

This story is what I'd call a background building story. Tiaver, the main character of this story is not a significant character. He will show up randomly in stories, though.

## [The Hammers arc] [12] [120m Express] [9640]

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The second Sol-Andromeda war which ended in a fragile victory for United Sol revealed how far the nation had fallen. The Bau was massively criticized for lack of proper planning as well as actions while newly promoted Admiral Kain was equally massively praised for his dedication to the nation and his service.

Regardless of the public voice, the Ark remained dysfunctional while Admiral Kain worked hard to establish his fortress in Uranus outpost.

This small episode existed in such a period.

**Venus Cosmetic Division** was a division of Venus government.

Everyone on Venus and, perhaps, even other people in the galaxy would have heard about them at least once. They were known for their delivery service called "Two-hour express delivery" AKA "120m express".

That's right. They guaranteed deliveries in two hours with little exceptions.

It was the fastest delivery system available in the galaxy for physical goods.

The concept behind the courier division started from a man named Tiaver.

Tiaver was an ordinary white collar worker. Though he had few small criminal records in his younger days, he had worked hard to overcome his red marks on his record. He had encountered the infamous “assassins” from Venus government once. His life was spared, and since then he had not taken a dark path again.

He was working for a trading company on Venus. He was content with his life. He was a little bored with life, but it could be much worse, therefore he didn't complain.

His alarm began to make annoying sounds. It was time to wake up. His life had always evolved around a cubic. He was working in a cubic in his company. And he was living in a cubic, just bigger in scale.

He groaned and grumbled as he stood up from his bed. He continued to grumble until he went into a bathroom to take a shower.

Disheveled hair, sleepy eyes and a face that needed to be shaved immediately; He was looking at himself in a mirror.

After taking a shower, he dressed himself into a formal brown suit and took off his phone off its charging deck and left his apartment. Some preferred to have a computer implanted inside of their skulls and have it connected to optic nerve, but he was one of those who disliked that idea.

Fallen Crater was his home city. The city was home to majority, as in 99%, of Venusians. Tiaver lived in an underground apartment which was located in B241 floor. The deeper, the cheaper a unit was.

In Tiaver's case, he couldn't care less and simply chose what he could afford which was a 2-room unit on B241 floor. He had been living in the unit for past two decades.

Unlike the suite Kisia was residing, his unit obviously did not have a view. What it had, however, was the quietness and isolation which were favored by many. His only issue with his unit was that it took him half a minute to get to the ground floor which was a minor inconvenience.

Venus was run by the Crimson wizard which inevitably meant dictatorship. But no one really minded anymore. The planet was running well, so well that everyone was gaining wealth. Though the high seats in Venus government were always reserved for those who the crimson wizard picked, mid and lower seats in the government were available for everyone. However, no one could ever apply for such positions. They had to be chosen. It had been four decades since election system was gone. It had met with great resistances at first. However eventually the dictatorship and its new system were accepted over time and blood.

Venus law enforcement was ordinary on surface. The police was there. The detectives were there. However, there were very few of them. Reason being was their shady method of punishment, assassination so to speak, which ultimately resulted in huge reduction of active crimes.

For even simple crimes, people were assassinated. It was the unofficial de facto way of punishing. Therefore, some people attempted to sue the government over such actions. But they were assassinated in the end as well.

In the end, they came to a conclusion that it was not worth trying to put up with the government. Those who did not want how the Crimson wizard ran things simply left Venus although those who left did not have easy time as they were

treated as prisoner of war by United Sol. Many of them wished to come back but they were firmly denied.

This resulted people not even daring breaking laws. It wasn't even worth trying. Age did not matter for assassinations. Even a teen who broke a simple copyright was assassinated. For an example, if a man uploaded commercial software on net, he would be assassinated within a day. No one knew how they were able to track every single crime. But what they did know that it was not worth risking one's life.

This resulted families teaching their children laws inevitably for fearing loss of their children since there was no mercy in the assassination. One couldn't sue. One couldn't appeal any decisions because there wasn't any.

Tiaver wasn't an exception. He was twenty one years old. He could clearly remember how his parents were desperate in teaching him Venus laws. In his younger days, he turned to some crimes. He was caught relatively soon and was given a second chance. In other words, he was spared.

Whenever he recalled the moment he was seized down by two men in black and another man standing in front of him with a pistol in his hand, it gave him chills. He was pretty sure he was a goner at that time. He did not know what made them to change their mind and spared him. Nevertheless, he was spared and had not turned to crimes since then.

Getting to his company was breeze apart from having to wait 30 seconds in an elevator that not only moved vertically but also horizontally. Taking a subway would take less than five minutes to reach his company basement facility where he would take yet another elevator to reach the floor he worked.

"Hey," Tiaver casually greeted his coworkers.

They greeted him indifferently and that was as far as the communication went.

He entered his cubic and began to work. Calling various suppliers for orders and often demanding explanations for late arrival of goods. His job involved mostly talking on phone. It was as easy as pushing a button and speak aloud.

A loud bell rang through his office hall. It was four o'clock. There was no break for lunch. Those who wanted lunch had a choice of taking a short break during noon. But many chose not to have lunch. With technological development, nutrition in food became greater in quality and there was no more need for taking three meals every day. In fact, one meal was quite enough generally.

Night of Fallen Crater was much more active than day. Couples would enjoy their time in various open cafes, pubs, and night clubs. Some chose to have their time in parks. Tiaver usually spent his spare time in his apartment where he would play games, watch porn, and... well, play with himself. There was nothing much he would do in his spare time.

Not long ago, he submitted an idea to the government. His idea was to create a separate division in the government that would exclusively handle contract logistics.

Venus had such logistics in place already, but the delivery time was rather poor. When Tiaver ordered few things online, he received his shipment after roughly twelve hours. It was too slow, he thought. Since he was working for a trading company, his main source of frustration came from late deliveries.

What Venus Cosmetic Division would offer in his idea was that the division would deliver goods within two hours after orders are placed and confirmed. It was a

challenging idea considering the size of the city. The city was as large as a single nation. Its size was roughly 100,000km<sup>2</sup>.

A car in the era floated. But it wasn't anti-gravity. A car featured what was seemingly identical to a spaceship's thruster, meaning a car utilized ion thrusters to lift itself and propel forward. A general, civilian grade, car would have four omni directional ion thrusters.

Anyway, he had not received a reply for weeks. Therefore, he figured that his idea didn't go through. He didn't really take it seriously. In fact, the whole idea was rather a joke that came to his mind during his spare time.

Few seasons had passed. One day, when he was leaving from work, he encountered few men in black.

"Mr. Tiaver?" They asked him.

Tiaver realized immediately that they were agents from the government. He recalled vividly when he met those men in black in his younger days. It was when he was about to be killed but was spared.

He stammered badly. "N-No, I-I am not. Y-You must be m-mistaken." He proceeded to leave the scene as quick as possible.

"Yes, you are. You are to come with us."

The men in black surrounded Tiaver, and two of them seized him by grabbing his arms.

"L, let go of me, please!" In a desperate attempt, he shouted. "I am not Tiaver. I swear!"

He struggled to be free, but it was futile. A black car arrived at the scene, and he was forced to get into the car. He was having cold sweats and was shaking from fear of assassination.

"I didn't do anything..." He kept on repeating as if he was possessed. "I didn't do anything..."

It was true; he did not do anything wrong as far as he could remember. But that did not change a fact that he might have done something wrong without his knowledge. He was spared once. There was no way they would give him second time. He was done for or at least he firmly believe so.

He eventually passed out from intense nervousness.

When he woke up, he was on a sofa.

"You've regained consciousness."

It was a female's voice. Tiaver raised his upper body and looked around. It was a secured office. There was a black sofa which he was on, and there was a chair where a woman was present. There was nothing else in this room. He felt as if he was placed in an interrogation room.

"Where ... am I?"

"B72, one of secured room in VCD," The female responded gently.

"B72...?" He instantly realized it meant 72 floors below ground. "VCD?"

"Venus Cosmetic Division."

Tiaver was afraid of looking directly at her, so he had few quick glances at her. There was a very unusual thing about her. It was her disheveled hair as if she never handled her hair after waking up.

"I apologize how my men have taken you here."

Her sudden apology made Tiaver relieved. "I am not going to die?"

The woman let out of a chuckle. "We don't kill people like that. If we wanted you dead, you'd be dead on sight. No need to bring you here."

She indeed had a point. But he still had to ask, "Then why ... was I taken here ... like that?"

"Well, I apologized for their behavior just now. They aren't used to such kind actions...," She narrowed her eyes gradually. "If you know what I mean."

Tiaver gulped. He did know what she meant. They were assassins. It was probably one of few times where they didn't get to kill their targets.

"Your name is Tiaver, yes?"

Tiaver nodded.

"This was your idea?" She showed him a piece of a printed paper.

"Y, yes, I did submit that... I, I am sorry if you were offended by it."

She chuckled again. "We are not going to kill you."

"Uh...," Tiaver was lost and confused. He wanted to know why he was here but was too nervous to ask.

She skimmed the paper and asked, "Do you think this idea is possible?"

Startling, he blurted, "Pardon?"

"This idea of yours."

"I am not sure..."

"But you did submit this idea, no?"

"Yes, but..."

The woman continued on Tiaver's behalf. "It was a joke?"

He was sensing that cold sweats of his again. "Kind of ..."

"Then make it happen."

He was confused for the moment. "Pardon?"

"Make it happen."

"The idea, you mean?"

"Yes, you will be in charge."

Her firm face indicated that she was clearly not joking. Gulping, he replied, "You are serious."

This was the beginning of "The two-hour delivery" service. Later, the woman identified herself as Kisia and she was the head of Venus Cosmetic Division. Tiaver had indeed heard of her before but the rumors associated with her wasn't certainly fitting with the real person. Kisia was rumored to be ruthless like the Crimson wizard and she'd kill people for fun. None of the rumors appeared to be true.

He was asked to quit his current job as he was going to be in charge of a small sub-division of Venus Cosmetic. He complied and quit his job without a second thought. He wanted something exciting and it was happening. He had no reason to hold back.

Internal codename for his sub division was V-lightning. It was a temporary name before Tiaver could come up with a real one.

At the moment, there was no one but Tiaver alone in the division. To give it a head start, Kisia decided to assign one of her employees to him.

"This is Gellie. She has been handpicked by me to assist you; she will be your secretary."

Dressed in a knee length dark gray skirt along with white shirt and sleeveless black vest, she formally greeted Tiaver.

"Nice to meet you."

Kisia explained, "I've instructed her about your task, so she knows what you are supposed to accomplish," She added. "She is reliable. You have my word on that."

She left soon after the instruction. Now there were two people in the whole, - empty -, section.

"I have an idea you may like." Gellie started her job right away anyway.

The main problem with the whole concept was that a civilian grade car took 16 days from one end of the city to another end at the maximum speed it was allowed which was 250km/hr. (155 miles/hr)

That was due to a fact that Fallen Crater was a gigantic metropolis with sheer size of 100,000km<sup>2</sup>, measuring 50,000km width and equal height.

Of course, the location of their future HQ would matter. Somewhat good news was that it'd take less than 10 days if they could find an office somewhere around the middle of the crater.

However, it was well short of "2 hour delivery guarantee."

Tiaver's first idea was to use shuttles to which Gellie informed him of current laws.

"Shuttles are restricted to the navy and the clans," She informed Tiaver. "You could talk to the boss regarding creating new laws but I doubt she will grant your needs."

Indeed, when he talked to Kisia about his idea, she refused at once.

"What you are asking is not possible. The navy and the clans have the exclusive rights to use shuttles." She did add that VNN was an exception to the rule. "Given their special nature, VNN has been granted the usage of shuttles."

It was during this conversation which Tiaver came up with something else. He suggested "a speeding permit".

Civilian grade cars were programmed not to exceed a certain speed limit. Speed limit differed on which lane it was on but the absolute maximum speed any civilian vehicle was 250km/hr. It was certainly possible to hack a vehicle to overcome the limit but doing so was illegal and being caught for it sometimes resulted in ... assassinations.

Tiaver's idea of speeding permit was to override the 250km/hr limit on specially licensed drivers. He suggested 550km/h initially but settled down to 350km/h after Kisia downright refused his initial suggestion.

"I will bring your idea to higher ups. I should be able to give you an answer for it within 24 hours," She said as the meeting was concluded.

And his idea was temporarily granted. Tiaver would need to report progresses before it would actually become laws.

It was, then, as simple as sending out ads to recruit willing drivers, and there were a lot of applicants. Tens of thousands applied and it was down to Tiaver and Gellie

to interview all of them. Tiaver did request some more personnel but Kisia refused, telling him that it was now up to him to do everything.

After six hours of non-stop interviewing, Tiaver and Gellie had finally completed interviewing the first batch of drivers.

Tivaer collapsed on his desk, muttering, "I've never worked so hard in my whole life. Six hours without a break. It's a record for me."

Gellie, who was sitting a short distance next to him, replied indifferently, "Really."

He glanced sideways at her who was looking down at a datapad, checking applicants' data.

"Your response tells me that this is rather normal for you," He said.

"That depends. We don't have designated breaks. We take breaks when we feel we should. Having said that six straight hours is quite norm here, so that's that."

"So, I guess this is what it is like to be working for the government?"

Tiaver was used to having a pre-defined schedule for his work. Getting to work by 9AM. Having a lunch break at 1PM for an hour. And getting off work at 6PM. He had such a clockwork like schedule for over a decade.

Nodding carelessly, Gellie put down her datapad and stretched out.

"We need to get more people. We can't do this by just the two of us," Tiaver remarked.

"Actually, I forgot to inform you something."

"Which is?"

"The boss did tell me to inform you about our budget. We can't go over it. The project will fail if we run the budget dry."

Tiaver's face frowned at once. "You should have told me that earlier. Much earlier."

“Sorry.”

According to her, the total budget for the project was 25 million credit. There was no deadline but depletion of the budget was going to be the end of the project.

“25 mil?!” He uttered. “That’s waaaay more than I ever hope for! You had me worried for a moment there.”

“Well, that’s the budget. And, just so you are aware, our payrolls, yours and mine, are coming out of the budget. All payrolls, expanses, everything will be coming out of the budget.”

Although positively excited at first, he became aware of the tasks ahead. Equipment cost alone could very well eat most of the budget, he thought. He worked at a logistics trading company. He had the general knowledge of how much logistics infrastructure could end up costing.

“Fine, let’s do this by just the two of us as long as we can. Better save the payroll.”

Gellie agreed wholeheartedly by saying, “Exactly.”

It didn’t take them long enough to realize that there were two types of applicants. The first type was those who had a speeding ticket previously and were very afraid of speeding ever again. In other words, they received a visit from the men in black and were spared.

The second type was seemingly ordinary people with no previous conviction or whatsoever.

“You know, these applicants who has a record of a speeding ticket,” Tiaver casually talked to Gellie. “There are lots of them. I am surprised the government spared this much people. I thought they killed people left and right.”

Gellie took a moment to make a response.

“I wasn’t even born when the imperial master took over, so I would have no idea. And this division does not handle the assassination jobs, so I wouldn’t know.”

Tiaver was a teen when Cecil took over Venus and, although he couldn’t remember clearly, he did remember hearing a lot of angry voices all over around him.

Clearly, passage of time seemed to have helped greatly to subside whatever Cecil had done when he took over the planet.

“Anyway...” Sighing deeply, he discussed the matter at hand.

"How are we going to find suitable drivers? And how are we going to keep the two-hour limit?"

He was becoming progressively skeptical of the chances. He was feeling overwhelmed at the tasks. Finding suitable drivers, designing networks, programming necessary software as well as constructing the required infrastructure. And he hadn’t even gotten off the ground yet.

“I believe we don’t have to start as two-hour delivery service. We should start up when we are able as just another logistics company and start from there. Remember, we have a limited budget. For us to succeed, I believe we need to function as a company and start earning profit.”

Tiaver narrowed his eyes. He had never thought it that way. He believed he had to make the whole thing work in one-go.

“I wasn’t even aware of... Well, I assume that’s why the money has no deadline...”

Then it hit him.

“Wait, do I need to pay the money back?”

“Yes,” Gellie told him resoundingly.

“Oh, fuck, what have I gotten myself into...”

It was literally his life on the line, it appeared.

Once they had chosen a hundred applicants, it was time for the first test drive.

Karin Bau delivered ten modified cars to a large garage. They had their speed limit increased and further tweaks on their thrusters to be able to be driven at higher speed.

“Ten hacked cars as ordered.” Karin exclaimed as he jumped out of one of cars. The other nine cars landed down one after another. They were remote controlled.

“Thank you, Mr. Karin.” Gellie beamed a smile at him.

“No problem. Tell the boss that I said hello to her. I haven’t seen her a while.” Turning around and waving, he casually walked away.

“Who’s that guy?” Rightfully so, Tiaver had no idea who he was.

“Karin Bau, a refugee from the Bau. He is a freelancer engineer employed by our division. That’s all I know. He’s pretty popular with ladies though despite being married and have kids.”

Ten drivers were called to the garage and Tiaver briefed them. Standing in front of them ten drivers and flanked by Gellie, he stated.

“Hello, today, we test the vehicles. Their speed limit has been set to 250km/hr and you’ve been granted a special, temporary, lane for you to travel. The car will automatically align itself to the lane, so try not to leave the lane.”

At this point, few drivers whistled pleasantly. Clearing throat, he continued.

“Your job today is measure your travel time. Pick a spot and count how long it takes to reach edge of the city. I want you to make five trips at least. Minimum is five trips, one of the trips being one edge to another edge.”

A driver raised his hand and Tiaver nodded at him.

“What if I cause an accident?”

Gellie responded, “Your safety will be covered as this is a special case. But if you cause an accident, you will be disqualified from this program.”

There was a brief moment of silence before Tiaver inquired them.

“Anyone else has a question?”

No one had any questions. Therefore, the experiment began. The cars lifted themselves afloat and started to fly away into the sky.

Once they were gone, he asked Gellie, “There must be other logistics companies out there. How do they deliver stuff?”

“I don’t know. I can certainly find out though.”

“Please do. Like you told me before, I think we need to start up the company soon.”

“Understood.”

Then an accident happened. It was several hours into the testing when a call came in. Gellie took it and her face turned pale instantly which was an indication of how bad it was.

“Mr. Tiaver, one of the tests car ran into a skyscraper!” She exclaimed while on the phone.

“What?!”

Tiaver rushed to the accident site. Apparently, a test car had run into a 250 floor building. It ran into 200th floor. He arrived at the ground where the fire looked like a flashing dot above.

There were several fire fighters who were placing a net to catch all debris falling from above.

“What’s the situation up there?” He inquired one of them but he knew very little.

Then a car swung by him and opened its door. There was Kisia inside.

“Gellie said you’d be here. Get in.”

She took her to the accident site where Tiaver could see one of the test cars that ran into the building. The car itself was pretty much gone. It wasn’t even in a shape to be called a car.

He was sweating like a waterfall at this point. He had several reasons to worry. The first was that he was spared once, meaning he was on his second chance. Secondly, he wasn’t sure what kind of punishment would befall onto him.

“Driver is dead. And two dead, one severely injured,” Kisia said while watching the accident site. Two fire fighter cars were containing the fire from spreading and an ambulance was parked right by broken glasses where they were entering the floor with a help of an ESP.

The whole scene didn’t look as bad as he was told. Of course, that didn’t excuse him from responsibilities which made him to sweat more intensively.

“I...I... a, apologize ... for this...” He stammered badly. “I, I will s, step down.... to, to, make up, f, for this....”

He planned to get a new job or jobs and pay off how much he had used of the budget.

Kisia glanced at him who was turning pale at this point.

“Are you afraid to die?” She innocently inquired.

Tiaver wasn't sure how to answer that question. He wondered if it was a question for his life. Should he beg for life? Or be brave? Which choice would spare him?

“I am just asking. For the record, nothing will happen to you. As far as I can see this accident has little to do with you. The driver had a prior and apparently he couldn't resist his adrenaline. There are always those chronically speed. He was one of them.”

Still, he was having a hard time that nothing would happen to him and she could clearly see that he wasn't easing up.

Sighing, she told him, “Our master..., or the imperial master, used to tell us that he never favored the idea of firing someone for their failures. He told us that only those who experienced failure would strive to avoid it.” And she placed her hand on his shoulder. “So, ease up, look at the accident site and swear to yourself that this sort of thing won't occur again.”

For reasons unknown to him, he started to sob. He found himself pitiful for sobbing but he couldn't help himself. The pressure and fear from a fact that he could be killed was too much for him to bear.

Two seasons passed since and Tiaver was about to take the first real step of achieving his goal of “Two hour delivery service”.

While realistically he was nowhere close to that goal, he was launching a logistics company. He did work at one previously. However, he was a desk worker at the

bottom of its chain, meaning he didn't really know much about what was really going on behind scenes.

This time, though, he was at the top of the chain. He had four employees, including Gellie. He had tied up contracts for logistics, designed their own software. Everything was ready to go.

For the time being, they were just yet another logistics company, using existing industrial train network to carry out deliveries. The car delivery idea was on hold due to its high expenses.

Tiaver and Gellie both agreed that running a successful company, thus generating some sort of revenue, was the first step. Growing as a company and earning prestige and fame was the only way to acquire the usage of shuttles which would enable them to achieve their ultimate goal.

The company's name was 120m Express. It was a long road which they've just started to walk on.

**- Fin**

