

Stories in Repairman arc are independent to each other. Therefore, it does not matter which order you read the stories. The repairman arc is also standalone unlike some arcs where you are asked to read other stories.

[Repairman arc] [1] [9599]

Rev 1.2

“Well, that sucked.”

I was covered with soot. A capacitor exploded and it brought down other carbon based components with it.

Another person on sight was communicating with the command center.

“Yes, it went down. Should be alright though. Will bring it up ASAP.”

Easy for him to say since he is just an overseer; he doesn't need to work on the darn thing. But I and few others didn't complain. It was our job and we had no issue or whatsoever with it.

When I went back to my quarter, I was in dire need of a warm shower. I wasn't exhausted however. This wasn't a hard job by any means. An annoying job maybe, but the labor wasn't hard.

Allow me to introduce myself.

I am a repairman on Jupiter assault station. I was born on Saturn but moved to Jupiter station when I was still a child. I still recall how excited I was, as a child, to live in space. How little I knew at that time that living in space was just like living in anywhere else with a solid ground.

Living in space has its merits. Though it would greatly depend on what kind of person he or she was.

Warm water pellets rained on me in a shower cubic. Closing my eyes, I leaned against a wall and let it clean me.

Space is really quiet. And even that is hardly an exaggeration. For those who spent most of their lives on a planet, there is a chance that they might go insane if they settle down in space. They would have to play something, let it be music or some form of drama or anything, in background to keep the quietness away. Except for some organized commercial areas, everywhere else in the station is dead quiet. You wouldn't hear anything at all. Even trace of footsteps could be welcome sound in such an environment.

I have forgotten what it is like to live on a planet surface with solid and steady gravity, but those who moved to space during their mid-life seem to miss their former soil life. According to a fellow repairman who went back to his home planet, Earth, he said he missed sound of wind, and occasional sounds from various objects. He insisted that space was too "quiet" and eventually had to go back due to mental health issues.

For me and many others here though, the quietness wasn't an issue. Being a repairman of this station was hardly a privileged career but this career has something that no other ordinary jobs could offer. We are required, by rules, on standby 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As much as that sounds daunting, it is not that bad. We operate by earning points, you see.

"Hmm."

I let out a satisfied grunt as I left my shower cube. My quarter was a self-contained one-room apartment with its own food dispenser, bathroom, and garbage disposal modules. If I ever wanted, I could just isolate myself in my quarter for years and nobody would care and even notice that I was gone.

Soaked wet and naked, I carelessly sat in my chair and turned on my computer to confirm that I did earn one point from the job I just came from. Several water drops were floating around my body in zero gravity. The first thing I had to learn fast when I started living on this station was putting on iron boots or any form of shoes on always in order to keep myself attached to the designated floor. Otherwise, I'd be floating all day long and it wasn't fun. In other words, walking on barefoot wasn't possible.

There were thousands of repairmen like me on this station, and they all operated on points. By rules, we were required to earn seven points a week no matter what unless you submitted a letter of absence to commend center. Failure to comply this rule resulted in being fired. And if I earned more than seven points, I would receive a bonus.

The downside of this career was that it had no future, at least as far as I knew. I had been a repairman for almost ten years now and I had yet to see anyone who was promoted to anything higher than perhaps an overseer. An overseer was just like a repairman like me but he had to oversee an operation if an incident involved more than three repairmen. Overseers were paid exactly the same amount as us repairmen but they did work a little less which is rather pointless.

“Hmph, one point,” I told myself reluctantly. “Better than nothing.”

It was an easy task. It just so happened that a capacitor exploded and made a mess.

Social people were not widely accepted to professional roles in space because they were very vulnerable to loneliness. Of course, there were jobs in commercial areas where social people were perfectly justified to be hired, but for solitary roles like the job I had, they determined that social people were a recipe for a disaster in long term.

Apparently, research data as well as real world results backed the theory.

Many roles in space required workers to be solitary rather than be social animals. They didn't need to talk to each other; they just needed to get their given tasks done as silently as possible and leave as little traces as possible.

My job, being a repairman, was the perfect example. We worked in background where residents of the station didn't normally see us. Even if they did see us, they didn't mind us and they didn't bother us. They didn't talk to us unless they had to or were forced to. In other words, we were ignored which was perfectly fine by us. "We are like worker ants," someone said. What's "ants" anyway?

I didn't talk to people unless I must. It wasn't not an illness or some disorder. It was just who I was; it was who we were. Thousands of my fellow repairmen shared similar traits; they were solitary and they are gloomy. We –

My strings of thoughts were intercepted when I spotted a work order. Its reward was only one point, but it was a quick and easy job. I decided to take this one and quickly grabbed it. Tossing my soot covered uniform into a laundry module, I grabbed another of the same suit from my closet module. After putting them on quickly and equipping my tools, I rushed out.

I didn't even need to bring my car. It was within walking distance which was why I hurried to the scene before someone else took it.

As the door to outside slid open sleekly, bright light blinded me momentarily, and then supposedly beautiful green sparkling park came to my view. You see, my quarter overlooks a community park. It is supposedly beautiful.

I am not certain because I don't have any attachments to those green stuff. There was no green stuff on Saturn in my childhood. I hear, though, that those from Earth and Moon dig those green things supposedly.

To us, repairmen, those green stuff are a part of headache because they often conflict with the station system. Their roots can somehow get into a tightly sealed circuit hub. Sometimes, those green stuff bring pests.

Thousands of one-room quarters were arranged through the dome wall. My quarter was one of them. To be exact, my quarter was located on 62nd floor and it beared #3101. I could see endless doors to other quarters on my left, right, and far ahead on other side of dome wall. I read that the idea came from studying a beehive. What the hell a beehive is beyond me. I could have probably found out easily if I wanted. Why bother though.

I arrived at the troubled spot according to the mission data. It was at dead end of a dark alley in a busy downtown area. I could hear people's random chats and their footsteps through the narrow passageway. I brought out a flashlight from my tool bag and searched the area.

I found the source of the trouble. I could see a badly deformed system access panel. I suppose somebody kicked it really hard. Maybe, he was drunk, but that's not my concern. My task is to find out what went wrong underneath the panel with a huge dent. I inserted a cord into a socket hidden on its left bottom corner.

"This is unit 434402 at task # D202. Requesting access to a system panel. The cord is in."

A computerized voice responded to my statement almost immediately.

“Processing...”

Pressurized air was quickly released from the panel and it became unlocked and loose. Upon opening it, I could easily see what went wrong. They generally design so that there is enough gap between the system panel and a circuit board, but when someone supposedly kicked it hard, the panel shorted out the board underneath. And the shorted board was causing issues for traffic and street light control. It's nothing serious in the grand scheme of things which was why it had only one reward point. I could repair the board which would take an hour at least, or I could simply request a replacement which would be much easier.

“Requesting a replacement. Board ID is”

I spelled out a long number consisted with few alphabets.

“Replacement on its way.”

My job was pretty much done at this point. I just had to wait for the replacement to come and simply replace the shorted board.

Meaning I had some time to kill. I leaned my back against a wall in the dark alley. At the far end, I could see people minding their own business on the other, bright, side.

Yes, it was the bright side...

When I came back from the task, the clock was ticking toward 21:00 hour. In space, there was no concept of day and night, and the station let light on 24 hours always. Darkness had a strong tendency of increasing crime rate, so they just let light on always.

Finding a good time to sleep could pose a little trouble for soil huggers but for people like us, we simply had our own schedule to sleep. In my case, I had a tendency to sleep between 11:00 to 16:00 hour. Tasks were available always, so it

didn't matter when I slept. I sat down in my chair and checked my computer to confirm that I did earn the one point.

That's two points a day and today is just the first day of a week, so that's good enough for me today.

Earning 7 points a week was easy enough; the thing was that the basic wage for just 7 points was not enough to support anyone. The basic wage which you got weekly for earning 7 points was just 500 credit. Ordinary salary men were paid an average of 10.000 credit a season. A season spanned to about 90 days. If I just earned 7 points a week, by end of a season, I would make slightly over 6.000 credit and that barely, just barely, would cover a very basic life style.

Ultimately, It meant that, while being a repairman sounded very luxurious on surface, you generally had to work your ass off for some weeks to make a decent living out of it.

The overall task system for the repairmen were quite laid back and new repairmen often made a dire mistake of slacking which will result them only 6.000 credit by end of a season where they would realize that they actually had to work decently.

It happened to me once when I had just become a repairman about 10 or so years ago.

As long as you fulfilled the 7 points, the system did not push you to work any harder. In reality, however, you did have to go beyond 7 points for some weeks to meet the average wage of an average salary man.

I generally did 10 points a week and earned about 8.000 credit by end of a season, which was not all that bad considering I supported only myself. Majority of my fellow repairmen were single. We were mostly solitary people and were quite sexually inactive, so we didn't go out to meet new people and make out. We did, however, had a strong desire to push our hobbies since that was our only mean to kill spare time.

My stomach growled at one point. I pulled out of my thoughts and looked at time. I took an energy pill about 6 hours ago, so nutrition wise, I should be fine, but being a mortal I am, my internal organs needed something to work on.

Standing up from my chair, I walked toward the kitchen module. There were three buttons. I pushed one on far left and the module dispensed a chunk of what could only be described as light gray slimy food. It actually had no nutrition, no calorie, no cholesterol, no whatsoever. It simply existed for us to chew and give our internal organs a job. It had no taste but helped greatly to take regular dumps at the toilet.

While taking casual dips at the food, I browsed the net. At one point, I received a red e-mail which indicated that it was supposed to be an urgent message. Hardly any red mails had been urgent to me at least.

I narrowed my eyes as I read the e-mail. It was from my fellow repairman and it said to visit news site.

Upon visiting news site, I could clearly see why it warranted to be a red mail although quite frankly it would have no effect on my life.

The headline read: Two admirals down by the crimson wizard.

I read through the article.

It said in summary:

Two courageous admirals, Jack and Rommel, stood up against the crimson wizard. The admirals were against the decision to grant independence of Mars and assembled a large fleet in order to upset the decision. However, both of them soon fell to the crimson wizard's trickery. Admiral Jack was killed in action and Admiral Rommel was captured.

The crimson wizard, some called him the red wizard. He was often credited with everything that is wrong with this universe. Hewas a very controversial figure in

politics and justice because he had gotten away with every crime he committed openly in public simply because, well, he could.

I personally could care less whatever he did. I mean the guy is on a totally different level of world. United Sol has been doing bad for God knows how long. It didn't take a genius to figure that a revolt would occur. I didn't think Mars could actually gain independence though. That was certainly unexpected.

Admiral Rommel is actually the admin of the Jupiter assault station. In other words, he is the big boss for me. But then he is on top of the chain whereas I am at the very bottom. I've never met him in person and he wouldn't want to meet someone like me. There are tens of thousands of personnel employed by the station. Since he has been captured by the wizard, it is likely that the administrator of the station will change but that won't have any effect on low-end workers like us.

I shrugged as I circled my hair, withdrawing myself from the news. Well, I am gonna take a nap.

When I woke up, it was 16:35. I cleaned my face and took an energy pill. My hobbies include drawing scenery of space, light hacking, and machine assembly. Because of my drawing hobby, I volunteered for a quarter that was located on dome wall instead of safer quarters. Quarters without a window are arguably safer in case of accidents. And they are supposedly shielded better for harmful rays from the space.

Quarters that were located on dome wall had excellent view of space obviously. I could see the space whenever I wanted to. But if an object hits the dome, I would likely be one of first ones to be sucked out to space and face a horrible death. But then such an accident hasn't occurred for hundreds of years, especially after Dr. Cezary's shielding tech was implemented.

I yawned delightfully. It was a good nap or sleep; however you wish to define it. Hopefully, there will be some easy jobs available.

After a quick browsing, I saw a task worth 2 points but it already had a unit dispatched for it. Still, the task was still open which meant that another person was required. I figured I'd go for it.

I could tell why the task was still open. It was an intersection where signals had gone dark. A repairman was already present as the task indicated but she was handing the traffic manually, thus she had no time to actually repair anything.

"I am unit 434402."

I haven't spoken my name ever since I took this job. We go by our unit number always.

"Hello, I am unit 799922. Do you want to take over or do you want to repair the signals?"

"I will repair it."

It should be a piece of cake. I approached a system panel for traffic signals nearby. Inserting a cord, I spoke to my comm. "This is unit 434402 at task DD682. Requesting access."

And as always, a computerized voice responded right away.

"Access granted."

It was easy to repair. The circuit was perfectly fine but there was a system meltdown on operating system level. I simply had to reset the system and it went right back up.

Unit 799922 left as soon as she saw the lights started working and I went on my way, collecting one point for each of us.

The job took only one hour, so I decided to take on another task when I got back. It was very unusual to see a flashing red task. Its bounty was 30 points. The highest I've seen was 300 points actually but the job required 300 repairmen, so in essence, the job was only worth a point for each repairman involved.

I read the task's description. Apparently, a ship failed to dock properly and rammed right into a wall. It took out numerous circuit boards and unreported amount of casualties. Repairmen are required as well as medic. There were already five repairmen in for the job. I decided to take on the job as well and rushed out of my quarter.

To be utterly honest, I don't go to the docking bay area often simply because any task involving the docking bay area is almost always complicated. It's often not worth the time to devote some hours just for one point or two. every once in a while though, I grow an urge to do a complex work. Today was such a case.

"That... looks bad," I told myself as I approached the scene. A luxury shuttle had rammed into a docking bay wall, taking out pretty much any circuits in its vicinity. The shuttle was pretty much intact though. You'd think the shuttle would be battered into pieces if it had rammed into a 800mm thick titanium wall.

"I am unit 434402."

I said to the five repairmen who were busy doing their things on sight. No one responded and I didn't mind. I entered the shuttle. A repairman was hacking into the system so that he could control the shuttle and move it out of the wall. I saw eight bleeding people, but we weren't allowed to touch wounded people per rule, so I left them alone. They would be taken care of by medic when they arrive soon-ish. I assisted him with his hacking and we piloted the shuttle out of the wall and landed it safely nearby.

A group of paramedics arrived and entered the shuttle to look after the wounded ones. One was declared dead on sight. Nobody said a word. I didn't say a word. Other fellow repairmen said no word. Even the paramedics didn't say a word except for when they declared a wounded person dead.

"She's dead. Recording time," A paramedic stated indifferently.

I could tell this accident was a result of drinking since I could smell booze when I entered the shuttle. Since the shuttle system was hacked, I decided to download its flight data. One of us would have to submit that to the command center anyway.

"Unit 434402, downloaded flight data, uploading now," I said to comm.

"Received."

After I left the shuttle, I saw people probably related to the casualties of the shuttle crying outside. Some of them gathered around the one announced dead and were crying.

I moved to the giant hole the shuttle made when it went through 800mm titanium wall. If the shuttle wasn't a luxury one, it wouldn't have gone through such a thick plate. Luxury shuttles had shields. I inspected the hole throughout. It became clear to me that, if the shuttle didn't have shield, it would have exploded instead of going through the wall. Its shield absorbed so much kinetic energy and it was the shield that made the hole. Once shield collapsed, power source for shuttle ran out and it may have gently landed in the hole.

The hole was made by the shield. More precisely, the shield melted the wall. If you imagine a heated iron ball being thrown into a wax wall, it would be easier to imagine what happened.

As much as the damage was bad, if the shuttle exploded, it would have been far worse and this task might have warranted 300 points rather than mere 30. For once, as far as I recall, a luxury vessel prevailed.

I and other repairmen spent hours rerouting necessary lines. We weren't builders, so we wouldn't need to replace the 800mm titanium wall. Besides, we don't have the tools to do so. Once we are done here, a new task for builders will pop up. I spent approximately 6 hours on the job.

I couldn't quite recall how many repairmen were on sight, so I counted on my luck when I checked my computer to see how many points I earned.

I earned 2 points which meant there were, I guess, about 15 repairmen. Sum of 5 points for 2 days, not bad at all, I thought.

For next two days, I simply slacked, doing my hobbies and sleeping more than usual. I also called my parent on Saturn to check in.

As far as I recall, my parent wasn't quite pleased that I took this profession. I have no father since my mother decided to accept an artificial sperm instead of having a partner. Since so many marriages end up in divorce anyway, I'd say it was a wise of her, less headache overall.

As I said, she wasn't pleased that I accepted this job. At that time, though, I had no choice. She wanted to go back to Saturn where she was born and grew up. I was also born on Saturn, but I was used to living in space since I spent my childhood in space. We did not see this on the same level and argued a little. The only way for me to stay in space was to have a permanent career. In rush, I took an entrance exam and passed an interview to become a registered repairman.

She eventually accepted, or had to accept, my decision to stay. She left for Saturn alone. It had been hard to talk to her for some years, but that is not an issue now. After all, it's been 10 years. She informed me recently that she was planning to take on another artificial sperm and wanted my approval. I told her to do what she wanted to do.

I mean, she's only 128 years old. She has like 300 years more to live. Everyone has to have something going in their life to stay sane. Otherwise, people would commit suicide which, in fact, a lot do. I once read that the suicide rate on Earth exceeded 65% of total death for the planet.

Since average life span is about 400 years, life has apparently become too long and – too boring-. Some studies were conducted and it said that human spirits were never meant to last that long. The studies found that it was only natural for humans to go insane at some point of their 400-year lifespan.

Further physiological and psychological studies were conducted. And later reports indicated that it was socially active people who committed suicide at some point of their lives. The most common age of suicide was found to be between somewhere 350 years. The studies also reported that the space navy should reject applicants who are found to be socially active because of long space voyage had a high chance of driving them insane.

Basically, the point, at least to me, was that the semi physical immortality we have now isn't compatible with integrity of our spirits. By time they commit suicide, they might just as well.

I had 3 days left on my week. I needed to earn at least 2 points which would be a piece of cake, but I should earn 5 points more which again wouldn't be too hard.

I looked through the task board and spotted few jobs I wanted. I chose a task worth 2 points but it already had a repairman in. I chose the task only because I recognized the repairman's unit number. My unit number is 434402. The repairman is reported to be 434400. She and I took the exam on the same day and had an interview on the same day. I've actually met her on that day even.

I undocked my car and flew away to the task sight.

Upon arriving at the task sight, I recognized the repairman. Yep, that's her. The task was regarding a stuck railbus.

I parked my car on ground and casually approached the repairman.

"Hello, I am 434402."

She turned around and responded, "Hello, I am 434...." She recognized me. "Long time no see, 434402."

I beamed a smile at her. "Yep, it's been" Well, I don't quite remember. 5 years? Or so, I guess.

A railbus was stuck. A railbus is a public transportation used to travel a great distance from one stop to another distant stop. It floats at a high altitude and moves at a great speed, so it being stuck isn't welcome news to anyone.

Thankfully, its safety program kicked in and it's safely floating at the moment. The name "Railbus" is from "Railgun" + "Bus". The bus is literally as fast as railgun ammunition, so it earned such a name.

"Let's go up," She told me. The railbus was above us. We couldn't see it from the ground though. As we approached the railbus using our cars, passengers inside of the bus waved at us. They weren't in panic and were quite casual.

At this height, should the railbus fall, no one would survive. But then it's not gonna fall, I am sure. As a machine assembly hobbyist, I knew the railbus very well. While its main frame is susceptible to errors like this one, the bus had tripe backup thrusters with its own operating system on read-only ROM which meant that it wasn't possible to be hacked. One of them is enough to keep them afloat. If all three fail, that would mean the railbus is meant to fall by destiny. Indeed, the railbus has a track record of zero percent crush rate. So far at least.

I maneuvered my car skillfully to avoid blowing air from its thruster and approached the bus from bottom while my fellow repairman approached the bus

from front in order to check its main frame status. I was at its bottom to check its backup thrusters just in case.

“The mainframe has experienced the blackscreen of death,” She told me through her comm. “I am rebooting and see if that works.”

I checked its backup thrusters. All of them were in perfect condition and were activated.

“That didn’t work,” She reported. “I need you here.”

When I parked my car in air next to hers, I jumped over to her car. She was in progress of taking out its entire main frame.

“You plan to replace the main frame?”

She nodded.

That would be quicker, I understood. But it turned out that they didn’t any spare main frame for the specific model in stock.

“Crap,” She blurted out. “I didn’t bring the OS disk.”

“I do.” And I happily handed over my OS disk to her. An OS disk had a copy of operating system for all kind of different frames.

“Thanks.”

Since replacing the main frame wasn’t an answer for now at least, she chose to reformat and reinstall the OS. That was the easier way of doing the job. I’d have chosen such a path also. Troubleshooting for an OS that you can’t even log into is a pain. Hopefully, it’s not a hardware problem or we will be spending many more hours for this one point job...

“Crap.”

This time, I said that. Reinstalling OS didn't work which would mean that it is a hardware problem. Now, we had another problem even before trying to fix the main frame. The railbus has been stuck for more than half an hour and the passengers inside were getting impatient.

I spoke to the command center through my comm.

“Requesting level 2, over.”

A short moment later, a human responded.

“This is level 2. What is the problem?”

I briefed him on the whole situation in detail.

“Roger. We will send a replacement railbus on its way. However, you are to repair the main frame if you wish to earn the points.”

“Understood. We will repair the main frame.”

“An empty railbus is on its way. ETA 360 seconds.”

And it arrived at 358 seconds. I and my fellow repairman assisted the passengers to move over to the new one. Once that was done and the replacement railbus went on its way, it was now our job to get this broken railbus in front of us to get working.

Otherwise, no point for neither of us.

We disassembled the whole god damn main frame piece by piece and inspected each piece. We went through thousands of pieces until we found the problem. Err, actually few problems.

“Two capacitors. One data flow chip,” Unit 434400 said.

Then we assembled it back to the way it was, spending over five hours overall to get it working. Not worth one point, but that's life.

Biding good-bye to my fellow unit 434400, I went back to my quarter. I was so tired that I didn't even confirm that I earned the point and went to bed.

A single point for a day...; that wasn't the plan but, oh well.

As soon as I woke up, I took a shower and swallowed an energy pill. Come to think of it, I haven't eaten anything for few days, so I decided to take the dummy food also from the food dispenser module.

Now, I wonder if there will be an easy job today...

- Fin