

Chapter 114: Ferrumus Station

It took us a while to complete our makeshift repairs to the fuel leakage, as we weren't properly trained technicians, especially not under microgravity conditions. The one good thing that we had going was that we were able to measure the levels of remaining fuel quickly after we got the repairs done.

We did so by simply sending a Nye in to measure the fuel tank, saving us valuable time.

"So there's good news and bad news. Which one do you want to hear first?" Priya, our pilot, asked once she got a look at our updated fuel tank.

"Whatever, just clearly lay it all out for us."

She scoffed at my reply. "I always wanted to try saying that. Thanks for not playing along."

I shrugged, and she let out a sigh before continuing.

"Our remaining fuel isn't enough to correct our trajectory and slow us down for arrival. Not with your timeframe. If you want to make it on time, we would like to shave some mass off this ship."

"...And I'm guessing that will make the trip dangerous?"

"No, I've done it before. It shouldn't be too hard."

"Then go ahead and do it."

"You know the rental company is not going to like it, right? You'll be paying some serious fines. Probably enough to cover for a new ship."

I paused at her words.

I didn't need a connection to the web to figure out that a spaceship did not come cheap. It should be several million, at the very least. I had to weigh that against being on time for my meeting with Ferrumus Corp.

How drastically would being late affect my negotiations? They can be understanding since we got attacked, right?

On the other end of the spectrum, it would be pretty dumb if our alliance was wiped out because I tried to save a few million, so it was probably better not to take any chances.

Wait, our alliance...I'll just have them foot the bill later.

Having resolved how I would handle the financial aspect of this trip, I turned back to Priya and gave her the go-ahead to start dismantling the ship.

After following our captain's instructions for dismantling the non-vital components of the ship, we finally approached Ferrumus Corporation's space station. It was their Earth branch headquarters, so it wasn't surprising to see it had a small fleet protecting it, along with numerous defensive emplacements.

Our ship pathetically limped into range and immediately received a transmission from their traffic control.

"Halt, you are not permitted to get any closer until you state your business." A voice rang out from the speakers in the cockpit.

I sent over the credentials Bi Sun had given me to Priya, who in turn, sent it over to their traffic control.

"We have a scheduled meeting at your station, transferring credentials now."

The guard at the other end of the call then asked us to connect to a video call to answer some questions. He seemed suspicious of us, and I couldn't blame them, considering the state of our ship. We were even worried about the life support systems not lasting until his questioning finished.

Once he finally believed us and granted us access to the dock, I left the cockpit to prepare for landing, as Priya hashed out the docking details.

The airlock soon opened, and we exited the half-wrecked ship. We walked through a long corridor with see-through windows, allowing us to view the darkness of space around us and the station we were approaching.

It wasn't nearly as massive as Aegis that was perched up on the space elevator, but it was still impressive, considering the place was owned and operated entirely by one corporation.

When will we have something similar?

Waiting for us at the other end of the corridor was an entourage of security officers.

"Mr. Halls, we've been expecting you. Please leave your power armor here, as they aren't allowed further in according to your security protocols," the lanky security officer said.

He had the same strange hairstyle as Bi Sun, where his head was mostly barren except for the few strands of hair that went all the way down to his waist.

This can't be a trend within Ferrumus Corp, is it?

I complied and had Brian stow our power armor away back on the ship while the rest of us continued onwards.

The lanky man with the strange hairstyle then became our guide. He led us through what appeared to be a training area, where several guards were practicing their sword swings.

“My name is Kai. Please don’t hesitate to ask me any questions while you’re here.” He said as he busied himself with a terminal beside a set of armored doors.

A short moment later, the door opened, and he gestured for us to go further in. I took another look at the guards’ training with swords of all things instead of firearms. I expected these powerful corporations would make use of more advanced weaponry instead of going backward.

As I passed by Kai, my eyes were drawn over to the sword on his hip and I instantly recognized it contained sophisticated technologies rather than being a simple blade.

“Is there a reason why you’re all using swords instead of guns?”

He smiled as if he expected this question.

“We also do employ range weaponry, like guns. It’s just that swords happen to be what our company specializes in. I can’t say much more, but trust that they are very effective in combat.”

It wasn’t long before he led us through another set of armored doors and an expansive scenery came into view. We were just navigating through indoor corridors a moment ago, but we suddenly entered into a spacious area like Aegis. The ceiling was high above, allowing room for tall buildings to be erected. Though there were no blue skies, and we were able to see the cold metal walls around the area. It was like a small campus compared to a proper city like Aegis, as it only encompassed several buildings.

“Your scheduled meeting is starting soon, so we won’t be taking any detours, but I’d be happy to take you around once later.” Our guide smiled as he watched us take in the scenery of their base.

He then took us toward the central building in the area, a building that had no roofs as it connected directly with the ceiling. As soon as we entered the building, the first thing we saw was a gigantic cherry blossom tree inside a small garden. It was encased in glass in the middle of the building. We could look up through the window to see the hallways of different floors, which all similarly had a clear view of the tree from different angles.

Kai urged us forth into an elevator, and we soon arrived at our destination on the fifth floor. Glancing one last time at the cherry blossom tree at the center of the building below us, we opened the door to the meeting room.

We were the first to arrive, so I took a seat while Kai swiftly served us tea as we sat down. He then retreated to a corner of the room, where he stood stoically. My guards, including Thorne, all stood behind me, across from Kai. Kai stared straight ahead at my guards, but we didn’t have time to feel awkward about it as the doors to the meeting room opened.

Three people walked in, an old woman and two men following behind her. I instantly recognized one of the men as Bi Sun, the vice president of this branch's office.

They took a seat across from us and the lady was the first one to open her mouth.

"I am Emma Fuda, the president of the Aegis branch, Ferrumus Corporation."

Bi Sun introduced himself next, followed by a man named Jo Tobi, who was another vice president of this branch office.

"I'm Rollo Halls. Thank you for meeting with me today. I wanted to speak to you about—"

The old lady held up a hand.

"Bi Sun and our intel department have already brought me up to date. Please tell us why we should act on this matter regarding your alliance and your adversaries."

"You should already know that Virtue Corp is involved, and they want to make headways in the food market."

"Yes, but it isn't much of a priority for us. It's not like they're entirely monopolizing all food trades from Earth." The old woman continued in a kind tone like a grandmother's, but she had a predatory glint in her eyes.

I reined myself in from taking a deep breath as I recalled the key points we had prepared.

"I understand your corporations are busy recovering from war. I believe helping us is in your best interest in that regard."

"Please do explain." She said with a smile.

"Our West Coast Agroindustry Alliance is willing to offer you generous discounts, so you may focus your efforts on different areas of reconstruction. You would no longer need to direct as much attention to your hydroponics, and at the same time, thwart Virtue Corp from a smooth recovery." I said as I sent a file with the comprehensive list of discounts we were ready to give them.

The prices barely covered our costs, so we were basically working for free for them. We were practically declaring ourselves their vassals.

"I see, we can make Virtue Corp redirect their resources on their own hydroponics while we save ourselves the trouble. Still, I do not believe this is worth us taking action."

I forcefully stopped myself from sighing. We were offering ourselves, and they were reluctant to take it. The feeling it gave me was definitely unpleasant, but it wasn't something we hadn't expected.

“There is no need for you to take action.” I took a sip from my cup while carefully observing their reaction. “What we want is for you to simply exert pressure on Virtue Corp to prevent them from getting too involved in our battle. We will take care of the rest ourselves.”

The old woman blinked blankly before exchanging glances with her peers.

“...If that is all you ask of us, then that is amenable.”

I stood up and went to shake their hands before they reneged on their agreement.

“Still, it wouldn’t do for us to do nothing at all. Allow us to cover the repairs to your ship. We won’t be able to fully restore it, but we can make sure it’s safe and functional by tomorrow. In the meantime, feel free to stay the night.”

Was that too easy? Or is this expected since we are handing them free stuff for barely any work?

The leaders of this base quickly left after that and we were led to a different building where they assigned us guest rooms. The new building appeared almost identical to the main one I was just in, with another cherry blossom tree on display in the middle of the building. The only difference was the size of the tree, which was slightly smaller.

When I entered my room, I immediately made use of the connection on this base to contact Joey to report on our success.

“Excellent! Wonderfully done, Rollo! Now we just need to counter-attack and beat down the High Gate Group.”

“...Do we even have the forces to win convincingly?” I muttered.

“Not immediately, but the fact that a powerful corporation won’t be breathing down our necks allows us to restore our strategic depth. We can discount them suddenly having reinforcements or using high technology that we were so afraid of. This fight won’t end immediately, but the end is now within sight.”

I exchanged some more information with Joey before I ended the call and contacted Claire to see how they were doing. My call just rang when a deafening explosion rocked the entire building I was in.

The alarm began to blare out and the PA system came online.

“All hands to battle stations. Enemy ships have suddenly appeared within range of the station. All other personnel are to stay in their rooms until further notice.”

The message began to loop as my guards charged into my room.

“Calm down. Let’s wait and see first.”