Chapter 191: The Next Project

"How has everything been going? Do you have everything you need?" I asked as I walked over to one of the many labs within my new base underneath the Burrow.

We had started calling this place Lab Zero, to differentiate it from the others. It may have been me being lazy, and copying the naming convention of Nova Tech, but I didn't really care. The name wasn't important, rather, it was the facility itself.

I had split it into four research labs, owing to what I learned during my tenure at Nova Tech's base. It was a lot quicker to copy an existing structure. This was especially so when I had recruited their personnel who already knew the system.

"Sir, we are almost ready to proceed to testing with the new bio-coprocessor chip. Then we just have to come up with the production plan. That part won't be too hard for the in-house version, but for the commercial version will require more thorough testing to reassure our clients."

I saw Cora's expression darkened at the mention of the delay before her project would have a commercial impact. It was understandable, as she had spent almost a year working on it. In the beginning, she was surprised at all the new ideas I had for it, but she quickly took them and thoroughly studied their viability.

It really helped because time was something I was always lacking. It couldn't be put into words how helpful it was to have someone take my rough ideas and polish them into something useable.

The only reason why it had taken so long was because I had her team assist with the cyber arm first. The commercial version of the Talos was scheduled to be released much sooner, so we needed all hands on deck.

"Very good. Just enter all the details for the experiments you plan to do. Headquarters will send you a reply once everything is ready, along with the test subjects."

"Understood, sir."

She nodded her head toward me, but then continued to stare my way. She wasn't trying to hide her hesitant expression, so I urged her to speak.

"What is it? Feel free to speak your mind."

"Sir…I wanted to request some time off for my team. I know it isn't appro—"

"Stop," I interrupted. "Both of us know that won't be possible. At most, you and your team can frolic within our headquarters compound. I can't risk having you guys go out into the public and risk alerting Nova Tech."

Cora breathed in deeply and finally focused back on her work.

It wasn't something I would budge on. Despite the NPC saying he had Nova Tech in check, it didn't mean I should openly taunt my enemies. I would rather not flaunt their former employees being under my employ. At the same time, these researchers knew a little too much. Without the assurance of their loyalty, I preferred keeping them where I could see them for now.

Hmm, I guess my mindset is becoming more corpo by the day.

Seeing that there was nothing more needed to be said, I returned to my own office.

Besides Cora's team, there were currently two other teams led by two others. One of them was led by Pino, the former mercenary from Aegis. He led the team that specialized in quality assurance. They would utilize his specialty of running simulations on top of the typical tests.

The other team was led by the former head of the R&D department. They dealt with more traditional research and were empowered by all the new cassettes I developed in combination with Nova Tech's knowledge.

The fourth and final team was led by me. Naturally, this team consisted of all the best experts in the fields I required help in. That included experts in the fields of mechanical engineering, physics, mathematics, and material science. They specialized in the more common, but also most vital fields that numerous innovations required.

It wasn't that I valued the foundational knowledge more, but the researchers in the more exotic and newer disciplines of science were in high demand. No sane corporation would let them out of their clutches.

That was why I had begun saving up my upgrade points throughout this time, deliberating what to invest it in. I had a few potential candidates, but many of them also required an enormous amount of investment from our company as a whole. I would only dedicate my upgrade points to it once we had the means to make use of them.

I brought up my status screen and the amount of upgrade points I had stored up always put a smile on my face.

Status	
Level:	38
EXP:	130/3800
Musculoskeletal:	211
Neural Reflex:	65

Visuomotor Coordination:	87
Endurance:	59
Sensory Perception:	127
Upgrade Points:	20
Upgrades:	- Stealth +7 - Hacking +5 - Cybernetic Engineering +10 - Stealth Technology +12 - Software Engineering +12 - Electrical Engineering +10
Enhancements:	SAID: Zenitech Sebastien v2 Bio-Coprocessor: SocialCorp Lightning II Optics: Mirage Tech Clear-Sights mk.12 Cyberarm (Left): Nova Tech Heracle Mk. 3 Cyberarm (Right): Nova Tech Heracle Mk. 3 Auditory: SocialCorp Echo IV Vocal: SocialCorp Orator III Cardiovascular: BioGen Lifepump 5 Sensory: Halls Corp Argus Elite Custom Additional Processing: Halls Corp Custom ST Miscellaneous: Halls Corp HSU Custom Shade

It wasn't possible to earn experience points every day, with me being cooped up in this underground base, busy with work. However, I took advantage of every opportunity I had, especially when I dropped by the wasteland.

More than once, I was tempted to invest all the points into one of my existing skills. However, a more rational mind kept me in check. The theological knowledge I would gain would only become more complicated. That meant the supporting factors around me wouldn't be able to keep up if I got ahead of myself.

The materials I would need to manifest those theories into reality wouldn't be available. That was unless I invested an equal amount of points into material science or whatever supporting disciplines were required.

None of my helpers would also be able to assist me, as the contents would be far out of their reach. Any research would become excruciatingly slow, as I struggled to manage it all myself, without being able to delegate or make use of third-party resources.

What I had with twelve points in both stealth technology and software engineering should be enough to keep any nefarious parties at bay.

It was far better to spend the upgrade points on something that could strengthen both myself and the company. One person could only do so much. I'd rather not become a lone wolf.

With that said, twenty upgrade points were still an astronomical sum. It was enough to upgrade two skills to plus ten points each. I still needed more time to see how the company grew before finalizing my decision.

That was why, for now, I had to focus on my existing projects. There were two main projects that were currently on my plate. The first one was targeting the commercial market by utilizing my software specialties. The second one would be focused on internal use first, with the set of cybernetics.

The software market was extremely attractive, especially for a small company like mine. It didn't have to worry about the physical logistics aspect and had huge earning potential. This would mean that any potential competitors would have fewer avenues to sabotage us. Most of their options would be limited to the virtual space, and that I was confident in.

The second project for the set of cybernetics had been on my to-do list for quite some time now. I was especially motivated to work on it after witnessing the combat between high-level corporations. The speed and ferocity of their fighting made it clear we weren't ready to participate.

That was why I wanted to bridge that gap as much as possible.

However, I knew that wasn't enough to level the playing field if fighting broke out. I also had the opportunity to witness several trump cards companies had to overcome their enemies as well. Ferrumus Corp had their signature blades that cut through energy shields and armor alike. My guardian angel's group had these frequency grenades to neutralize energy shields, and a lightweight power armor to finish off the job.

My company had none of that. We had guns purchased through commercial channels, and that was it.

It would take ages for us to bypass any energy shields. That was why I was eyeing a few skills in my system to address the issue as well. Though, I had to account for a second skill that would synergize well with it.

These decisions hinged on how well my software product would do. The better it did, the more ambitious my plan could be.

With that in mind, I pushed these distracting thoughts aside and focused on my project.

"Lanus, put me on 'do not disturb' mode. I trust that you'll take care of the experiment request once Cora is done submitting it?"

"Affirmative. There are enough test subjects within the facility to be redirected to research group blue."

"Good."

With my matters in order, it was time to start coding.

Previously, I had spent months brainstorming on what I could do to maximize my profits without disrupting an existing market. The last thing I needed was another corporation to have a feud with me over stealing bread from their table. Some level of that was always unavoidable, but there were different levels to it.

It wasn't surprising that I started off by researching the existing market. The software industry wasn't as booming as my old world, due to understandable reasons.

Enterprise software was missing, as each corporation only trusted its own work. Perhaps some vassal companies shared programs, but that still meant they were entirely absent in the commercial market.

Productivity software was better, as it was much easier to detect any nefarious code from the finished works. Each corpo preferred a particular set of office suites. It was only the project management tools that were more absent from the market.

Various other software only had niche markets due to all the security concerns.

The remaining major sectors in the software market were cloud computing, SaaS, gaming, education, retail, e-commerce, and automotive software. This was due to these areas mainly catering to the masses, so security concerns were thrown out the window.

My existing communication app had already appealed to the masses, advertising we were different from the typical corporations that were out to milk them dry. Many were surprised we were still in business without being driven away by competitors. We weren't surprised, though, as we knew beforehand that the communication app industry wasn't that attractive. It hadn't stepped on anyone's toes enough for them to take action.

That was why my first idea was to head into the e-commerce sector. I could enable people to be able to host their own online business at reasonable prices. However, after some more research, the idea proved to be too disruptive.

It was hard to regulate what my customers would sell, which may in turn draw the wrong corporation's attention. It also dipped our toes into numerous industries, allowing corporations to possibly ally against us to shut us down.

SaaS, which stood for software as a service, was out of the question for the same reason. There were major players in that sector that I would rather not disrupt.

Eventually, I settled for the gaming industry. It was generally a fast-moving consumer goods industry. People bought new games all the time. The competition was fierce, but the companies knew not to waste time sabotaging others, as there were too many players in the market. Consumers were always looking for the next new thing. It was just more efficient to dedicate your resources to your next game rather than sabotage.

It also offered various payment models as well, with subscription models, in-app purchases, and offerings like loot boxes.

However, the industry was not something easy for me to just jump into. As good as I had gotten with software, the gaming industry required an artistic aspect of it as well. The one thing I had going for me was that I had a treasure trove of knowledge from my world.

In the past, a certain executive from SocialCorp had hosted a volleyball tournament just because he enjoyed a certain manga he had found. After doing some investigation, I found the entertainment industry was completely different from what I knew. That meant I could 'borrow' some ideas from my predecessors.