

Chapter 219: Eyes on the Future

We didn't immediately get a reply from Astro Forge after our little show. It was understandable, considering we were the ones who gave them two days to decide. The people I was talking to couldn't make such important decisions without consulting the actual owners, the Axion family.

Which was why our follow-up plan included shaking things up with this prestigious family. If their profile was correct, they cared more about maintaining their lavish lifestyle than aggressively expanding their business.

While some may call them dumb for their lack of ambition, in a way, I kind of respected them. They were satisfied with their place in life and recognized that the higher up the ladder they went, the stakes would increase as well. It would cause their life to be more turbulent and dangerous.

It was something I thought about as well. However, I recognized that compromising wasn't enough. Stagnation wasn't a good thing. The world changed for both the better and worse. If it was the latter, you had to adapt to it. Without sufficient strength, your fate was left to those who did have it.

Besides, this kind of dystopian world wasn't a place I wanted to spend the rest of my life in.

Not long after our discussion with Astro Forge, we steered our makeshift ship out towards the moon. It took us almost a full day to reach it, and it was not a comfortable ride.

We were in what was essentially a modified escape pod. All other areas of the ship were taken up by the various components we jammed into it, so it could increase its capabilities beyond the norm. At least that performance increase included its speed, which got us there faster.

"We're approaching orbit, sir," one of our new pilot's voice rang out in my comms.

"We're not here for sightseeing. Discreetly, get us to Astro Forge's headquarters."

While our ship moved, I glanced at the video feed showing the massive city in the distance. It was entirely covered in the characteristic soft glow of an energy shield, looking as if it was an oversized snow globe.

However, that wasn't the place we were headed for. Like many companies, Astro Forge's headquarters was in its own space station. It was in the moon's orbit, along with dozens of others. Naturally, the Axion family's residence was there as well. Their location offered them both security and proximity to the nearby city where they could have their opulence lifestyle.

At the same time, it also isolated them, allowing us to strike without worry.

We activated all the stealth systems we installed so we could sneak as close as we could. Then, we fired a shot without warning. We didn't even have to aim it as their energy shield easily soaked up the particle beams.

The point was to get them sweating, not wreak havoc.

As soon as we let off our salvo, we immediately retreated. From what I could see, the space station was definitely shaken. We could see various ships rush to sortie from the station. They came in various sizes, from large cruisers to tiny jet fighters. However, they were taking their time assembling into formation around their property while we were long gone.

Therese Axion - Astro Forge

A group of middle-aged women were chatting merrily inside a brightly lit indoor courtyard. There was a gazebo in the middle of a field of grass, with a splendid chandelier sparkling above, thanks to all the crystals used in the design. The walls in the distance were decorated with artwork from distinguished painters and if that wasn't enough to tell any onlooker how expensive the venue was, the dozens of servants doing their best to serve the ladies sitting in the gazebo would definitely do the trick.

Everyone was dressed in frilly dresses or lavish suits that were reminiscent of the Victorian era. The artificial grass and flowers that embellished the background fit strangely well, despite the indoor setting.

As the group of women sitting at the center was enjoying their social time over a cup of tea and some cloudpuff, a bulky man suddenly intruded on the scene. He was fully armed and wore a power armor, which stuck out like a sore thumb. He briskly walked through all the servants, who yelped out in surprise as they tried to get out of the way.

It instantly changed the mood in the place from merry to tense. It caused the group of middle-aged women to stop their chatter and alternate their looks between the newcomer and one of their members. They knew exactly who the man was here for.

The woman in question remained seated, looking down at her cup of tea as if nothing had happened. In reality, she was quickly scrolling through dozens of new messages and alerts.

Like this, everyone in the room silently watched until the man got close enough to pull the woman's chair for her, assisting her up. It was only then that the woman turned to her companions and curtsied their way.

“Well, ladies. It has been fun. I would love to host the gathering next week. That way, I can select the theme,” she said with a graceful expression. “Anyway, excuse me. Good day to you all.”

“Goodbye, Therese,” the women at the table called out in unison with pleasant smiles.

With that, Therese and her escort turned around and quickly made their way out. As soon as they turned their backs, the group of women resumed their chitchat immediately. The tension disappeared in an instant, and the atmosphere relaxed. That was, except for the two making their way out.

Therese picked up her pace the more she walked, and her expression turned more frosty. That lasted all the way until she boarded her ship.

“I want a status report immediately. And open up a channel to my home right away.”

A screen quickly materialized before her eyes. A moment later, the video call connected, and the screen displayed a clean-shaven man with two small children wrapped in his arms. The children, a boy, and a girl, had teary eyes and called out immediately upon spotting Therese.

“Mama!”

“Shh, it’s okay, dears. Don’t cry. Mommy will be back soon. Will you two be good and go wait for my return with Auntie Beckie?”

The two children hesitated to answer, choosing to tighten their grip on their father’s arm instead. It caused the man to smile before he gently ushered them somewhere off-screen.

“Come on now, kids. Listen to your mom.”

With the kids out of the view, Therese and the man stared at each other meaningful but stayed silent until they heard the sound of the door closing behind the children. Then all hell broke loose.

“What is the meaning of this, Peter? An attack on our home? Scaring our children? You better not have reignited your old ambitions!”

“Calm down, Tess. I swear I didn’t do anything. I left everything to each branch’s executive long ago. I only make sure they don’t embezzle and nothing else.”

“Then explain this travesty!”

“We just got a report from the Aegis branch, and we’re still sorting it ourselves. Just give us—”

“NOW!”

Holding his hands up in defeat, Peter nodded repeatedly as he agreed to the request.

Therese soon received a heavily encrypted file, but her SAID easily decrypted it within a split second. She quickly scrolled through the report and her face got redder and redder.

“Peter! Get your men under control!” Therese yelled.

When I returned to Aegis, my terminal was flooded with messages as soon as we got back into the network. It automatically filtered them based on the level of importance, so I soon went over the most urgent ones.

Having taken an entire day there and another day back, it seemed that Astro Forge was ready to give me their answer. Claire has noted that their Aegis branch director had sent over a request for a meeting and was available at any time.

Plenty of time had passed and they would have dug into everything they could about me already, so this time, I left negotiations to my employees. That allowed me to step back and watch from the background. Whatever strategy they formulated to use against me would have to be trashed.

It was in no way me putting off the tedious work to others, so I could retire into my workshop. It was just an efficient division of labor. My employees had better diplomatic skills to negotiate the fine details, while only I could research certain advanced technologies.

Like that, I peacefully returned to our base and kept their talks in the corner of my vision. In the meantime, I channeled all my excitement and passion into starting a brand-new project, spaceships.

Having worked on the ad hoc project with Grom ignited my drive to research ship-class applications of my technologies. The potential was limitless, and I spotted so many things lacking from our pathetic makeshift work.

Just because we strapped together a dozen Light Judgements didn't mean it automatically became a ship-grade weapon. The quality didn't change, only the quantity. I believe if we had a proper cannon equipped on a warship, the salvo we fired off at Astro Forge's space stations wouldn't have been dispersed by the energy shield like it was nothing.

After all, I doubt the energy shields a C-Class company employed were any good. It was likely just some outdated model that the more powerful corporations retired.

However, if there was one thing they had going for them, I would say it would be the large variety of ships they had. Their long history gave them a stable foundation to create a fleet. While large battleships were too expensive for them to maintain, I saw that they made use of single-seated fighters instead.

The concept clicked particularly well with me. We had never been numerous, and we didn't have years to build large, bulky warships. But if it were space fighter jets, it was much more doable.

As I lost myself in exploring all the options open to me, I inevitably arrived at the same problem, no matter the idea. The power supply system.

There were two solutions to this power issue. I could either buy the premade nuclear reactors companies like A-Flux incorporated sold or dedicate upgrade points to do it myself. Either way, in the short term, I would be going with the first option. What I needed to eventually decide was if the latter was worth considering.

It would take a lot of time and resources to create something comparable to what was readily available. However, it would make me reliant on an external force for vital parts.

The dilemma ate at me the entire time I was researching. When I finally couldn't take it, I decided to reach out to speak with a trusty acquaintance who was more experienced in these things.

I quickly compiled an invitation and sent it off to the leader of Authentic Corp.

Hmm, while I am at it, I should set up a meeting with someone at A-Flux Incorporated. Also, maybe Apollo Corporation, too, for their jet fuel. Ionic propulsion can only do so much, it still can't compare to the acceleration of burning high-grade fuel.

As I sent out invitation after invitation, I finally directed my attention back to the negotiation with Astro Forge. They had hashed out most items relating to the cessation of hostilities. Now it was time to move on to negotiating a business deal.

There were no eternal allies, only eternal benefits. We had to make sure to sign a win-win deal in order for things to remain peaceful between us. It was more binding than any ceasefire agreement.