

# Chapter 194: Facility Inspection

I had my body double continue to show his face around Elevate City while I took the trip to NLA with Thorne. As always, we used our holographic projection tech to disguise ourselves as average Joes.

That meant we wouldn't be getting an escort from Vin and our men from the airport to our compound. Instead, we got a hotel like any normal visitor would do and settled in. We checked in with our luggage before I met up with Thorne in the lobby.

"You double-check you got everything?" I asked.

All the stuff we would be leaving in our room was just props. If we couldn't return in time for some reason, we wouldn't mind losing it.

"Of course."

I stared at him for a second and waited, but he didn't do anything. It made me give him a nudge.

"Oh...right."

A look of realization set in before he stood close to me. That was because we were currently disguised as a couple. To the onlookers, I would be just another man traveling with his partner, holding on to him.

We walked onto the public streets and began following the arrow drawn by our optics. It guided us toward a secluded, dark alley. Without a word, we moved over to a rusty manhole cover and removed it.

With the strength of our cybernetics, we were able to easily toss it around like a toy. Still, we ensured we closed it properly after we went down.

The smell swiftly intensified the further down we climbed. Thankfully, it wasn't flooded, so there was ample room on the elevated walkways beside the sewage flow.

As we walked down the musty wastewater network that spanned the entire city, we made sure to be on guard. There were various critters like rats in here, and I heard there were crocodiles or even the occasional mutant that snuck in as well.

Whether it was true or not, I never had a good experience in the sewers. Every time I came down here, it was either to infiltrate into an enemy base or rescue some mercenary from her pursuers.

As if the world knew what was on my mind, the sound of crumbling suddenly rang out behind us. We turned to see the stone walls that we had just walked, now had a crack on its surface. A moment later, the crack grew and several fist-sized pieces of debris fell into the wastewater.

“This place is disgusting,” I said. “The sewage system in Lion City was way better maintained than this. Even though the smell was no better, at least I didn’t have to worry about the literal walls falling on us.”

“It’s not too different from Elevate City. It’s what happens when the people in charge will only do anything if there’s an imminent and catastrophic failure,” Thorne shook his head as if reminiscing about a particular incident.

“What? What happened?”

“Don’t worry about it. It wasn’t anything important.”

I narrowed my eyes at him for keeping his story a secret. It was cruel for him to mention it, only to decline when asked to elaborate. Too bad he didn’t seem to care and kept walking. It may be because we both wanted to get out of here quickly. Shaving off even a second of having to breathe in this foul air was a huge boon.

Before long, we spotted several people in rags lying to the side. They were beggars Vin had rounded up. Many of them normally slept down here, so we offered them some essentials in exchange for relocating to our specified locations. They would act as our makeshift sewer sentries.

I ensured their trustworthiness by installing them with the same monitoring implant I used with my employees. I couldn’t take any more chances, so I made sure to add a safeguard in it too to eliminate them if they proved to be a threat.

It wasn’t long before the arrow led us toward a dead-end. However, we continued walking. That was because we knew the wall was a fake projection we had set up. As soon as we passed through, our scenery changed for the better. It still stunk of sewage, but at least the infrastructure was new.

A set of sturdy doors began to close behind us and I turned up to nod at a camera.

We didn’t bother sticking around and climbed up the first access ladder we saw. The metal hatch clicked open, allowing sunlight to rain down on us.

When we got up, we immediately let out a stretch as we breathed in the fresh air. There was a gallery that comprised a dozen security guards watching us, but I didn’t care. In fact, one of them helpfully handed me a spray that allowed me to remove the stench from my clothes.

The moment I finished spraying my belongings, the guards parted, allowing a man through.

“Rollo. How nice of you to join us! I hope your tour of the underground was to your expectation,” Vin teased.

“Oh, shut it,” I shook my head. “You know I made a rule for executives to follow the same procedure when they go out too, right? You’ll be taking the same path if you want to go on leave.”

“Ha, as if I need to. Look around. We have everything we need here now.”

Our NLA branch mimicked the compound of our headquarters in Elevate City. It used to be of a smaller scale, but that was no longer true. Land in Elevate City came at a premium. It’s what happens when there’s only so much land, and hundreds of millions of people jammed packed in it. The population density in NLA was much more reasonable, and they had ample land to accommodate for an expansion.

Our logistic company also grew every month. The number of personnel needed to operate it required bigger facilities. Our recent expansion aligned with these needs. The goal was to reinforce the foundation needed to set up for our future development. That meant infrastructure and personnel.

We focused on building training facilities that complemented our cassettes, allowing our employees to train without leaving the compound. Their dorms were here as well, virtually eliminating their need to leave. This was done to discourage them from frolicking in public, becoming possible intel leaks or hostages.

I glanced around, following along with where Vin pointed to, familiarizing myself with the place. We were on some grass inside a park, and we could spot a large pedestrian path. If I didn’t know where I was, I would definitely think it was just another commercial street.

Stores filled both sides of the road, ranging from clothing stores to coffee shops. There was even a VR cafe in the mix. There weren’t too many people, but I’ve been told they were more busy during the late evenings. That was because everyone within the compound was part of my company. They would be working during this hour.

In the distance, I could even spot a main street with four lanes of traffic. I pulled up the map in my optics and began exploring. It told me what I saw was the only main road that allowed vehicles to come and go from the compound. The other areas only had pedestrian paths.

We didn’t dawdle in the park for long. Vin began escorting us to the main building. I took the liberty to stop by several vital buildings; mainly the training centers, clinics, and the motor pool.

“Come on, we’ll be coming here tomorrow anyway. Don’t you want to take a shower and rest for now?” Vin advised.

He was right. My main purpose to visit was to oversee the training of the new recruits and facilities. I would be coming back for sure, but I had to sate my curiosity first.

“Fine. Let’s go. You have our luggage right?”

“Yeah, and your rooms are ready, too.”

On our way to our rooms, I spotted one of my milkshake stores, so I made sure to refresh myself before retiring to my room.

The next morning, we returned to the training facilities. It had large rooms allocated for hypnopedia learning with our homemade cassettes. Directly adjacent to it, we had set up either labs or tactical training rooms to put what they learned to the test.

The cassette part didn’t need me to examine too much. I just needed to check the logs, and I was done. However, for the other sections, I decided to get a little hands-on with it.

I went inside one of these labs and ran the course like a typical trainee would. The first thing I had to do was to literally complete a test. I sat by a terminal and began answering various questions. The questions would be consistent with the contents of the cassettes they used. For me, they just used whatever was already pulled up on the device for our little mock test.

Afterward, the lab was equipped with various tools that one would see in my workshop. Its comprehensive collection allowed our researcher trainees to experiment and try out applications of their newly gained knowledge.

Overall, the facilities weren’t something too alien. It was similar enough to what I’d seen before. That was why we waited for the next batch of trainees to arrive, so we could spectate.

“The geeks have been telling me our new methods allow us to train security personnel twenty times faster than before. Less than two weeks with your sleep-learning stuff is equal to a year’s worth of training,” Vin informed me as we glanced over all the trainees.

“Yeah, but that’ll also be as far as they can go with this method. They’ll have to train themselves the old-fashioned way after that.”

“Are you sure you can’t cook up those cassettes with more advanced skills?”

“The more complex logic reasonings in those skills will make the brain endure most stress. It’ll be easy to overload—” I realized Vin’s face was screaming disinterest despite my attempts at simplifying it, so I stopped. “Bottom line is, no. For now, that’ll be the best we got. We haven’t figured out a way to safely create an advanced version that also doesn’t instill exploitable habits. Genuine training is still king in this area.”

“Don’t mean to complain,” he shrugged. “It already cuts down a year of training time for me. Couldn’t help but get greedy, you know. It’s the corpo way, right?”

Vin nudged me with a grin. He never identified as corpos, even after how far we've come. In his heart, he was still a mercenary of some sort, doing a long-term gig. That was fine. I didn't need everyone to start acting like stuck-up corpos. I was glad he remained unchanged.

Next up were the tactical training facilities. It was similar to what I saw when I trained with Thorne and our first batch of recruits back in the day. Holographic technology combined with modular platforms allowed them to set up any terrain quickly.

It was a given the most interesting part here would be the people themselves, so we had our new recruits put on a show. Vin had scheduled this even earlier already, a competition among the new hires, so there was no confusion.

Various cameras and Nyes kept track of their exercise, allowing me to see every detail that went on.

"Is this the updated training curriculum you updated?" I turned my attention to Thorne.

"That's right. The cassettes only contained the general skills they wouldn't form bad habits from. We need to shore up their experience with dealing with our potential enemies."

By potential enemies, he meant power armors hailing from powerful corporations.

The training scenario he had come up with included facing off against power armor and zero-g combat. Holographic simulations only went so far, so they included our real armors in the exercise as well. They were all equipped with energy shields, so it was more difficult to damage than not.

In partnership with Vin, Thorne had compiled a new set of tactics to go up against similar challenges they may face in the future. I could tell it was heavily inspired by my protector's fleet, where they worked together in unison with assigned roles to whittle down the enemy.

Unfortunately, our equipment was much worse. It made them come up with a tactic to drag the fight out as long as we could. They needed to either drain the shields or create an opening for melee weapon wielders.

It brought my attention to the major weakness I have been deliberating about. Our weapons were bought from the market. They were reliable, sure, but they weren't anything special. While it was fine to use against most opponents, the large corporations that have set their sights on us were a different story.

I naturally opened up my status screen and my eyes drifted toward the upgrade section. There were numerous things I could upgrade. With twenty points to spare, my vision zoned in on the choices I had been keeping an eye on.

*I just need our software project to earn well. Then I'll be able to start addressing this weakness of ours.*