

Chapter 162: The Captive

Raven - Nova Tech

A petite girl sat on one of the couches inside a luxurious office. She was fidgeting with her two cybernetic arms to pass the time as she waited for her big boss to call on her. She occasionally made eye contact with her superior's secretary, sitting behind the nearby counter, but the room remained in total silence.

It's been like two hours since I've been called up here...

Thankfully, before Raven could let out another sigh, the nearby secretary finally broke the stifling silence.

"Ms. Raven, you can now head on into Mr. Athalik's office."

Hearing the news, she swiftly got up and briskly walked in, following the guiding lights on the path behind the secretary.

Raven soon came across a fully transparent walkway where she could directly look out into a space dock. Despite being a private dock that belonged exclusively to their CEO, there were dozens of spaceships in the port. They varied from sleek little ships that could only fit several people to full-sized cruisers that could hold thousands of guests with ease.

The myriad of colors from the different designs dazzled Raven, who had a modest upbringing. It was only at the blinking of the guiding lights that she was urged forward. She soon made it past the walkway and into the spacious office of her company's CEO.

The place was filled with bright light and had delicate red carpets laid out in the center while the rest of the room was decorated with bookcases and display cases filled with cybernetics products of their company.

It was only after walking over a small arched bridge over a small waterway that she came before her boss, sitting behind a grand wooden desk with intricate engravings.

"Mr. Athalik, I have arrived as requested. What do you need of me?"

The aged man of average build calmly inspected the latest arrival before nodding.

"Yes, Raven. I've heard a lot about you from your superior, Grayson. I have an important job specifically for you, one that needs to be done with the utmost confidentiality. Can I entrust you with it?"

"Of course, sir!" the short woman instantly saluted.

“Relax, you can call me Henry. Let me stress that whatever you see or hear during this mission, you must keep to yourself. Do not reveal it to anyone, even if Grayson asks. Is that acceptable?”

“Of course, sir—Henry. Whatever you need.” Raven thumped her chest in a show of confidence.

“Very well. You can find the details in this folder here. Don’t record anything and burn it when you’re done reading it. I’ve already arranged for a ship to your destination for you. You can head to the docks immediately.”

“Understood. You can rely on me.”

After curtsying to her boss, Raven swiftly made herself sparse as she felt out of place within the opulent office.

Although she had questions as to why her big boss would suddenly go over her superior’s head and order her directly, she was savvy enough not to ask questions.

She had grown up in an orphanage from a young age until she was picked up by the orphanage’s sponsor for showing excellence. She had an inkling that whatever job she was assigned made full use of her unique upbringing, which often made use of the effective communication skills she had with the ‘peasants’.

The same couldn’t be said of most of her purebred corpo peers, who only knew to snobbishly look down on everyone else with roundabout euphemisms and bent the knee when they encountered someone more important.

As someone who knew how to strictly follow commands, Raven wasted no time and quickly boarded the ship, waiting for her at the dock. She began reading over the folder she received during the trip, and the mystery of why she was selected became clearer.

After a full day of traveling on the spaceship, they finally arrived near Ceres Station. Contrary to what she had thought, they didn’t dock at Ceres Station, one of the largest settlements between Mars and Jupiter. Instead, they headed out into the asteroid belt.

Their ship soon came across an unassuming asteroid that had been hollowed out into a secret base. It was one of Nova Tech’s research facilities, where some of their most advanced inventions were birthed.

As they docked, she glanced out at the numerous defensive turrets hidden all around the asteroid until they finally finished the docking procedures.

Her ship didn’t stay for long and began starting up again as soon as she disembarked.

Before she could question how she would return after her job was complete, the sound of approaching footsteps drew her attention.

A pair of men briskly strode toward her. One of them had messy white hair that went all the way down to his shoulders and wore a white lab coat. The other man accompanying him was fully decked out in power armor, but his helmet was completely transparent, showing the face of a gruff man with dark red hair.

“You the girl Henry, sent?” The man in the lab coat asked. “Never mind, of course you are. I’m Dr. Chen, the head researcher of this base. This here with me is Commander Poltrix, who is in charge of the security forces stationed here.”

“Ajax Poltrix, please contact me if you need anything.” A deep and gravelly voice sounded out from the speakers of the power armor.

“Pleasure to meet both of you. If you don’t mind, I’d like to get my job started right away.”

“Of course, Commander Poltrix will lead you to the man you seek. I’ll be returning to my research lab. Please only call me if it’s important.”

“Understood, thank you, Dr. Chen.”

The woman and man in power armor watched as the old man swiftly disappeared down a corridor before they, too, went on their way. They navigated through elevators, and maze-like corridors, passing by occasional patrols who were all decked out in power armor as well. They went through yet another elevator before arriving in a small room where Raven found a young man sitting calmly by a desk.

Seeing how the man was curiously glancing around, Raven did a double take before grabbing Commander Poltrix back out of the room and closing the door behind them.

“Commander, are you sure it’s fine to let him be without any restraints?”

“Of course, this base has many hidden defensive systems. If he tries to run or anything, we can easily restrain him through one of our hidden turrets or even by upping the gravity of his room. Rest assured, it isn’t like a street rat like him would dare to escape when he already knows how far we’re from Earth.”

“Okay...I hope you guys have already scanned him for any threats or hidden cybernetics too, then?”

“Yes, your boss said his men had thoroughly scanned him, and our base has strict procedures to scan anyone who leaves or enters. He’s clean, you’ll be fine.”

“Very well, commander. In that case, I’ll have to ask that you let me be alone with him. Our talks require the utmost confidentiality.”

“Of course, I have been briefed,” the man in power armor gestured for Raven to enter the room. “He’s all yours.”

Raven took a deep breath to compose herself before entering the room and sitting down across from the man. Once Commander Poltrix closed the door behind them, Raven fished out a small circular device and placed it on the desk.

The device emitted a privacy field that scrambled any devices that may be eavesdropping on their conversation.

“Okay, we can talk now. Let me introduce myself. My name is Raven, an employee of Nova Tech. I know who you are already, so no need to return the favor. And by the way, those are some really cool cyberarms you have there. Our company does good work, right?” Raven asked with a smile.

The man before her politely bowed his head in response.

“Um, so what do you want with me?” he asked nervously.

Why does he suddenly sound so nervous all of a sudden when he seemed fine earlier?

“Today, we just wanted to ask you some questions. I don’t know if you know this or not, but the man who you have been listening to is a very dangerous person and we would like to help you.”

“What?! You wanted to help me by coercing me off the planet with you guys?”

“Yes,” Raven responded in the most serious tone she could muster. “That man is just that much of a threat. Nowhere on Earth is safe from him. That was why we had to get a little rough with you, as time was of the essence. We would like to help you, but we first need to know what he has been up to. Can you describe your experiences with him?”

“Who are you talking about exactly?”

“There’s no point in lying, Rollo. You know exactly who we’re talking about. The man who had assisted you in forming your corporation.”

Rollo’s eyes widened at Raven’s words. Despite everything going according to the script so far, Raven couldn’t help but feel something was off, but she couldn’t put a finger on it. Still, she persisted in her duties, as she knew she was only a cog within her company and she was paid to follow orders, not speculate.

“...I don’t know anything about that person. I didn’t even know he was a man until now.”

“It’s okay. We don’t expect you to have a file on him like some detective. We simply want you to recount all the experiences you had with him.”

“I...Well, you see...”

As the man before her answered, Raven carefully compiled a transcript in real-time. She carefully asked the questions listed on the dossier she received, not deviating one bit. It took a full two hours before she was done.

The interactions the man in front of her had with this mysterious backer were few, but were full of meaning if one took a closer look. It wasn't her job to pass judgment, so she kept her suspicions to herself and prepared to send off the report once she got a connection again.

"...And that's all I know. Please, can I go home now? I don't care if that man is dangerous. I just want to go home," Rollo pleaded.

"That...I'll have to ask my superiors. In the meantime, please endure here for some time first."

Just as Raven was getting up, the man continued.

"Then please at least let me do something. It's too boring just sitting around when you guys won't even let me access the web. I'm pretty good with cybernetics, so at least let me help you out. This is a research lab, right?"

"Oh? And why do you think that?"

"I saw some people dressed like researchers on my way in."

"...I'll relay your requests. Again, it's not up to me to decide, but I'll see what I can do."

Seeing the man satisfied with her response, Raven took her leave. She found Commander Poltrix waiting for her just outside the door.

"You done?"

"Yes, commander. I'll need to use the comms room to relay the results now. Oh, and can you pass a message along to Dr. Chen? The captive would like to do something productive instead of staying cooped up in his cell."

"Sure, I'll ask. It's not like he's ever getting out of this place, anyway, so I don't see why not." The commander stared at the ceiling for a few seconds before glancing back at Raven. "You'll have to follow me to the comms room, since you'll need my codes if you want to contact the outside world."

Finally. I hope I don't get reassigned right after this. I was hoping to spend some time relaxing in Ceres Station.

Raven did not get her wish.

After reporting back to the big boss, she received the orders to remain on standby so she could remain as the point of contact with the captive.

A day after my interrogation with whom I learned to be members of Nova Tech, a man in a research coat visited me in my little room.

I had banked on the fact that my capture was something done with discretion, and it seemed like it worked.

Thomas, the man I had captured, didn't seem to have corroborated his experience with his company. It wasn't surprising considering no corpo would want to air their failures. That meant the people who now approached me all treated me like some upstart street rat who was in over his head.

"You. You said you wanted to help out, right? There just so happens to be a lab around here, but I'll need to test you first before I allow you to do anything. Show me what you can do." The old man threw a tablet before me. "If you pass this, I don't mind giving you some small responsibilities to start with."

I picked it up and found its contents to be similar to the tests I took when getting my cybernetic license. My gambit had paid off. These cartoon villains really believed I would never be able to escape if they were willing to let me approach their sensitive research facilities. At the same time, it also made me a little anxious if my guardian angel could really rescue me from here.

I would have to keep an eye out to see if I could forge my own way out in case he failed.

Either way, I couldn't wait to gain access to Nova Tech's database.

Let's see what an A-Class corporation has got.