

Chapter 99: Woodcrafts and Dungeons

The next day, we returned to the spaceport, where various expos were continuously being held throughout the entire week.

The three of us had a lot of fun trying out various corporations' new products and taking notes on how each panel was held. Joey helped a lot in that aspect too, as we watched his Authentic Corp's presentation, I got a lot of useful insights from it.

"You boys better not lose track of time today. I have reservations for us at The Earl, and it wasn't easy getting them," Claire said from the backseat of our car.

"Relax, we're adults. Right, Thorne?"

I took my eyes off the road to look over at the man beside me as the auto drive took over, to just catch the sight of the glow fading from his optics.

"Huh? What did you guys say?"

"See?" the girl in the rearview mirror said while triumphantly smirking.

I shook my head at her and turned my attention back to Thorne.

"Did you pick out the panels we should visit?"

"Only a few. There are so many compared to yesterday, I don't know which ones to pick. And did you guys want to check out the neighboring expos as well? I heard the one for wood crafts is really popular among corpos."

"I'm fine with anything today. How about you, Claire?"

"Those blocks of useless chunks may go for exorbitant prices, but I don't have the eye to appreciate them. I'd rather we stay at the weapons expo unless it gets super crowded or boring."

Our car soon passed through all the stringent checkpoints and arrived inside the familiar convention halls at the base of the space elevator. We were immediately greeted with a sea of corpos when we entered the building, who mostly wore suits of muted colors. There were only a few occasional people in the crowd who dressed flashily, likely the children of some bigshot that came to play.

Compared to yesterday, there were a lot of small drones flying overhead, transporting small boxes around. The weapons expo today would have some new products that allowed visitors to test them out at a range, so the logistical support required would be intensive.

Following Thorne, we made our way to our first panel of the morning, inside a smaller room that could hold around one hundred people at most.

I spent the time going over the other panels available today before the session began.

“Welcome everyone, I am Jeremy from Aether Tech, and thank you for coming to the product release of our company, where we will be presenting the latest model of our automatons.”

The man gave us a brief introduction to his company before he commanded a robotic humanoid to enter the room. It carried a weapon and marched at a consistent but natural pace.

He expounded on the features of their latest model, and how powerful they were even against typical cyborgs. The overall reception from the audience was lukewarm, though. Robots weren't popular for a reason. They were too expensive and high maintenance compared to expendable humans.

Cybernetics were also very developed, which meant even cyborgs were a more efficient investment. Even so, they still had their uses in defending sensitive areas, where secrecy was a priority.

Like us, it seemed about half the people who came here today were mainly just having fun taking a look and weren't serious potential business partners.

I watched as the representatives ended the panel with a grimace, at having achieved poor responses.

Our next few panels were much more popular, with next-generation railguns, holographic decoys, and magnetic pulse weapons that could disrupt electronics. It definitely helped that we were handed tokens after the presentation that allowed us to test out their product at the range.

“We should buy a few of these,” Thorne said, as he put down the magnetic pulse rifle he had just finished shooting.

Claire quickly sent the digital pamphlet of the weapon in question and highlighted the price tag for him.

“Hmm...maybe one or two for us. Our EMP grenades are way more cost-effective. We should definitely get a few of those decoys, though.”

The decoys were cheap in comparison. While it was possible to make something similar myself, it would cost too much time and energy when a mature solution was already available. It was better to purchase them and modify them if needed.

The three of us then went to a few drone panels before we started running out of interesting panels to visit. The remaining ones were too niche or industry-specific, and we weren't here to hear about the incremental improvements others had made by a few percent.

We had some time left before our reservation, so we proceeded to the wood crafts expo in the neighboring exhibition hall.

The clarity of my optics allowed me to immediately notice the fabric of everyone's clothes here was of a higher quality compared to before. It made sense seeing this expo was more for hobbyists who could afford wooden works, and not the corporate drones that had to attend for the sake of their job.

Unlike before, the panels were not organized by entire corporations, but by the category of pieces being presented.

I may have said I didn't care, but how in the world is there anything interesting about seeing a wooden chair?

We entered a random panel that was about to start as we didn't have a preference. We could immediately see an antique wooden chair that was finely carved sitting in the spotlight. It had a reddish hue and a marble slab in the centerpiece of the backrest, but everyone around paid more attention to the rosewood.

"Haha, greetings everyone. I wanted to present to you my latest haul that my dungeon team had brought back to me. My researchers date this chair back six hundred years! Before the apocalypse. They..."

As he continued to extoll the latest piece of his collection, I looked up the information online and my eyes widened in surprise. This wooden thing is worth over fifty million credits! That wasn't even the most expensive one, as there were ones that went for a much higher price.

It was mind-boggling to believe that this little thing that was so common in my old world was worth several flying vehicles and more than everything I had made so far. It was a humbling experience, one that made me doubt if I went into the wrong business.

So that's why there were so many mercenaries in Lion City braving the dungeons.

I had thought they were only doing so for the lost technology there, but these antiques were much more common and worthwhile.

I still had no plans to venture into one, though. I heard these dungeons were mostly bunkers from before the apocalypse, but the defense systems for most of them still remained active. Even if they weren't functional anymore, the bunker itself was a hazard, with it falling apart. The worst of them were old test sites during the war, and I would rather not uncover a super bioweapon.

The panels here were much shorter due to its nature as a bragging session among collectors. It worked for us as we were only here to broaden our horizons, not to closely inspect any particular piece.

Before we knew it, the day was over, and it was time for our reservation.

The Earl, the restaurant that Claire had somehow made a reservation to, wasn't just any fine dining restaurant. It was one located under the space elevator, a restaurant under the sea. It was famous for its beautiful view of the underwater world. With mutants lurking deep underwater, it was one of the few places to safely attain such a view in this world.

It wasn't the most prestigious restaurant, though. Its sister restaurant had an even better view, being located in the space stations in orbit, far above our heads.

For today, we would make do with this underwater dining experience.

We headed deeper into the spaceport than ever before. Towards where the climbers that took its passengers into orbit were. After presenting our reservation to security, we were guided to a slightly different section where the elevators were.

As we passed by the waiting area for the space climbers, we saw a huge crowd awaiting their ride. The terminals around informed everyone of their delays, and they weren't shy to let them know it was due to a VIP coming down from orbit.

Seeing it wasn't my business, I made sure to keep pace with the group and entered an elevator. It didn't take long at all because this elevator only went down, and a separate one was used for our return trip.

Inside the elevator, we weren't alone. Two women in cocktail dresses were already waiting. They flashed us a smile that we politely returned and they resumed their conversation, but that action had earned Thorne and me an elbow to the ribs.

The moment the doors opened, I could hear several gasps beside me as the blue underwater world greeted us. The scene was definitely pretty, but it wasn't that different from the aquariums I had been. For the two beside me, though, it was likely their first time laying eyes on what was beneath the ocean in person.

As they recovered, we made our way to our seats, guided by the server, and began talking about our presentation tomorrow.

"After seeing the presentations today, I think it would be a good idea for us to incorporate the usefulness of the Argus for dungeon exploration," I declared.

"Well, it isn't that different from what we had. Mercenaries are still the ones who venture into them," Claire replied while keeping her eyes on the menu.

"Yes, but they seem to be a different sort of mercenaries that specializes in them. They definitely have the funds, seeing most of their patrons are willing to spend tens and hundreds of millions on those antiques we saw. No matter how much those corpos had undercut them, the crumbs of tens of millions can't be that bad."

Mercenaries had always been the target market we had in mind. We were a known quantity in their industry thanks to our Shade, which made it much easier to introduce our new product. The civilian market didn't have as great of a need for our detection implants, anyway. It was better to work with our existing clientele than to set foot in an unfamiliar market where we could easily step on the toes of powerful competitors.

"I hope you're not planning on going into one of these dungeons, Rollo." Thorne glared at me.

"Nope, not for me."

"...We may have to sponsor a dungeon exploration team before our official launch." Claire awkwardly interjected. "It would help promote us to that segment of the market a lot more effectively if we have proof and reviews of the Argus' effectiveness inside dungeons."

While we were holding a panel for the Argus tomorrow, it would hit shelves at a slightly later date. This session was to help find business deals, retail stores to carry our products, and other regional distributors that we couldn't reach with our power alone currently.

"Maybe we can find someone who has the connection with a competent team tomorrow, then. I don't want to make a trip to somewhere with a dungeon to scout for mercenary teams," I replied.

We continued exchanging ideas for our presentation and reviewed what we saw for the day while we ate our food.

When we were done, we returned using the other elevator designated for going up. This time, we had it to ourselves.

We resurfaced as a slightly different section of the spaceport, and we started searching for our exit. It was a similar layout, where we were close to the waiting area for the people traveling into orbit.

As we were looking around to find the way, I froze when a statue entered my vision. It was a simple replica of the space elevator off to the side. The thing that caught me off guard was when I caught sight of the text on its plaque that explained its history.

Thanks to my high-quality optics, I could easily make out every single word.

'...elevator was destroyed by the terrorist, The Gamer, and was promptly rebuilt through the power of...'

The Gamer?! Was there seriously someone called that? And they had the power to destroy an entire space elevator...