

# Chapter 149: Assembly

Status	
Level:	25
EXP:	1560/2500
Musculoskeletal:	211
Neural Reflex:	65
Visuomotor Coordination:	87
Endurance:	59
Sensory Perception:	127
Upgrade Points:	0
Upgrades:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stealth +7</li> <li>● Hacking +5</li> <li>● Cybernetic Engineering +10</li> <li>● Stealth Technology +10</li> <li>● Software Engineering +11</li> <li>● Electrical Engineering +10</li> </ul>
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

I glanced over at my status screen and deliberated on how I should spend my upcoming points. It was satisfying to see how many experience points I had gained by spending some time in the wasteland, but I needed to plan on how to make use of my gains as well.

I had already used the two latest upgrade points to push past the ten-point barrier, so my software engineering skill was now at eleven points.

The sensation of upgrading remained unchanged, with a sudden influx of knowledge. However, when I reviewed the knowledge, I immediately thought it was worth the two points for the upgrade.

The improvement may have been the same as before, but I was already very knowledgeable prior to the upgrade. It was as if I was a top sprinter who suddenly learned there was a whole new level beyond what I knew. It was no longer about simply running on my two legs, and cybernetic limbs were added to the equation.

*Only a software-focused corporation near the top should be able to match me in software engineering now.*

It took a while to internalize my new knowledge and would take even more to explore new things I could accomplish. Thankfully, there was more than enough software waiting for me to practice with. I needed to make a pass through all of them anyway, to update them to my new standards.

*I wonder what it'll be like if I go even one step further.*

I glanced down at the upgrade button, where it indicated I now needed three points to upgrade software engineering again. That was an entire level and a half worth of upgrade points.

As I struggled to decide on a clear progression path, my alarm woke me from my musing, alerting me to the upcoming meeting.

I immediately rushed out of my lab and straight to our meeting room.

“How are our new products doing?” I immediately asked as I sat down.

This was my first weekly meeting in months, so I was completely out of touch with current events.

“Rollo...It's good seeing you again,” Claire said as she sighed. “What made the sunrise from the west, making you interested in the company again, all of a sudden?”

“...Look, I might've neglected a lot for the past few months, but it's because of that project we've talked about. It's so close to being complete.”

“Yeah, yeah. I understand how important that is, but a little forewarning about all the work you've been relegating to me would've been good. Anyway, why don't you read over our latest reports to get caught up first?”

I swiftly read over the weekly reports she sent me and paid particular attention to the sales of our new products. I hadn't heard anything about them since we settled all the major design solutions early on as I left all the optimizing to Luford's Sensorial Corp.

It eased me to see that our product had been doing well. Nothing that knocked it out of the park, but still quite profitable. It was no surprise since we targeted several more niche markets such as naval sensors or more powerful but bulky active scan devices built for fortified positions. With our smaller target market, we didn't expect to suddenly sell an absurd amount.

The reason why I even cared about our sales was because of the next roadblock I had to clear in order to realize our company's first artificial intelligence.

"Have you renewed our budget and allocated our recent earnings already?"

"Some of it. Not for the extra income for this month yet."

"Good, I'm sending you a list with some specialty electronic parts and materials I need you to get. It is a priority."

"Is it to finish that project of yours?"

"Yes."

"...That requires a lot of money, Rollo. We'll need to draw funds from elsewhere."

"It's fine. Tap into our reserve."

"Hmm... Yeah, we'll need to, but I think there are some extra funds from that other business as well."

"Other business?"

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### **Luford Perez - Sensorial Corporation**

"Thank you everyone for your hard work. Thanks to you guys, the launch of our new product series, the Gazebo line, has been going off to an excellent start!"

The crowd of researchers cheered in unison at Luford's speech. They all had been forced to work overtime for the past few months and their hard work finally bore fruit.

"I know you've all been working hard. That's why I'm giving you all a bonus and a two-day paid vacation!"

The Sensorial Corp employees cheered once more at hearing the news, and much more enthusiastically, this time around as well.

That was because paid holidays to celebrate a successful business venture were unheard of in the corporate world. It was already rare for anyone below a middle-management position to even receive bonuses.

It was only after having spoken to Rollo more during their breaks that he was convinced to try embracing more positive reinforcements to encourage his employees.

It was something that went against everything he was taught during his management classes. The schools had taught him doing such actions would ignite the greed within his subordinates, and they would expect more and more. They may even come to the point of boycotting if these incentives aren't kept up. That was why it was taboo. Corporations needed full control and obedience from their members.

While Luford doubted the effectiveness of Rollo's methods, he decided it was worth trying it after having heard him out. It was also because he had a decent relationship with his fellow researchers, so he supported the idea of enriching their lives.

*I was never a stickler for the tradition or rules, anyway.*

As Luford was contemplating the impact of his decision, the researchers around him had decided to hold a party right away before their first vacation.

Luford was swept away by the crowd surrounding him and soon found himself on the streets of Elevate City.

Their entourage had grown even more when security noticed their mass exodus, which prompted them to send several teams of guards to tag along. Their large entourage blocked off traffic as they dominantly navigated through the roads.

They soon arrived at one of the nearby malls, where their group headed for the food market.

With a few dozen of them, it wasn't going to work out going to a restaurant on such short notice, so they settled on the food court.

The employees quickly dispersed as they went to procure food and drinks, leaving Luford alone with several of his guards.

When Luford came to it, he decided he too would talk a stroll around.

He passed by the large variety of food stalls that ranged from cheap synthetic products to dishes made from authentic ingredients that came with the appropriate price tag.

Luford came to an abrupt stop when he spotted one store in particular.

"That store...The Milkshake Halls. That's from our allies, right?"

"Yes, sir. It opened last week. I believe a memo was sent out throughout the company to remind the other employees not to cause trouble there."

Luford sighed and sauntered into the store as he thought about his new eccentric business partner.

*He is dipping his toes into the food industry too?*

He found his allies had a foot in several industries, which he found quite strange for a corporation of their size. Normally, one wouldn't dare to do such a thing for fear of provoking multiple competitors at once that could band together to remove such a market disrupter.

That was why his company, Sensorial, focused on the detection equipment industry, without straying from it. They had a solid foothold where none dared to challenge their market leadership, and they had to focus on keeping it that way.

It was this train of thought that made Luford come to a sudden realization. The realization that he may have boarded a dangerous train, where he would be swept up in the turmoil to come.

*I have to strengthen our company...Or get rid of whatever tampering they did to me...*

"Hello? Sir, how may we help you?"

The voice of the clerk woke him up from his alarmist thoughts.

"...Sorry, can I get a..." He glanced over the menu above, where found a variety of flavors and the prices for the frozen desserts. As an executive-level figure, his eyes were naturally drawn to the most expensive item on the menu. "I'll take the premium O-Cookie Milkshake."

It was one of the few milkshakes that charged a premium of five hundred credits, while the others ranged from ten to twenty. With his bodyguards glancing over his shoulders, he could only order what was befitting of his position.

"Very well, sir. Thank you for your patronage."

He took a sip to fuel his brain for the sake of continuing to come up with ideas. Ideas where he could not only survive the dangers to come but thrive as well.

*This is actually pretty good...*

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"Careful with that. Make sure you don't drop it. They're delicate electronics that's a pain to order from spacer companies." I warned the clumsy-looking cyborg before me.

"Yeah, Thorne. You wouldn't believe how hard it is to order this stuff, even with the credits. There's a whole waiting list for it and everything." Leo added from the back.

"You both know you can help, you know. Especially you, Rollo. Those cybernetic limbs of yours are easily capable of lifting all this shit."

"I can't do manual labor and monitor the installation at the same time."

Thorne could only sigh at my response and accepted his fate. We all knew it wasn't a good idea to send for more help as this secure compartment deep beneath our headquarters was a new top-secret section where we hosted our AI.

The fewer people who knew about it, the better.

On paper, this was my new research facility and testing ground for both heavy armaments and vehicles. My employees should know better than to go anywhere near my research labs.

"I would love to help too, Thorne, but we're busy parsing through all the stuff Rollo had hoisted onto us at the last second again," Lana interjected from behind Leo.

The two cybersecurity experts were proofreading my work, just in case. I was confident everything was perfect, but it didn't hurt to get more eyes on it. Especially on the parts that restrained the personality matrix. Any small mistakes there could result in our new AI becoming our enemy.

We spent several days, spread out over the weeks, to avoid drawing attention as we set up the database services, processing units, memory modules, cooling, power generators, and defenses.

Two weeks after we started building out our mainframe, we were finally done.

Standing before a large terminal were Thorne, Claire, Leo, Lana, and I. They all glanced over at me as I did one final check through all the hardware and software before I nodded toward them.

"Okay, I'm starting it up."

"Just hurry up and push the button! The suspense is killing me," Claire yelled.

I responded to her by pressing the button.