Chapter 151: Research & Subjects

"Lanus, how long until the analysis of the latest prototype is complete?"

"Report. The estimated remaining time is three hours, twenty-two minutes, and five seconds. I would like to reiterate it is recommended to upload the database of academic knowledge, especially regarding physics, mechanical engineering, and robotics."

"I'm trying. It's not that easy to type out everything in my brain or just find a handy database with everything on it online."

Lanus didn't even bother replying to my complaints as I continued to type away on the terminal.

We had finished testing out our new AI to the best of our abilities and allowed it limited access to our internal network. I was still hesitant to allow it access to the wider web, as I feared exposing its existence.

I was currently busy with two projects, one that had been on my back burner for a long time and another that was more urgent because of the upcoming volleyball tournament.

However, in order to get Lanus to be useful in both projects, I needed to upload as much knowledge as I could for the AI to reference and learn from. Otherwise, it wouldn't be that helpful when it only had the knowledge bank I sourced from that sketchy school that had allowed me to outright buy a certificate with them.

There was a lot of specialist information locked away in my brain thanks to the system, but that wasn't something I could just transfer out that conveniently.

With each corporation hoarding academic knowledge, it became a higher priority on my very long wishlist and would increase as I got closer to finishing one of my two main projects.

The first main project I had in mind was the one to do with the cassettes and SAIDs with the sleep learning mechanism. Personnel was one of our bottlenecks for growth, besides financial constraints.

I was hoping that with the completion of this project, not only would it speed up my security personnel's training with their tactics training, but I could unlock the ability to swiftly train a team of brilliant researchers to expand my R&D department.

While I already had my existing knowledge from the system, I needed others who were familiar with both similar knowledge and different disciplines. It would aid us greatly in churning out better products to fuel our growth and equip our personnel with better equipment.

As I had a few hours before the analysis was complete, I used my time wisely and continued working on my second project.

Joey had notified us of a volleyball tournament one of SocialCorp's executives was holding. It was apparently my best shot at integrating myself with the higher social circles. These social circles would not only allow me to stay informed, but also acquire connections that would let me procure valuable partnerships and academic knowledge that I seek.

That was why I had bumped up the urgency of our in-house cybernetic project. Previously, it had been somewhat of an afterthought as I fantasized about equipping my employees with a specialized set of cybernetics. An entire set would be much stronger than a bunch of mismatched cyberware, but the maintenance requirement would be so high it wouldn't be commercially viable. It would be a product for internal use only.

However, when I started working on the project, it really highlighted the benefits of designing an ecosystem for my cybernetics. Normally, sensitive modules like power sources were stored separately for each cybernetic, but you could have the cybernetics share one if you designed an entire ecosystem. It would allow it to be stored safely deep in the body and less prone to external damage. And that was just for the power supply. There were still numerous ways that different cybernetics could support each other.

It opened up so many possibilities I almost wanted to update my commercial products to use the same platform, but a little market research showed why it didn't exist in the public sector. The rival corps would never agree to an initiative that would lower their profits by agreeing to a set standard when they were all trying to monopolize their market. While it was in their interest to make it as hard as possible to switch from their products, the customers weren't stupid.

Thankfully, if I only wanted it for our internal use, we did not need such considerations. It was quite amusing that the first set of cybernetics I was designing would be used in a sports environment as opposed to combat, but it served as a great testing ground.

I currently kept the project simple, focusing only on the leg replacements. The tournament had rules regarding cybernetics use allowed, but they were pretty lenient. The only real physical constraint was that the participants couldn't be full-body replacement cyborgs, which normally meant two cybernetics limbs or less. If a participant had more, their additional cybernetics had to be restrained using limiters.

I selected cybernetic legs as giving them mobility should allow them to coordinate better since coordination software was banned.

"Alert. Analysis on the prototype XJ4 is complete."

I quickly pulled up the results on my terminal, as Lanus knew to productively spend its time going over the research data for me.

The cyber legs I designed included a partial spinal replacement and had the entire set in mind, which included cyber arms as well. However, all that fine-tuning to allow it to work in unison with other sections wasn't needed in this case, so it should be ready before the tournament began in two months.

Still, it would be irresponsible of me if I didn't thoroughly test out my product.

"Lanus, prepare experiments for our new prototype here. I'll go find us the subjects."

"Recommendations. I believe it is more efficient if we run the experiments for the cassettes at the same time."

"...The risk profiles for these two projects are so far apart…"

"Clarification. Experiments needed to progress regardless. Risk profiles will likely remain static. It is more efficient to source test subjects together now than to do it separately."

"...Are we really ready to test out the cassettes already?"

"Affirmative. We will make no progress without thorough testing. As you requested, I will stop the experiments when their vitals become dangerous to keep the test subjects safe. It is better use of my resources to carry both experiments at once, as monitoring additional subjects yields negligible variance to the burden it imposes on me."

I sighed as I took a moment to think things through. I knew Lanus was right and that we wouldn't make much progress with the cassettes without testing them out. I was a little hesitant about just jumping into such a dangerous experiment unsupervised.

It wasn't like there were any research ethics committees or other fancy institutions we had to respond to. However, I had to be confident in the AI I created. I waited all this time for it because I believed it could do a better job managing the intricacies of the experiments with minimal sacrifices.

I placed a call through to one of my pinned contacts.

"Hey, Claire. I'm ready to carry out some experiments for my latest projects. Can you start finding some volunteers for ideally tomorrow?" I swiftly sent over a file with the details of what I was looking for.

After several minutes, Claire responded.

"...Projects? Are you carrying them all out at once? The one for the volleyball team is no issue, but where do you want me to look for a large number of healthy test subjects? I'd rather not contact any external contractors after having been caught up in one myself…"

At her words, I reminisced about my time encountering them within one of those research facilities that kidnapped people off the streets to perform corporate experiments. It disturbingly sounded like what I was about to carry out.

It hurts to find myself resembling those assholes now…

There was no way I would go off kidnapping innocents for experiments. If I just needed bodies for it, I knew just the type of people I could 'invite'.

"You're right, we shouldn't contact any of these experiment services. Recruiting regular people ourselves is a little…iffy. I'll deal with this myself, then."

"Wait—"

I accidentally cut off the call and shook my head before calling another pinned contact.

"Thorne, we're resuming our nighty hunts. It seems like my hiatus is over."

"Hmm?" I could audibly hear him raise an eyebrow. "Did you finish with your workshop stuff?"

"Well…not exactly. I wanted to source some test subjects for one of them."

"...And you chose harvesters? Well… I can't say that's bad."

Burksby - Halls Corporation

"Terrell, can you hear me?" A burly man, wearing dull blue overalls, shouted out.

He was alone in an underground shaft, where the air was both damp and musty. Beside him were various machines that worked arduously but produced such high levels of noise pollution that he couldn't help but scream into his comms.

"Yeah. You don't have to scream, you know? The noise suppression can filter stuff out."

"It's a habit!" Burksby yelled out once more. "Anyway, tell Winry to bring me some of those air filters and the pump. There's a lot of junk clogging up the water intake that it's working the filtration to its limit."

After several hours of hard work, Burksby was finally able to help clear out an impending issue before it created any disruptions for his company. He smiled at his accomplishment as he made his way back up to the employee dorms. However, on his way back, many other employees would steer clear of him due to the smell and his disorderly appearance.

It's the same everywhere, but at least the working conditions here are good.

After a quick shower to clean himself up, Burksby decided to drop by the company food complex to reward himself for a day's hard work. He strolled around several stores as he searched for one that tickled his fancy.

Before that happened, a voice called out to him.

"Burksby! Over here!"

A lean man lazily leaned back on his chair as he waved toward the burly maintenance technician.

Burksby nodded and sauntered into the newly opened store with the name 'The Milkshake Halls'. It was the only unmanned location throughout the city, as it belonged to the Halls Corporation.

"Trey, you finished for today, too?"

"Yep, and I was just thinking of heading to practice early before I saw you."

"Oh, I was going to do the same after grabbing a bite."

"Okay, let's—"

Before Trey could finish, a notification popped up in the middle of their vision and the two coworkers shared a look before nodding.

"I'm definitely trying out the new cyberware. How about you?" He glanced down at Burksby's legs. "Are you finally going to replace those organics?"

Burksby smiled ruefully and shook his head.

"No, I've worked hard to train with these all my life. It would just throw me off if I suddenly swapped them out."

"Purist are you? Well, suit yourself. Liberos and maybe settlers like you probably don't need them as much as we do."

"I'm still curious about it, though. I'll tag along and see what you guys can do with the big bosses' latest work."

"Oh, you're right. We might be seeing the big boss himself! Let me go order a premium milkshake, so I have a talking point to approach him with."

"...I heard he's approachable. You really want to throw three hundred credits for one drink?"

"One fifty with the employee discount and I bet you I'll get a bonus for 'volunteering', anyway."

"..."

The duo swiftly ordered some additional food and drinks for takeout before they headed over to their CEO's infamous workshop. The doors automatically opened after standing at the entrance for a minute, but what they saw behind those doors made the two grown men freeze up in shock.

It only grew worse when they heard someone abruptly cry out hysterically from further within.

Trey couldn't help but flinch at the screaming and drop his three hundred credits milkshake. The spill instantly attracted the gaze of the owner of the room.

Trey was at a loss for words as sweat dripped down from his brows.