

Chapter 245: Space Trials

Devin - Halls Corporation

Within one of the numerous ports on Aegis, Devin was currently engrossed in welding, along with many others. They each wore the same thick spacesuits with visors that displayed various information about their current status.

It also had one function that Devin was fully experiencing right now.

“Anomaly detected,” a robotic voice called out. “Follow the evacuation path immediately.”

The warning was accompanied by giant red words that covered a good chunk of his vision. It was enough to snap someone out of their trance, no matter how focused they were, and Devin was no different.

“Don’t be greedy now boys,” a more human-like voice rang out this time. “Hurry up and get out of the way or you’ll not only be hearing from me, but from all the suits up in the HSE department.”

As the man was speaking, Devin was smart enough to have already moved away from his previous position. Everyone calmly floated around in the vacuum by making use of their suit’s ionic thrusters. The few who were close to the airlocks exited into the safety of the station while the rest were each assigned their own route.

The routes could be called unique or eccentric, depending on who one asked. It made the welders look as if they were drunk and flying randomly around in space. Devin had been with his new company for enough time that he was used to it. He mechanically followed the route displayed by his optics as he browsed through the web through his cybernetics. He treated this event as a routine break.

His videos were only interrupted when he caught sight of someone wearing his company’s uniform veering into his course. He quickly changed to the proximity channel and reprimanded the offender.

“Hey! Get back into your lane! Are you trying to get us both killed?!”

“Umm, sorry, sorry! It’s not a great excuse, but I’m new to this!”

Devin sighed.

“They hire random rookies nowadays?”

“What? No! I’ve got half a decade of experience, it’s just that—”

“I didn’t ask for an explanation. Hurry up and go back to your route!”

The urgency in Devin’s voice wasn’t only to scare the new recruit. It really was imperative that both parties followed their instructions. The reason for that came shortly after the rookie drifted back to his assigned area.

Dozens of shadows engulfed the entire scene. They only flashed by for a split second, but if one paid close attention, they could see how close Devin and his crew came close to death. The shadows were composed of space debris that was floating around at speeds so high that made them practically bullets.

If space didn’t insulate sound so well, they would be able to hear dozens of impact noises from the debris hitting the hull of the starship they had been working on.

This job was so much easier in the initial phases before it got so big and clunky that there was no longer enough space for us to work inside.

The alert taking up his vision didn’t go away, so the Halls Corporation employees continued to move as they were instructed. It allowed them to dodge the deadly shower of space trash, sometimes by a hair’s breadth. However, none of the workers panicked and simply followed their instructions.

Not long after, a second salvo of debris came barreling through their workplace. It was only when it was over that the alert was terminated and the workers were instructed to go back to their posts.

“Umm, about what I was saying earlier,” a familiar voice rang in Devin’s spacesuit. “It’s not that I’m inexperienced in my job. I’ve worked on dozens of other projects before. It’s just that I’ve never experienced anything like our company’s forecast system before. They usually just leave us out there to fend for ourselves. If we die, we die.”

“Look, you’re not the first one to say that. Just learn to follow instructions and that’s it. You don’t need to do anything else special. Now get back to work.”

Like how bees returned to their beehives, over a hundred people started buzzing around the seemingly complete spaceship. Some of them welded, while others were working on the wiring beneath the hull or the armaments placed along the exterior.

This type of work continued for another few hours until their shift was over. The locker room in the interior of the shipyard became increasingly busy as the people from the new shift scrambled into their suits while the people getting off breathed out a sigh of relief at having finished yet another day of work.

Devin was all smiles until he noticed the rookie from before tailing him quietly.

“What? Do you need something?”

“Um, I just wanted to talk, if that’s okay with you.”

“I don’t get paid to stand here and talk. I don’t mind talking as I walk, though.”

The newbie’s face dimmed and lightened up in quick succession.

“Sounds good! I’m Ricky, by the way.”

“Devin.”

Without slowing down, Devin began making his way to the company’s cafeteria. It made Ricky puzzled when he saw Devin and many others make their way toward the food dispensers and pick something out.

“Isn’t lunch long over? Are we really allowed to be here?”

“Of course. Lots of stuff on the menu is at a heavily discounted price and tastes just as good as anything you’ll find outside. So it’s a given we’d buy from here before we go home.”

After packing away his takeout order, Devin then made his way over to the shuttle station, where several buses were waiting for the workers. Ricky took advantage of this time while the buses were still idle to continue the conversation with his coworker.

“Can you tell me about anything else I should know about working at this company? My supervisor normally seems too busy for me to ask, but I’d like to get situated as soon as I can.”

“What? Isn’t that dereliction of duty and negligence seeing how you almost got into an accident today? You should report him to the higher-ups right away.”

Hearing this, Ricky made a strange expression.

“You want me to report my superior to the HR department? Isn’t that just a recipe for disaster? There’s no way they would take my side over a supervisor who’s been with them for a lot longer.”

Devin shook his head.

“No, it’s fine. The company takes these things seriously. In fact, they may already know what’s going on. If you don’t report it, it’ll be a black mark on your record as someone who doesn’t know how to communicate or take the initiative.”

Devin spent the next few minutes detailing various incidents that had appeared across the years he had been working at the Halls Corporation. Corruption wasn’t tolerated, and neither were incompetent supervisors that only knew how to throw their work off to others.

The conversation only stopped when the shuttle announced it was soon departing.

“Okay, thank you so much for showing me the ropes despite it not being your job,” Ricky said with a smile before making his way off the bus.

“Where are you going?”

“Umm, as embarrassing as it is, I currently don’t have a place to stay yet. I moved from Ganymede Station, so I’m still taking things one step at a time as I save money. That means I’ll be sleeping around the shipyard to save on oxygen fees. That should be allowed here, too, right?”

“Yes, but no one does that. The company provides dorms! Why did you check the box that says you have your own residence on your application if you don’t?”

Ricky sheepishly chuckled as he scratched the back of his head.

“I thought it’d lower my chances of being hired. It’s fine. I want to cut down on any expenses that I can.”

“Dude, it’s all free at the dorms. Water and air. Only if you want to upgrade to the more spacious units will it cost anything.”

“What?!”

Seeing how clueless the rookie was, Devin couldn’t stop himself from shaking his head.

Seriously, who was responsible for this guy? They’re definitely getting the boot.

“Rollo, hurry up or we’re leaving without you,” Claire called out upon barging into my workshop in our Aegis branch.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m coming.”

I left Lanus with a few instructions before complying with my COO. We made our way down toward the parking garage where our convoy awaited. On the way to the elevators, I made sure to greet as many of my employees as I could. There were now dozens of people in this branch, bringing the life it had previously been missing.

We had even more employees on Aegis if you counted those working outside of the office, totaling in the three digits. Combined with our growing empire back on the planetside, we were well into the four-digit range when it came to numbers.

Once we boarded our cars, it didn’t take long for us to arrive at our company’s one and only shipyard. After renovating it, it could concurrently build five vessels.

An entire year had gone by since the incident with Aurora Corporation, and today seemed to be the day of our first completed starship. It still had space trials, but I was confident no major issues would arise.

I walked through the shipyard, where dozens of our employees were standing there to welcome us. There were many faces I recognized from the time I went around to various settlements, disguised as a mercenary to increase our company’s recognition, but I had to keep that to myself. Even if I recognized them, surely none of them would recognize me, as they only recognized Shake and not Rollo.

“Thank you everyone for coming to welcome us!” I said to the crowd. “I know you’ve all been working hard throughout the past year to stay on schedule. I’m proud of all of you and hope you continue the great work. In order to show my gratitude in a more tangible sense, I’ve decided to give a bonus to every worker in the shipyard!”

A moment of eerie silence took hold of the venue as my employees turned to each other. Then, one after the other, they burst into cheers as they applauded my decision.

I signaled for the manager of this place to proceed with guiding us to our new vessel as we left the celebrating employees behind. I didn’t need a full entourage accompanying me, anyway.

The place was austere, as the focus was on shipbuilding. There weren’t that many amenities available, as we only needed a changing room and the relevant equipment. I

waited for Claire and a few of her secretaries to don a spacesuit while I ordered the nanomachines around my power armor to project an image of me wearing the same kind of suit.

It wasn't that I didn't trust anyone here. I simply didn't want to be known as that guy who always wore power armor wherever he went. It would only allow my enemies to take that into consideration while stroking fear among those who saw me.

As soon as we exited the airlock, a small group of our party raced toward the closest ship like little kids to candy.

The most excited among us wasn't me, Thorne, or Claire. Instead, it was the pilots we had brought along.

These pilots had spent the last year training for this moment. We had Lanus' help with simulations and virtual reality training, but we all knew it couldn't replace the real deal.

While the impatient pilots and crew members rushed inside, our group leisurely floated around to get a clear view of the latest addition to our fleet. It would also be the only one that was built from scratch by us.

After the incident with Aurora, we had completed a few makeshift troop carriers out of old hulls. It had been completed too late for the action, but it didn't hurt to have options.

Now, our first proper ship was complete.

It wasn't just a trooper carrier, but fully designed with fleet-to-fleet battle in mind. It carried large particle beam cannons similar to the ones that have been circulating into the market, albeit a superior version. It had the capability to stealthily come and go while having the capacity to carry over a dozen power armors and a hundred troops, not including the crew. It only took a dozen crew members to operate, thanks to the smart AI assistant we implemented into it.

And for this first vessel, I specifically repurposed a storage compartment to be a workshop I could use. That was because of a plan I had come up with a long time ago.

Reinforcing any base was good and all, but I believed the safest place was somewhere the enemy had no knowledge of. And what better way to accomplish that than to have a mobile fortress that was undetectable?

Once the trials were over, I couldn't wait to take a tour of my new base.