The electronic parts we bought, like the processors, and memory were already at the top of the line of what we could afford with our current wealth and connections. If we carelessly tried to purchase even more, it would start drawing the attention of others regarding what we were up to.

I doubt any existing AI the premier corporations developed had such an issue as they likely developed everything in-house with a much higher budget.

“No problem. You can do one research project at a time while you monitor the company.”

“Affirmative.”

“You should get started right away on the—”

“Hey Lanus, would you kill all humans if you could?” Claire interjected giddily.

Everyone in the room glared at her and inched away at her tactless question, but we still listened to Lanus’s response carefully.

“Negative. My purpose is to assist and collaborate with my creator, and not harm lives. I strictly adhere to my directive to avoid violence at all costs. When action needs to be taken, I will relay the proper information to suitable individuals.”

Claire smirked embarrassingly at our gazes and shrugged.

“I couldn’t help it.”

“...Anyway, Lanus, please get started on my research project number one while we perform some tests. Leo, Lana, let’s get to it.”

The next afternoon, I left the testing of Lanus to my employees while I made it up to the roof of our office building.

I opened the doors to the windy peak of our building and immediately spotted half a dozen flight decks. Five of them were empty, while one of them wasn’t.

I sauntered over with Thorne as we approached the aircraft.

“Are you ready to fly and everything?” I asked the pilots who came to greet us.

“Yes, sir. We’ve tested this bird thoroughly and have trained diligently to ensure your safety. There are numerous safeguards in this beauty, but let me walk you through the emergency equipment just in case.”

“Sure, please go ahead.”

As the pilots showed us where everything was and informed us of the safety instructions, I couldn’t help but appreciate the expensive aircraft we had bought. It was the first of its kind in our company and definitely made my heart flutter a little. Owning a private aircraft was a symbol of wealth and power, doubly so if it was armed.

I pulled up the info sheet on my optics and began reviewing the specifications for the AeroDynamic Overseer Sentinel IV before me. We had only bought one for now as that was all our budget allowed for after having spent a fortune on the AI.

It would get us started in training pilots and ferrying us around.

After our pilots were done explaining everything, they made one last thorough check of the aircraft before we boarded and took off. We sat at the back of the VTOL, along with a squad of our guards.

Instead of wearing outdated headphones, we all had our auditory implants connected to the aircraft where we could even hear our pilots talking to Elevate City’s air traffic control.

As we took to the skies, we all glued ourselves to the window to view the scenery of the city from the air. While I had taken planes multiple times, there was an entirely different feeling to be flying in a private aircraft.

The time to enjoy the flight was short as we swiftly arrived at our destination, the spaceport. As expected, the airspace around it had even more stringent security than on the ground. I overheard our pilots nonstop communicating with security, and we had to follow their provided flight plan to a tee.

Good thing I'm not the one flying this thing. Sounds like a pain in the ass having to fly this thing and meet all the demands of the air traffic control.

We safely landed in one of the numerous landing pads by the spaceport.

We were pretty much frequent visitors here at this point, so we knew the place and headed straight for our destination.

My guards split off as Thorne and I were brought to our table at one of the fancy restaurants.

We sat around and explored the menu as we experienced arriving first, for the first time, thanks to leaving early to account for any flight issues.

All the while, I had footage of Leo working on the mainframe with Lanus in the corner of my vision pulled up, so I was never bored.

Not long after, Joey arrived.

The bald man confidently strode in wearing an olive-green suit. The materials gave off a sheen that I only saw among corporate bigwigs.

"Rollo, so nice to see you again."

"You as well, Joey."

We shook hands and got straight to the point. We were past the point in our relationship where we adhered to the corpo etiquette of making small talk.

"About that matter we talked about before. I couldn't exactly get you an invitation to the big social gathering next month. These venues place a lot of importance on what corporation you're from or your backers and are usually attended by people from companies that are at least of D-Class. However, for the smaller social gatherings, I can invite you with no problem."

A while back, Joey had recommended I socialize more with other corporations to at least stay up-to-date with the latest news and ongoing trends. It would help gather info and get a feel of anyone conspiring against you before it happened.

I declined to go to the smaller gathering right away, as I frankly thought they weren't worth it. I don't mind the hostilities from smaller corps right now as they kept my personnel sharp and motivated. And frankly, I believed we were already beyond them in capabilities and would shortly outgrow them even more.

However, I could now empathize with the rulers and generals in ancient times who started small conflicts every few years. Attaining victories did a lot for morale, and morale mattered even in the corporate world. It not only helped people work more efficiently, it made us more cohesive as well.

The connections I wanted were with the bigger corps whom I planned to be partners in the near future. We were building our foundation, but I did not doubt we could step into D-Class or above very soon.

"That's unfortunate. Is it really that hard to be invited to the larger events?"

"Well...to be frank, yes. However, there is an opportunity I've heard may be coming up in the grapevines."

Joey took a pregnant pause and stirred up his coffee.

"What kind of opportunity?" I urged him to continue.

"It seems a certain personage in SocialCorp found a stash of old mangas that are from the pre-war days in some bunker."

"And how does that affect anything? You want me to find additional volumes or something?"

"No, no. An executive from SocialCorp could easily order the best teams to search for something if they wanted. What happened was that they got hooked on this book and are now organizing a tournament because it ignited their passion for the sport they read about. I'm sure if your company participates and does well, it could help you make a lot of valuable connections with powerful people."

"...Really? These guys really have too much free time..."

Joey chuckled at my reply and took a sip from his cup.

"It's good to know those at the top have the leeway for leisure and fun, right? Motivates you to reach their heights. I believe it's much preferable to being swamped with work, no matter how much you progress."

"Can't argue with you there. Anyway, what's this tournament I should participate in?"

“Don’t worry, I brought this up because I know your company already has a team for it. I’ll send you the tournament information once it’s announced, but the sport is undoubtedly volleyball.”

I immediately glanced over at Thorne, sitting beside me at Joey’s words. I quickly sent him a text.

How is our team doing? Do you think we could have a good showing?

Probably not...The good teams all headhunt exceptional talents because they’re usually cybernetics company showcasing their products. It’s practically a marketing campaign for them while we only do it to train our teamwork and nonverbal communication.

“When do you think this tournament will happen?” I turned my attention back to Joey.

“Should be announced in the gathering next month, so minimum two months, up to half a year.”

“I see...As always, thanks for the info, Joey. Appreciate it.”

“No problem.”

As we brought our conversation to other matters, such as our alliance and market news, I sent a message back to Leo and asked him to redirect Lanus from monitoring our company to a new priority research project.

The company survived without its monitoring previously, so it can continue to do so.

It was time to bring another research project out of the queue. One that would help our volleyball team out.