

Chapter 223: Accelerating Expansion

The three heads of Aegis Branch Ferrumus Corporation before me were all experienced enough to recollect themselves quickly after hearing about my proposal to cooperate in defense technologies. They wasted no time and questioned my intentions.

“That is quite an interesting proposal, but I must ask, why?” Bi Sun said with a frown. “To be precise, why have you suddenly become so open to collaborating with us? The last time we spoke, you were more reluctant.”

“It’s simply math. We did the calculations, and you guys have proven yourselves trustworthy, and the benefits of cooperation are too great to pass on.”

My answer didn’t ease the crease on his brows and he stayed silent. Instead, his superior, their branch president, Emma Fuda, responded.

“I’m happy that you’ve gained such strong trust in us, Mr. Halls. Can you provide more specifics as to your vision of how we can cooperate? We prefer to have as much information as possible before we pass it up the chain.”

Her question basically asked us for a written proposal, so we gave her just that.

After receiving my files, everyone at the table predictably fell silent as they perused through it. No one spoke for an entire half hour.

The proposal included several different initiatives in how we could strengthen ties and share technology. While they may have had an idea of what we were capable of, we needed to write down exactly what we could provide. After all, cooperation or not, a deal still relied on it being mutually beneficial.

I didn’t hesitate to bring out one of our new trump cards to the table because I expected equal returns from them.

To be precise, my proposal offered to share our particle beam armament technology in exchange for their proprietary swords, energy shields, and mobility technologies. It wasn’t a fair trade, if that was all there was to it, so we sweetened the deal.

Instead of just sharing with them our tech or selling them the completed weapons, we asked for a joint research agreement with the intention of developing commercial products. That meant it wouldn’t only be for internal use, and we would be developing particle beams to be sold on the market. Of course, we wouldn’t be selling the best, but it still allowed others to analyze our tech in exchange for profits.

For many corporations, that would be tantamount to giving up one of their trump cards. It was our major concession in this deal.

However, I didn't really mind. Weapon technologies were one of the most sought-after for a reason. Once developed, even if it was leaked to competitors, there was only so much they could do to deal with it.

Pure firepower wasn't something you could defend against just because you knew how it worked. No one would hyperfocus their defense to deal with one weapon type, as their enemy could always use a mix of armaments.

The deal also allowed me to make use of Ferrumus Corporation's immense industrial capabilities. As a small company that hasn't had the time to build up a foundation, having access to an established player's infrastructure was a great boon. With it, we would be able to produce at a massive scale, with enormous potential in profits.

The main downside I had to live with was that we would be reliant on Ferrumus Corp for everything related to the particle beam business. It was something I had decided was necessary if we wanted to expand rapidly, which was why I even went with the idea of partnering with another corporation in the first place.

"This is an interesting proposal, Mr. Halls," Jo Tobi, the other vice president, stated. "However, the scales for this deal seem to be tipped on your company's side a little too much."

"Jo is right," Bi Sun supported. "You're asking us to share many of our core technologies in exchange for one of yours. There's no way anyone at headquarters would approve of this."

Each of them gave me a meaningful look. If anyone stumbled upon the scene right now, they would definitely mistake them for trying to intimidate me because of how intense their glares were. Which was why I believed their president had stepped forward at precisely this time.

"Now, now, gentlemen," she clapped her hands. "This isn't something that a little negotiating can't settle. I can forward your proposal as it is if you would like, Mr. Halls, but I believe what my vice presidents say may have some truth to it. Would you like me to proceed?"

I knew she was plainly stating I should make adjustments to my terms, but I couldn't bend over so quickly. The negotiations had already started.

"Personally, I think the terms are fine as they are, but I can see how we may weigh the benefits of opening up an entirely new market differently. We both know particle beams, especially at the ship-grade, would be a valuable asset to any spacefaring company. Perhaps that's where we disagree on?"

"Hmm, while I can't refute that, I believe my company is not open to sharing so many of our core technologies just because of that. If I could give my input, I believe changing the terms from sharing our technologies to supplying the completed products to your company to be much more amenable."

I knew my initial offer was asking for a lot, so there was room to negotiate. What Emma just suggested was the minimum of what I was looking for. Still, there was no need to settle on anything yet.

“Your input is noted. I’ll be sure to let my people know about your stance, but please go ahead and forward the proposal to your headquarters first. Once they give the go-ahead to start negotiation, we can explore these options then.”

“Very well.”

“So how did it go?” Claire asked as soon as I returned to our Aegis branch office.

I stayed at Ferrumus Corporation’s base for a few days, so that our pilots had the chance to learn how to handle their new vessel. During that entire time, we stayed in close contact in order to facilitate the negotiations regarding the cooperation plan I proposed. This was why I was confused when Claire asked for clarification when she was up to date.

“What do you mean? Nothing has changed since our last conversation. Our negotiation team has to prepare for further discussions to decide on how the stakes will be split in our new joint venture.”

“Really?” she continued to ask with disbelief apparent on her face. “No secret backroom deals, ambushes, scandals, and the like? Knowing you, you should’ve plotted with them to sneak attack some corporation far, far away.”

I shook my head as I let out a chuckle.

“No, silly. Who do you think I am? Business is always our priority, and in this case, we’re pioneering a new market, so there are no competitors to deal with.”

“Hmm, then we should proceed as planned?”

“Yes. Going according to plan shouldn’t catch you off guard, right?”

“Right,” she meekly nodded.

With the broad strokes of the deal finished, our upcoming expansion should be settled. All that we needed was time to put it all into action.

I had to work with the engineers over at Ferrumus to develop ship-grade particle beams, and we could purchase their trump cards like their swords and mobility boosters.

No competitors were in sight, as particle beam was something companies kept to themselves if they did have access to it. No one sold them out to the open market like we planned to do.

There was nothing to worry about. I doubted there were even that many companies with the capabilities to compete against us if they wanted to.

Instead, our expansion would be bottlenecked by the lack of personnel and facilities across the various stations across space.

Besides the arms business we were stepping into, we also had to get our mining operations started up. To make that even worthwhile, we had to reach a scale where we could become a supplier ourselves, selling raw materials to offset our initial investment.

All this meant we needed hundreds, if not thousands, of personnel spread across dozens of stations. Then there was the crew of the logistics networks as well. It wasn't a number I could hope to fill by simply recruiting in Elevate City.

We needed people who were both willing and able to work in an off-planet environment. The level of training and education required was no joke. The cheapest and quickest way was to recruit from the existing pool of workers always present in the various space stations. This caused me to debate whether I should repeat the successful recruitment strategy I had recently employed or not.

By showing up in person, we were able to hire several dozen dockworkers right away in the following few days. If that was all I had to do to solve our human resource issue, I'd be happy to do it.

However, the matter wasn't that simple.

"Rollo, you're asking to be targeted if you go through with that plan," Thorne sternly remarked. "You'd be isolated far away from your allies on Earth. Anyone who would want to do you harm would suddenly find their job very easy."

"Yeah, but if we traveled quickly, not giving them any chance to even react to my arrival in each hub, we should be able to do it. We just need to get a ship that's fast and stealthy enough. It just so happens we had a head start with the one we built with Grom."

"That thing is just an escape pod strapped to a bunch of makeshift components! It can barely withstand a short trip, not to talk about multiple long-distance journeys."

"We have time now. We can develop it properly," I defended.

Thorne frowned and shook his head in response. Seeing that, I sighed.

"Fine, we can travel incognito for the most part, then. I'll only reveal myself before we leave, and to our prospective employees only. That should be fine, right? I mean, I did it all the time as Cloak, and you didn't complain then."

“You want Cloak to suddenly expand his sphere of activity to space and fly around in a spacecraft?”

“Well, it doesn’t have to be Cloak. We’ll just make up another identity. Or we can make up a story of how Cloak struck it big, and is expanding his mercenary trade to the much richer environment of outer space.”

To do that, I would preferably like to make a ship fully furnished with a workshop on top of all the other features I plan for our future fleet to have. This vessel could even be our prototype, testing out all our ship-grade components.

None of this could be done overnight, but it seemed to lead in nicely with everything else happening.

It was time for my return to the mercenary scene. Except we would be entering an entirely new front. The few mercenaries who were fully independent, owning a spacecraft, were all seasoned veterans that couldn’t be trifled with.

To have the capability to mess around with powerful corporations was exclusive to only the best among the best of mercenaries. I had to debut as someone like that.