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Bounty Hunt in the City of the Stars

Stellapolis

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[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Copyright](#)

Chapter 1

Titus Tannenberg sat reclining outside the dingy cafe. A bent cigarette hung from his lip and his hands were folded behind his messy brown hair. His clothes gave him a patchy look. On the table stood his cup of tea. He had been waiting for a while and the agreed upon time had already passed, but that was not unheard of. He looked up at the sky, where the distant sun was visible far away and like a line through the sky above him, the opposite side of Starpol 4's wheel went across the sky. It was night over there on the other side now. Nearer he could see the hub of the wheel, where the spaceport was, and the spokes of the wheel through which they themselves had come down here not so many hours ago.

He took a breath through the cigarette and exhaled a cloud of smoke. Across the street he could see some screens showing news in Cyrillic letters. Below were the shops' Chinese signs. It had not been entirely cheap to pay the triad to be allowed to work in their district, but it was better to pay immediately rather than risk them coming and collecting themselves. Titus liked his fingers and you had to be careful about operating in the territory of others without giving them their share, but it would be nice if the informant would show up! They had already invested a lot of money in this, so it was a matter of getting the job done, otherwise they would run out of money. Here in Starpol 4's China district, there was a buzz of activity in the street and there were many shops that no doubt all paid the triad. That's how it is. Starpol 4 was otherwise something of a wreck, as the maintenance of the habitat ring needed a loving hand, but it was hardly something that the oligarchs spent a lot of time on these days.

He took one more breath through the cigarette and casually put it in the ashtray and took a sip of the tea. Across the road stood their little rented wagon. In there Bo sat and kept an eye on him and the other surroundings. In the clear light of hindsight, this may not have been the best solution, as there were not many other wagons in the area, so it actually stood out, but on the other hand, they just had to meet an informant and did not need too much security.

The air was somewhat thick in the street and it was hot. A sure sign of the lack of maintenance of the climate systems on Starpol 4. It was a neglected and overcrowded place, but as far as everyone knew the place still gave profits to the government and there was better maintenance in their districts, which was not easy to get access to. In the Chinese districts, at least, not many resources were used.

The earbud in his right ear activated.

I think I see the informant coming! Said Bo over the radio connection between them.

It was about time, too, Titus replied calmly.

He straightened up and put the red bag that was the agreed signal on the table. Soon the informant came to him. He was an evasive bespectacled man with the agreed yellow shirt.

Does the green tea taste good? He asked as agreed.

Personally, I prefer Irish coffee. Titus replied and pushed the cup towards the man. So feel free to drink the rest.

The man smiled broadly on his yellow face. His teeth were like shoveled into his face. The informant accepted the cup and sat down and placed a folder on the table.

Thank you very much. He said.

I have been told that you can provide information on where I can find a friend of mine. Said Titus.

I know a lot of people and how to get in touch with them. Replied the man, smiling with his crooked teeth. I think you can find everything you need in this.

He pointed down at the folder lying on the table.

But of course I will have to be compensated for my help! He continued smiling. I assume this red bag contains what was agreed?

Titus put his hand on the bag and nodded.

It contains the requested items. He said, opening the bag and showing the containers with various beauty products.

He let the man take one of them and unscrew the lid. He examined the powder that was inside.

And they contain all the chemicals in demand? He asked.

You can check them all if you want! Titus replied, pushing the bag over to the man who went through everything.

It was not difficult to make a trade like this in Starpol 4. The authorities were not overwhelmingly committed, the biggest problem was to get what they wanted transported here, which Titus and Bo had used as their trading opportunity.

After a while, the man nodded and put everything back in the bag.

It's as it should be. Treated properly, these things could be extremely lucrative for me, he said.

Good for you, Titus said, but now it's your turn to live up to the agreement.

The man opened the folder and took out a piece of paper and handed it to Titus.

On it was a name and an address.

I think this is the information you need to find your prey. I know you've been in contact with the triad and they're not interested in protecting him anymore, so you can just go and pick him up. Said the informant and stood up.

And the information is legit? Titus asked.

The man laughed.

Of course it is! What do you think would happen to me, if it became known that my information was not worth the hassle? He answered.

Titus nodded and the man took the bag and the folder and left him. He looked at the note with the address.

He looked over at the car where Bo was sitting.

Did you get it all? Titus asked.

Yes, I've got it all, shall we go? I do not want to stay here too long.

Agreed, but you will not be happy with the address! Said Titus, getting up from the table and putting the payment plus a tip on the table. It always paid to be generous ...

Titus put his hands in his pockets and strolled over to the car. He was a somewhat ragged type with an indifference to him, which, however, could easily turn into nervousness if things did not go as planned. He took out a new cigarette and hung it in the corner of his mouth, lit it and threw the match away.

He threw himself into the passenger seat of the car and closed the door behind him. He looked over at Bo, who looked disapprovingly at him.

Bo rolled the window down, took the cigarette out of Titus' mouth and threw it out. Titus raised his eyebrow but said nothing.

Bo was a large man with upper arms as bridge pillars. He was the muscles and the brains of the team. He was almost completely squeezed in as he sat there in their rented car. He would never be able to go unnoticed anywhere with his huge body and red hair.

So? Bo asked. What is the address on the note?

Titus sighed and sat up more properly in the seat.

You will not like it. He said, handing the note over to Bo, who took it with an expression of discomfort.

He looked at the note with the scrawled address on it.

Oh, by the Lord! Bo almost shouted when he had read the note.

District 12! It's a total rat hole. No one would go there! Even to hide!

He looked over at his partner, who had put his hands behind his head again. Bo knew he was nervous, but always

had to give the relaxed and indifferent attitude. It was really annoying.

There's not much to do, Titus said. We need to pick him up. After all, he is worth a lot of money to us. So if you can get this box started, we can get going and get this over with.

I should sew those lips together! Said Bo, starting the wagon. As if it's not enough to go to Starpol 4 District 17 with all the yellow devils that are here. Now I also have to be a taxi driver directly into the solar system's asshole!

Let's keep the tone! Titus said ironically. It does not help to cry like a baby. We need the money and it's not a difficult job, we just need to get hold of the guy, who no one seems to want to help. It's just a minus that it is in District 12 he is hiding.

Yes, yes, I know, but who's hiding in District 12?

A very desperate person without a doubt ... Titus replied.

They drove up the main road that connected the various districts in Starpol 4's ring. Titus leaned back. It took some time to drive from one district to the next. Below them they could see the dilapidated buildings and districts of this part of Starpol 4. The more fashionable and sparsely populated areas were in the districts from 30 and up after. District 12 was the last district before the part of the ring that was completely closed and airless. Not even the metro ring went there anymore. The only reason the government still kept it open was that they did not know where else to send the poor people who lived there. At the other end, the ring closed after District 57, which was said to be something of a wealthy area. People like Titus and Bo, of course, had never been to that end. They would never be allowed in. Few were. The oligarchs were very cautious about their privacy.

They approached District 12. Unlike District 17, which had been given the name China along with some other districts due to their composition of residents, no one had taken the trouble to give District 12 another name. There were