

# Chapter 161: Turning In

“Now tell me, do you want to do this the hard way or the easy way?” The voice on the other end of the call immediately cut straight to the chase.

According to my captive, I was talking to his dad, the person in charge of their security department, and the mastermind behind this ambush on us.

I had already settled on a plan, so it was time to go through with it. In order to appear like the timid street rat that had suddenly ascended up the ladder thanks to the support of a mysterious actor, I remained silent as if I was too scared to reply.

Just by doing this, I found out the other party wasn't the most patient person out there.

“Hello? I asked you a question. Now, if you value your life, I'd hurry up and answer if I were you.”

I slowly breathed in as I tried to get into character.

“I...I...want to negotiate...”

“Do you really think you have what it takes to negotiate with us? You may have gotten lucky the first time, but we have thousands of more agents on standby. If you surrender obediently, your friends might be able to walk away from this safely.”

“No...don't... I'll give you back your son if you leave us alone.”

“Ha! You'd be a fool if you think a son or two would get a corpo to give up on what they want.”

“I'll...kill him! I'll really do it!”

“You low-born filth can only think of violence. I'll tell you right now if you go ahead and kill him, I'll make sure you'd wish you were dead when I get ahold of you, boy. If you are actually intelligent, you would know I'm trying to offer you a good deal that is beneficial for both of us.” He let out a dramatic sigh. “I'm telling you, kid. A big corp is after you and there's no running from that. The best you can do is to be obedient and make it easy for both of us.”

“What!? No! You guys will definitely kill me. I just want to live!”

“Hahaha!” He erupted into a fit of laughter and only stopped after a dozen seconds. “If we really wanted you dead, it'd be over already. We'd simply snipe you from afar or drop something from orbit, and it'd be over. Trust me, kid. Turn yourself in, and I promise we won't hurt you. We just want to ask you a few questions.”

“...That's...I don't know...”

“Decide quickly! I’ll give you five minutes or we’ll be doing this the hard way!” the man roared.

I let out a yelp and threw the terminal on the ground to demonstrate my nervousness to the man on the other end of the call.

I glanced up to find Thorne holding our captive. He had been once again blindfolded and his sense taken from him. Both Thorne and Claire stared my way listlessly.

*I expected them to be grinning at my performance, but I guess they’re not in the mood for it now.*

I quickly sent them a message. ‘We may have lost this battle, but we haven’t lost the war yet.’

The moment this ambush started before we got out of the city was when our loss was set in stone. We couldn’t help it because if we immediately left with no preparation, the enemy may have raided our base, found our AI, and massacred our employees.

Our only chance was to flee from the city before they were ready to act while leaving crumbs for them to follow. Otherwise, we’d have to give up on everything else. In hindsight, that may have been the smarter choice for a safer option, but it was too late for that now.

I moved to pick up the terminal and resumed my call.

“S-sorry about that. I...umm, if I turn myself in, will you leave my company and employees alone?”

“Well...that depends on how obedient you are. Do you still have my son in one piece?”

“Yes, yes. Of course. Would you like to speak with him?”

“Put him on.”

I did as instructed, temporarily disabling the restraints on him that prevented him from hearing or talking, and holding the terminal next to him.

“Yes, Dad. I’m fine...I know. I’m sorry.”

After exchanging a few lines with his son, my captive gestured for me to take the terminal back. I made sure his restraints were back on before I spoke.

“S-sir...?”

“Yeah, I heard you. If you come to the spaceport within the next two hours with my son, then we have a deal. I’ll leave your company and employees alone.”

“Yes, sir! I’ll be there!”

With that, I ended and took a long look at my companions. I had a feeling my mysterious guardian angel wouldn't return that fast or he wouldn't have bothered leaving all these warnings.

"You guys take my power armor and head back. I'll see you guys soon." I declared and gave them each a hug. I didn't wait for their answer before jumping out of the car.

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## **Grayson Stone - Nova Tech**

The middle-aged man sitting in the middle of a spacious and luxurious office stroked his mustache as he glanced out at his window that overlooked his home planet.

He was winding down from another hectic workday as the head of security within Nova Tech, one of the larger companies in the cybernetic sector. His everyday life normally consisted of dealing with rival corporation's raid teams, arsons, and assassinations, but today was slightly different. He received a sudden mission to capture a target alive, and from the reports, the target was just some low-level street rat who had a sudden turn of fortune.

That was why he confidently sent his idiot son on the mission to gain some merits, so he could justify promoting him as he had planned. However, the mission didn't turn out like he had thought, and his pathetic son had somehow gotten captured instead.

*Where did I go wrong in raising him...?*

He shook his head and took out a hit of the Cloudpuff attached to his desk. It helped him relax as he prepared to clean up his son's mess.

After another puff, Grayson placed a call to his secretary.

"Redirect the second strike team we just sent out to wait at the spaceport. Our target is turning themselves in."

"...Sir, are you sure they're not trying to pull a fast one on you?"

"Yes, they have Thomas with them and his tracker is steadily moving there. And come on now, Betty, you'd think I'd get fooled by some peasant trash? The dumb fool was pissing his pants just from talking to me. He's too scared to do shit."

If Grayson was perceptive, then he would have literally heard his secretary rolling her eyes. Unfortunately, he was not.

"If you say so, Grayson."

"Oh, and call off the mission to attack their compound. There's no more need to waste any ammunition on it anymore."

“Good, that means we can redirect the resources toward Enceladus Station, as I had suggested. Our rivals are getting a little unruly there, despite the war already having ended for over a year.”

“Hmm...It's about time they start to act up as they make their recovery. They won't do anything big, though. Not until they replenish their ships and get their finances in order.”

“Anyway, is that all, Grayson?”

The man in question breathed in another lungful of Cloudpuff before answering.

“Yes, take him to our facility in Ceres. The big man will dispatch someone to handle it from there.”

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It didn't take me long to arrive at the familiar spaceport that was the symbol of Elevate City. All the previous times I visited were for joyous occasions, meetings, and shopping, but this time it was different.

My gamble was based on a lot of assumptions, but it was also the best plan I could have at this moment. The frustration of being denied access to better options made me reconsider my past decisions.

*Was it the right choice to spend all my points on things like electrical engineering and software engineering? Maybe I should've focused on just stealth technology first, to the point that I was untouchable...*

*If I had done that, I wouldn't be able to amass wealth as quickly to fund my research...But I also wouldn't have drawn as much attention. No, my guardian angel already had my eyes on me long before. I don't think that would've changed.*

The saving grace was that the first part of my gamble had worked for now. They confessed to not wanting to take my life and promised to leave my company alone. While that wasn't a guarantee when discussing with corpos, I was confident the man I had spoken to would hold up his end of the bargain. No corpo who made it to an executive position was stupid enough to waste resources on a solved problem.

There were no benefits to attacking my base now. For a corpo, it was best to complete his mission at the lowest cost possible. If he suddenly decided to attack my company now, his corporation would only frown at him for wasting resources on an insignificant F-Class company.

The predictability of organizations hyper-focused on efficiency was sometimes a double-edged sword.

As I exited my auto cab, I strode into the spaceport with my now-freed captive.

“Lead the way...erm... What was your name again?”

“...It's Thomas. And it's this way,” he replied with a hint of arrogance returning to his voice.

As we got closer to the boarding gates, we found a group of a dozen fully decked out in power armor, waiting for us. I could recognize the model as the same one our friend Thomas had worn during our engagement. His waving at the group also confirmed my suspicions.

*We definitely wouldn't have won against this group in a straight-up fight. We'd run out of the concealing particles before we could even finish all of them off.*

Thomas cheerfully reunited with his allies while one of them stepped toward me with a handheld scanner. They waved it around my body before they stilled as they read the results. The person who scanned me nodded to their companions and then we immediately got on our way.

Our entire group passed by the security checkpoints unhindered, and took us into a compartment of the shuttle that we had to ourselves. The entire time, two people in power armor flanked me, but they seemed quite at ease, not even considering the possibility I was a threat.

They weren't exactly wrong as I handed in everything I had to Thorne for safekeeping, along with Lanus. I felt completely naked without my trusty weapons, especially my Suri, which I had with me for as long as I could remember.

The only things I kept with me were my cybernetics. My internal ones were all upgraded with the best stealth tech I could muster, which I was confident it wouldn't show anything wrong on their scans. I knew they were an A-Class corporation, and my stealth tech was on par with at least SS-Class corporations.

I couldn't enjoy our trip up the space elevator this time as I looked back at the planet below. I tuned out Thomas' cheerful noises as he chatted with his coworkers while I began brainstorming how to best take advantage of my situation.

I had convinced Thomas' father I was a nobody. If I could continue to do so in my upcoming interrogations, I should be able to convince them to allow me to work on research for them. That way, I could absorb their knowledge rather than sit in a cell like a damsel in distress.

*Who knows, maybe I can even take advantage of opportunities when they fight against their rivals to escape. After all, from my experience with Ferrumus, the big corps were always fighting.*