

Chapter 185: A Chat

One of the bridge officers guided me at Captain Diaz's command to the meeting room nearby. It was a cozy room that could fit a dozen people. At the center of the meeting table was a holographic projection of the miniature ship that replicated the one we were on.

It was apparent the executives on the ship normally used this room to discuss important matters, but I had it all to myself now. The aide, who had guided me, swiftly departed after placing down a cup of water for me.

I approached the seat at the head of the table and sat down. I examined the terminal that controlled the holographic projection, but it was password-protected. Breaching the terminal wasn't something I was dumb enough to do while on my ally's ship. I could only sit around and wait.

With nothing to do, I glanced around the room, noting where the cameras were hidden and any other defensive turrets that could pose a threat to me. I wasn't sure what to say to my guardian angel. He had been protecting me for a while, but I had no idea what his intentions were. If the discussions soured, I had to be on the lookout and prepared to escape.

I'm sure Thorne realized as well, so he should be sizing up the bridge as well.

What could my guardian angel possibly want to talk about? He was fine with staying silent until now.

I went over the scenarios where he would need to talk to me. He may just want to reprimand me for my bold moves. However, I didn't think he would be that emotional of a person.

In that case, he may have some important news for me. Maybe inform me about the enemies that were after me. It was evident my protector was busy with his own matters, so this may be him telling me to watch my own back.

There were many other reasons as well. In the first place, I wasn't sure why he even protected me. The former Rollo was from an orphanage and should have no connection with anyone who was that important.

Was I his long-lost bastard or something? If that is so, it would make sense why he's keeping his assistance so low-key. He may have his own family, and it would be awkward to take care of his illegitimate child.

Still, I have no intention of recognizing anyone as my father. I won't recognize anyone in this world as my father. I wanted to take control of my own life.

After some time of thinking through the different scenarios, I found the cup I was sipping on empty. I stood up and went to the beverage dispenser. I went over the options and, as I

expected, there was no milkshake option. I settled for an old-fashioned coffee instead, partly because I believe my powerful allies should have access to authentic coffee beans.

My assumption was correct.

I briefly took in the aroma and took a sip. In the middle of doing so, the room's lighting suddenly dimmed. Then a bright projection materialized on the center of the table, replacing the previous image of the ship.

The holographic image depicting the back of a figure could be seen. The person was controlling over a dozen robotic arms that helped him work on something in front of him. I couldn't get a good look as he was turned the other way. The scene reminded me of the cybernetic clinic when I worked on a patient.

"So. We meet at last, Rollo Halls." The man's deep voice rang out from every speaker in the room.

"Yes, but I don't think it's our first meeting. I believe the last time was in the wasteland. I still haven't said my thanks for that incident, so let me do it now. Thank you. You saved both my life and Thorne's."

"How are you so sure it's me and not someone else, or even one of my agents?"

"Hmm...A gut feeling."

"A gut feeling? Ha ha ha. I'd expect a researcher to be more rational about it, but I guess you're not a purebred scientist in that sense. Well, you're right."

I thought back to my first counter with my mysterious savior. I was lying prone back then, waiting for him to pass by me before I ambushed him. He didn't fall for my tricks and came right up to me and spoke with a voice changer of some sort. Back then, all his tech seemed so mysterious, but I now knew he hadn't even revealed a fraction of his capabilities.

He had told me to keep growing, and that we had similar goals. I didn't even know my goals for certain back then, so I thought he was just bullshitting.

However, now that I knew he had such a powerful background, he should've had every bit of information about me prior to our encounter. It wouldn't be surprising for him to know me better than I did.

"So...what did you want me to talk to be about? I assume you're not someone who has a lot of free time, so it must be important, right?"

The man didn't respond. He simply continued controlling the dozens of robotics arms to work on his little project.

He only did so for five minutes before he stopped, but it felt like an entire hour.

“I should have told you the last time we met. Our goals align. That is all.”

“...Really? Am I the only person in the entire world who has similar goals to yours or do you help everyone who shares these vague objectives of yours? How come I don't know anything about these goals you speak of? In the first place, I don't even know your name!”

The man in the chair finally turned around at my question. I laid my eyes on his face for the first time and struggled to contain my gasp. I had wondered what my guardian angel was like for a long time, but it wasn't anything I'd imagined.

His entire face had flawlessly smooth skin, but the area around his entire left eye was naked titanium. He looked like one of the most extreme cyborgs I'd ever seen, not something I'd expect from a top corpo at all. The left eye had a menacing red glint, making no attempts to appear like an organic eye like corpo culture dictates.

Taking a closer look at the contours of his body, I had no doubt he had a full-body replacement. He was a bona fide cyborg.

He smirked upon seeing my reaction.

“Well, do forgive me. I'd rather not give you a full introduction at this point in time. For now, you can call me...NPC. As for my goals, you should already know.”

My eyes widened, having heard the name he gave me.

NPC, what in the world? Does this have something to do with QGs being quest givers, or is it a coincidence? From what I've seen, these game terms were quite retro, dating back to the era before the Great War. That was over five centuries ago. But some it was possible some of that culture resurfaced from finds in dungeons. That was the case with that SocialCorp executive who organized the volleyball tournament.

“...NPC, does that stand for something?” I asked, trying to fish for more information.

He simply smiled and gave me a knowing look.

“I see that you have a hint of what it might mean. It was a fruitful meeting. Before I go, I do have to warn you once more. Something has happened recently that has drawn the attention of every top corporation in the world. It means I'm occupied with this new turn of events as well. I have taken care of the matter with Nova Tech, but not whoever was behind them.”

“Should I lie low for some time, then?”

This time, he unexpectedly shook his head.

“No, I was able to allocate some resources back from the front lines. It should keep any corp around you from acting out, but the situation could change at any moment. I am warning you

because I want you to accelerate your growth. You need to be able to defend yourself sooner rather than later.”

“...That’s a vague request if I don’t know who is after me. Is it one or a group of corporations?”

“I can’t say... You should at least set up a base where no one can find you to weather any future storms. Maybe also a fleet to protect it in the case of an emergency and run logistics. You’re good at being hidden, correct?”

“Right...but space isn’t something I’m familiar with. It’d take some time.”

“Time is something we are all short on, but we don’t know exactly how much we have left. You should try your best to hurry things along. That is all I have to say. I hope the next time we speak again, you’ll be closer to my level.”

With that, the holographic projection disappeared and was replaced by the image of the ship once more.

I closed my eyes as I remained seated. I went through our conversation again in our head and processed everything.

He refused to reveal what goals we exactly shared, so there was nothing I could do about that. However, I could tell it was something that required me to be in power. Otherwise, he wouldn’t encourage me to grow as fast as I could. He must be hurting for allies of similar strength or something.

Even if he didn’t tell me to, I was planning on expanding my strength as well. This incident was a wake-up call. Enemies that were much stronger than me could strike at any time. I needed more safeguards. Maybe several safe houses and hidden bases like the one I was kept in.

Stealth was my advantage, and I had to fully utilize it.

Various plans began to go through my head. Plans to design self-sustainable bases inside the wasteland. Various safe houses throughout Elevate City. The idea that had the best potential was the construction of a large spaceship. It would cost tons of money that we didn’t have, but the idea of having a mobile stealth ship as our headquarters stirred up the child in me.

After thinking up a storm of various base ideas, I then brainstormed what to do with the most fundamental aspect of everything: the people. I had the cassettes figured out thanks to my AI, Lanus. We had to hurry up and produce all the relevant training materials for our personnel.

Then, to fund all of my plans, I would have to come up with more ideas to make money.

So far, I have been in the cybernetic market, with my Shade and Argus. Transportation throughout NNA was a steady income as well, but that took too much time and investment to

expand. The returns on it wouldn't be fast enough. The milkshake shop was in the same situation, so I had to come up with other ideas to make money.

I could utilize my current knowledge and create another marketable cybernetic or even venture into something new. I brought up my status screen while I deliberated.

Status	
Level:	25
EXP:	1800/2500
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 +11 ● 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 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

It couldn't be helped that my eyes were drawn to my skill with the most points; software engineering.

Hmm, back in my old work, software companies did make bank if they could make it....

With that in mind, I compiled a list of things to consider and questions I would have to ask my current head of intelligence. After all, they managed the messaging app that was our foothold in the software market.