

This is a minimalist exercise in writing dialogue with the least amount of contextual exposition. The scene is in a bar full of shipyard workers in the far future.

The bar was dense, dark, and crowded. The cacophony of a hundred voices made it the perfect place for discussions you didn't want overheard. Eli was positive that those conversations were happening right now. He had a feeling that this was one of those very talks.

"We're gonna need a ship." Salas sat across from him, a hispanic man his thirties.

"No shit."

"Not just any ship though Eli. I'm talking about a ship that we can't get."

"Then we can't go." Eli knew that wasn't the case. Salas always had a plan. It was the legality of the plan that worried him.

"Legally, no." Exactly.

"What does that mean?" He had more than an idea.

"Really?"

"I mean logistically. *How* illegal?"

"If we fail we never see sunlight again."

"Fuck."

"But we won't fail." Salas sat back in the booth.

"You sound uncomfortably confident. " He always did, come to think of it.

"Confidence is always disquieting to those who lack it."

"Shut up."

"You want to leave this place or not?"

"More than anything."

"Then you are going to have to get your hands very dirty. Everyone will." Salas had been a career criminal once. A truth that was less than rare in today's world, but still an unsettling truth nonetheless.

"You understand what you are asking everyone?"

"I'm not asking them. I'm asking you."

"What you *will* be asking them. "

"Asked."

"What?"

"Everyone else is on board. Gears are turning. You are the last piece." For some reason, the idea that everyone else was already on board made Eli more uncomfortable. Yes, everyone wanted to leave but, were there objections? Why wasn't he a part of the original group?

"Why am I the last piece?"

"Because you're the incorruptible one."

"Coming from you, that isn't much of a compliment." Eli deflected with an insult.

"Fuck off." Salas pulled a cigarette from his breast pocket, lit it, and blew the smoke directly across the table at Eli, "We don't need your approval. You know that, right?"

"But here you are, seeking it."

"Wrong."

"Then what is this?" Eli lit his own cigarette, *keep cool*, he told himself.

"An opportunity."

"So explain to me how we do this without becoming jail meat for the next century?"

"You listen. Very, very closely." Salas leaned in. His face, a collection of scars and right angles, intense.

"Then speak."

"We have six people ready to go. The announcement has sent Unity Defense into overdrive. Ships and Nav Computers being made in excess of seven thousand units per day."

"Of each?" The number was staggering. Unity hadn't manufactured on that scale since the AB Con was created. Salas only grunted as he exhaled, the smoke from his lips lingered in the tension between them.

"Damn."

"Overdrive."

"Go on."

"I work on the line that produces NavComs. All I have to do is defect one out and it will be sent to ReCon for reformatting."

"So we lift it from there?"

"No."

"No?"

"Too risky. "

"Why?"

"ReCon is in the center of Victus' Facilities. We don't want to be there, not if we are going to want to get away with this."

"So we need to make it more accessible? How do we do that?"

"I have to break it." He put quotations on break, and knocked the ash from his cigarette. "I have to do something to it that ReCon can't fix."

"If ReCon can't fix it how will we?"

"ReCon can fix it, but they are overworked."

"So you sabotage the NavCom, then what?"

"It's not that simple. I will have to damage the Computer just enough that they know it is fixable, but don't have the time to fix it."

"Sounds tricky."

"More than tricky. If it is too easy they will keep it on site for early restructuring. If it is too far gone then they will cut their losses and send it to Deconstruction for parts."

"And if it is just right?" Eli was fully engaged now. Salas pulled a small sheet of paper from his pocket and spread it out on the table top.

"If it is just right it will get sent to Special Service, on the outside of the western facility." He pointed to a box on what had to be a blueprint of the entire facility. "A thirty meter jog from the western property barricade."

"Thirty meters isn't a jog with a thousand pound Navigation Computer."

"So astute. This is the tricky part."

"And the first part wasn't?"

"The first part is tricky for me, but you can't worry about that. Either I get it right and you get a phone call or I don't and you find a new mechanic."

"Great."

"Have some faith Eli."

"Do I have a choice?" Eli pulled his cigarette from his mouth.

"Not really." Salas chuckled. "After I make the phone call you and three others will need to be on site with a loader."

"And where are we getting that?"

"Bennet and Alec should be liberating one as we speak."

"Shit." Eli sat back and weighed his options. He could go home. He could get up right now and let things play themselves out without him.

"You ok?" Salas snapped Eli out of his thought process.

"Yeah, fine."

“Good. We will have at least ninety-two seconds until the first patrol reaches Special Service once it has been stolen.”

“Sounds exact.”

“I’ve taken the route every day for the last week, pacing the patrol car. Yesterday I placed a small explosive in a defective engine part. On patrol it takes them three minutes to reach the perimeter, on high alert it takes ninety two seconds and that was during work hours so the roads were cleared. “

“You fucking planted a small explosive?”

“More of a firecracker.”

“And that sent them into high alert?”

“It was placed in an engine part that had already been primed. The fuel ignited. Made a satisfying thump.”

“And they didn’t realize that it had been sabotaged?”

“That is why I told you not to worry. I am very good at my job.” Salas was right. He was damn good. Eli couldn’t help but crack a smile.

“So what happens after we load? What will you be doing?”

“We will be moving a shell into my garage.”

“Where in the hell did you get an operational shell?”

“It’s not. And we got it from Unity, about a week ago.”

“You stole an entire ship from Unity and they didn’t notice?”

“They absolutely noticed.” Eli’s stomach turned inside out. “We just blamed it on someone else.

“Great. And who is the innocent soul you sentenced to death?”

“He’s dead.” Now it was Salas’s turn to grin. “Died of a heart attack a week ago.”

“Shouldn’t you have been a little more careful with the biggest piece of the puzzle?”

“If I had then there would have been no way for me to monitor the patrols for a week. The incident heightened security, made it more regular, before it was spotty at best.”

“And what do you meant it’s not?”

“Before it was just-“

“No.” Eli cut him off, “The shell. You said it wasn’t operational.”

“Of course it isn’t.” Salas’s response was more than cryptic. Eli just cocked his head to the side waiting for an explanation. “Operational shells are held in Receiving. Partial shells have to make the trip to Portland for outfitting.”

“So you lifted it in transit?”

“Sure.”

“What?”

“It’s more complex than that.”

“And I don’t get an-”

“We don’t have time to talk about shit that has already been done.” Salas snapped.

“Right, sorry. So what happens after we grab the NavCom?”

“You bring it straight to the garage.”

“Sounds risky.” Salas just stared at Eli. He knew how obvious that statement was. “I mean it sounds risky taking it straight to the garage.”

“We have to get the NavCom installed as fast as possible and my garage is the only place where I have everything I need.”

“And if they follow us?”

“No if.” Salas put out his cigarette and lit another.

“When they follow us?”

“That is why you have to do it quickly.”

“How quickly?”

“You’ll have thirty minutes to get it to me, and I’ll have about an hour to install it, before Victus starts connecting dots.”

“Have you ever installed a NavCom?”

“Once.”

“How long did it take you?”

“Three hours.”

“Great. So you think that’ll miraculously be cut down while under pressure?”

“Trust me Eli, I have weighed the options.” Salas quickly flipped the blueprint over revealing an ad for the Space Corps.

“What is that?”

“I’m thinking about joining up” Salas face changed. No longer grit and determination, but an oddly sincere twinkle of, patriotism?

“What are you talking ab-”

“Can I get you gentlemen a drink?” A waitress stood two feet from Eli’s elbow. A waitress that he had no idea had approached.

"I really want to go fight those Belt Miners." Salas held his gaze with Eli. "Can we get two broadswords please?"

"Of course, is that-"

"Yes, that will be all." Salas cut her off.

"Sorry ma'am, my friend here is a little worked, excuse him. That will be all though." The girl turned away, slightly frightened. Salas flipped the paper back over.

"I've weighed our options Eli."

"Well, that is comforting."

"Don't try to be a smart ass."

"I'm trying not to throw up."

"Why is that?" Salas looked confused.

"Because I don't want to puke in public"?

"Remember what I just said about-"

"Because this whole plan is in motion and I have no other option but to get on board."

"You could stay behind, find another ride." Salas didn't smile this time

"Good one."

"See. No one likes a smart ass."

"You really think I have chance finding another ride? You are the only ones I know who are going. "

"Take a community ship."

"Too many people."

"Says the guy who lives downtown." Salas chuckled and ashed his smoke.

"Says the guy who hates the idea of a mass of people cooped up in a metal box hurtling across space for six years."

"You'd rather live with eight?"

"Smaller chance of insanity." Eli was frank with his response.

"Larger chance of piracy." So was Salas

"You should be a salesman."

"What did I say about being funny?"

"So when will the running end?" Salas seemed to like the question. He knew that Eli was on board now.

"When we get to the asteroid belt."

And why is that?

AB Con isn't just a fancy mining company anymore. Con no longer stands for Construction, it stands for Confederacy. And they have consolidated the outer colonies."

"When did that happen?" Eli coughed on smoke. "Last I heard, it was only a rumor that they wanted out."

"Well, some rumors are true, and they had the whole thing planned. With citizens headed out of the system, they will have a huge industry boom, they won't need UEC financing anymore.

"And they won't turn us in?"

"Unlikely that they will want to do anything for Earth officials after their secession."

"Touché. "

"So when do we do this?"

"Tomorrow." Salas folded the plans up and put them back in his pocket just as the waitress dropped their drinks off at the table.

"God."

"What?"

"I have no time to think about this?"

"Trust me, if you did you wouldn't show up."

"Probably not."

"You're welcome."

"I'm not thanking you till we're off the ground." Eli drank deep.

"Fair enough." Salas raised his glass and drank deep.

"Salas."

"Eli." Both men stood, dropped cash on the table, and walked separate ways. Eli set the glass on the bar on the way out the door. It was happening. Tomorrow night he and seven other people would be fugitives, racing away from Earth. He couldn't wait.