

Chapter 96: A Break

“Let’s gather at Haven tonight for a drink! Go call all our old acquaintances!” I said to Thorne first thing in the morning.

“...Any special occasion?”

“Nope. Just to hang out after a while.”

I completed testing the prototype of the monitoring implant last night. I named it Twilight’s Gaze, in the internal documents I stored in my terminal within me. I wouldn’t be informing anyone else about it, but I needed to name it for my own reference to organize the completed projects.

That was why I decided to call out everyone I knew tonight to take a breather. There were still many projects awaiting me, but there was only so much one man could do at once.

“Alright. You better finish your meetings on time, though.”

At Thorne’s words, I quickly checked my calendar and found the meeting he was talking about. The one scheduled with one of the clinics we were partnered with.

“Of course. Send me the details once you finalized the details.”

Thorne nodded and headed off into his own office beside mine while I did the same and entered my own office.

It only took me an hour to finish all my paperwork for the day. Normally, I would retire to my workshop, but today was a break day. It’s been a while since I had time to relax. With no imminent threat lurking about, I wasn’t entirely sure how to spend my time.

I wasted time browsing the web and watching videos. None of it held my interest for long. I went back to my unit where the VR capsule Claire had ordered for me and tried it out again. The MMO they were playing was great, but required too much time investment for it to be worthwhile.

Still, I played it with an open mind to observe how the game was made and how the NPCs reacted.

Maybe I can create my own later once I’ve upgraded my software engineering and get an AI to help out as well.

Lunch time soon came, and I decided to go out for once. I’d been cooped up in my workshop or avoiding any QuickLinks assassin for so long, it wouldn’t hurt to have a change of pace.

I picked out a highly reviewed ramen shop that had minimal seating, so I could have my security wait outside. The small convoy of Wraiths dropped off Thorne and me one street away. We then joined the line outside the ramen shop, where numerous corpos on their lunch break impatiently waited.

The line moved decently fast as the corpos ate quickly and left because the culture of 'time is money' was ingrained into them. It also may have to do with the thirty-minute lunch break heard most companies instated.

We soon got seated at individual stalls that were equipped with handheld terminals for ordering. Though what drew my attention the most was the robot chef working in the kitchen before me. It worked with speed and precision, as it served meal after meal without a pause.

While I waited, I glanced around the interior of the store. I could see Thorne's torso sticking out beside me, but the divider blocked all view of his table and face. On my other side was someone in typical corporate attire, chatting away with his friend.

"How is it in your company, Tae? Because mine is a lot worse than I had thought."

"Hmm? Mine's just kind of boring, with no one really interacting with each other. What's wrong with yours?"

"I thought joining a G-Class corporation would mean they would be a more tight-knit family, where I could actually be mentored and learn something, but it's even worse than at our old school. The factional strife, scheming, and politicking are all driving me crazy. I don't even think I'll survive the entire internship."

"That's just how it is. At least it sounds like your co-workers are keeping it civil and within the rules. Mine are just outright hiring mercs to sabotage or assassinate each other on every single project."

"...Damn it! I wish my parents would just let me become a mercenary! I'm confident in making just as much as the middle managers if I had a chance."

"Right, and I could start up my own corporation if I just got enough funds. Come on now, the grass is always greener on the other side. No point daydreaming about hypothetical situations."

I listened in on other people's conversations as the robot chef brought my food to me. Their menu had a large selection, from the cheap synthetic garbage that tasted like crap to the version made with somewhat authentic ingredients that I ordered. The lab-grown proteins were shit, but at least the broth and noodles were decent.

Once we were done eating, I went to one of the clinics that belonged to the company I was meeting with later. I mainly went there to browse through their catalog in order to refresh my perspective on the current market. I had to verify if my next idea for the commercial project would be viable.

After speaking with the clerk about what were the recent trends, I headed back to the office to tour the other sections of my company that I rarely visited before it was time for my scheduled meeting.

I first went to the dorms we had created, shortly before we built the servers for the communications app. It was a ten-story apartment building located within the fenced-off area where our main office was. There were over two dozen units on each floor, enough to house all our employees with room to spare.

Seeing how the apartment building loomed over our office it reminded me how much we needed to expand our main building. We were in talks about purchasing the land, which was why they allowed us to build the dorms, but we would need more credits to purchase the land before we expanded the main building.

All the floors within the main office building were in use now, so I took a quick tour of the area and left lest I interrupted their work.

Like clockwork, the representative from the corporation I was meeting today showed up on the dot. It was one of the best things about corpos. They all were punctual human beings.

“Mr. Halls, thank you for your time today.” A young woman greeted me and shook my hand.

Once we got seated, she continued. “Our company would like to discuss a sale of the Shades for the upcoming month. As the amount we’ve been selling has dropped recently, we plan to offer a big discount to make a big splash.”

There were more and more copycats entering the market that our Shades dominated, but the market was still small and declining. Both parties knew that the sales would only decline from here and would take a while before it evened out, so it wasn’t a bad idea to go out with a bang.

“Very well. About the details...”

After the meeting, several of us headed toward Haven in separate cars. It was simply because there were too many of us to fit in one.

We arrived early without any fanfare and walked past all the neon signs around the area until we got to the one that had Haven written on it. Along the way, all the mercenaries gave us guarded looks, seeing how we exited a car marked with corporate insignias.

We got our own private booth this time, so we made our way toward a corner of the main area and entered the room behind the glass partition. Claire immediately sat down and began chatting away with Lana and Leo while I glanced over at Flo.

“Is Erza coming tonight?”

“Yeah, I made sure she agreed to come before leaving this morning. She’s been cooped up in our home for too long.”

“You could always convince her to take up a job and work with you in training our security.”

“Ha, maybe in a year or two. She’s been planning her break this entire time, so I doubt she would agree to any offer until then.”

“Oh, traveling to anywhere?”

“Lion City. She wants to try her hand at treasure hunting. Without having to fulfill any jobs while at it.”

“I see...I never really got to go anywhere while I was there. Just the part of the city where they allow foreigners, which was practically the same as every city.”

A female server came in with a tray of drinks. She had pink hair and cybernetic legs that were fully exposed by the slits on the side of her pants. Once she left, Thorne chimed in.

“I didn’t get to go last time. You only went with Claire. How about we go once things become less busy?”

“Pick your own goddamn time to go and don’t interrupt my honeymoon!”

“As if we’re ever going to get less busy!”

Both Flo and I retorted at the same time.

He took a swig of his drink and shrugged before falling silent.

Immediately after, the door to our room swung open again, and this time, a familiar man walked in. He held his rifle lovingly in one hand as he went around greeting everyone.

“Max, it’s been a while.”

“Rollo, yes, it has. I assume you guys are doing good with the looks of it.”

“Yes, all thanks to you.”

“You damn better be doing well. You headhunted half my team. Now I have to run with some newbies.”

Both Max and Liz had declined to work for our corporation, preferring the mercenary lifestyle instead. We still sometimes stayed in touch, but with our reliance on mercenaries decreasing, chances to meet grew fewer and fewer.

“Newbies? Everything going well?” Flo raised an eyebrow and asked.

“Ha, things have changed without you guys. We do more delicate work now. The newbies are fine as my spotters, and Liz has them under control. We just took out some big shot from a gang the other day. No offense, but it’s nice running things my way instead of yours.”

“None taken. Feel free to call us if you need help sometime. I think my boss wouldn’t mind, right?” Flo glanced over at me, to which I nodded.

The next time the door opened, both Liz and Erza came in. With their addition, everyone was gathered. Despite Liz’s lethargic aura, the party only got more lively as they started doing karaoke.

“Cheers!”

We all came together and clinked our glasses. I glanced around and thought back to when I first came to this world, where my life consisted of only myself and my part-time job as a cashier. I may have encountered a lot of danger along the way, but it was moments like these that made me feel it was worth it.

It was also moments like these that encouraged me to continue growing so we could defend our happiness and agency. Money didn’t solve all problems, but not having money created numerous problems.

As our night came to an end, we all departed, content. No trouble came our way. The mercenaries left us alone, and we peacefully returned home.

As the clock hit midnight, the day switched on my calendar.

Feeling refreshed, I returned to my workshop, which I had managed to stay out of for the entire day.

I pulled up my status and prepared myself for a new design session.

Status	
Level:	21
EXP:	960/2100
Musculoskeletal:	211
Neural Reflex:	65
Visuomotor Coordination:	87
Endurance:	59
Sensory Perception:	127

Upgrade Points:	0
Upgrades:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stealth +7 ● Hacking +5 ● Cybernetic Engineering +10 ● Stealth Technology +10 ● Software Engineering +6 ● Electrical Engineering +8
Enhancements:	SAID: Zenitech Sebastien v2 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 Additional Processing: Halls Corp Custom ST Miscellaneous: Halls Corp HSU Custom Shade

I had the monitoring project mostly completed, with the calculations for the fine-tuning still being processed in the terminals. My plan was to create a commercial implant next to revitalize our cybernetic business. That didn't mean it had to be strictly commercial. I could have the neutered version sold to the market while we had a more advanced model like we did with the Shade.

It also made sense since the cybernetic expo was being held soon and we were invited as established players in our niche. It would be a good opportunity to introduce and launch a new product to keep our success in the industry going.

As for what I should design, I have been designing many devices with stealth capability in recent times. Maybe it was time for me to work on the other angle, in detection. I couldn't have the Nyes deployed at all times, so it wasn't a bad idea to have several detection methods. With no enemy standing before us now, it was a good opportunity to bolster our defenses from the unseen threats.

Then, once I leveled up, I could focus on the vehicles again before venturing into software, where I would aim toward creating an AI to give me an advantage over our adversaries.

With a plan forming in my mind, I got to work.