

Jackie and I spent the next few hours testing out all three of my new and improved mag weapons. We burned through just about all of the custom, high-accuracy ammo I had made, putting all three weapons through their paces. By the end of the second hour, Jackie and I were consistently using the mag sniper to tap our furthest target successfully, which was about a thousand meters out. We even started spotting cacti, rocks, and trash past that. It was impressive, especially considering how little range time we had with the new sniper rifle or snipers in general.

Jackie was confident that, in the right hands, the sniper would be able to hit targets twice the distance we were hitting. He also guessed that if I invested in some smart tech for it, then it would be triple. Personally, I was happy with what it was already a powerful sniper rifle that couldn't be hacked to jam or overheat.

The basic mag rifle performed brilliantly, and Jackie agreed that I absolutely made the right choice in trimming it down a bit. It was relatively lightweight, easy to fire and reload, and, like both of the other weapons, could be shifted down until fired projectiles didn't break the sound barrier. I spent a while dialing in that setting for each weapon, marking down the settings so I could machine out a guide along the adjuster.

When we were finally done testing the weapons, we piled back into the truck and drove back to Night City, leaving the dead and barren Badlands behind us.

When we pulled into the megabuilding parking structure, Jackie and I agreed to meet up the next day to visit Vik sometime early in the afternoon. After that, we said our goodbyes and split up, with him riding out of the building on his motorcycle while I carried my gear back up to my apartment.

Thankfully, with all the ammo gone and the pistol now on my hip, it only took one trip.

I let out a sigh of relief as I stepped into my room, the chilled air running over me, an amazing feeling after having spent so much time in the hot, sandy hellscape that was the Badlands. It made me wonder how the nomad families could stand living their lifestyle. In my old world, living on the road, outside the rules and stress of civilization, sounded like a halfway-decent retirement fantasy. Here, it felt more like a painful and exhausting nightmare.

Then, the ambient distant gunshots and screaming reminded me that living in cities was just as hellish, if not more so. Still, I spent a few minutes just enjoying the cool air before changing out of my dirty clothes and into something more relaxing. Eventually, after having a quick, barely stomachable lunch, I walked into my workshop.

I sat down at the computer, staring at the black screen for a moment. Eventually, after about a minute of just sitting and thinking, I turned the computer on, opened my CAD program, and got to work.

Ever since I finished the [fusion blade](#), I had wanted to redesign it from the ground up. It was just a straight-up bad design, despite the tech it used being quite potent. Unfortunately, I had put it aside since, *technically*, the current form was functional, and I had been working on a schedule. Now, though, I had some time, and I want to do it right. Rather than start from my previous design, I started from scratch, working quickly to create the general idea, before fleshing it out completely.

My primary, major issue with the original design was the fact that it was a one-sided blade with a ridiculous-looking and dysfunctional bar and cap on it. There was no way the bar did anything other than get in the way of your cuts, and the blunt cap at the end made stabbing, one of the most crucial abilities for a sword, impossible. These issues were the result of some pretty undeniable limitations in the tech. Specifically, it had a lot of internal parts that needed to go *somewhere*. In the original design, almost all of that fit into the bar and cap behind the singular edge.

For my design, I basically took the bar, extended it to the side, flattened it slightly, and introduced a curve. With the extended room, I fit the parts for a second blade, this one on the other side. The only thing that was left was a final, third "blade" that formed the tip. The spine of the blade was a little thick, but between the curve going down to the blades and using superior cyberpunk tech to minimize the size of the parts, it was thin enough not to get in the way when slashing or stabbing at something.

[My final design had](#) a two-foot-long blade and was shaped like a classic longsword, even if the spine was a bit on the thicker side. Since pulling out a sword every time I wanted to cut something would get old fast, I also designed a similar but much smaller knife I could carry on my hip.

Because both of the blades would mostly be made from Alien Alloy, they would be pretty expensive to make, more than any single weapon I had made so far. To keep from wasting money and materials, I decided to scrap my old mag weapons, the plasma rifle, and the original fusion blade. Doing so would extend the time it took to make them, but it would also basically make them free. As I started disassembling stuff, I couldn't help but smile at the idea of showing Night City how the longsword would beat a katana any day of the week.

Sure, Katanas were culturally interesting, and the process used to make them traditionally was fascinating, but the romanticized obsession that people had about them was mostly based on crap. They were effective weapons at the time of their invention, but they aren't the end-all, be-all melee weapons, and they take a hilarious amount of skill and training to wield properly. Meanwhile, a standard longsword was easier to make, easier to train with, easier to use, and significantly sturdier. Sure, they weren't perfect, but no one claimed that they were, either.

As it started to get late, I finished disassembling the old mag rifle and the plasma rifle, feeding the AA back into the smelter to work down in more usable stock. I set aside the rest of

the parts to go over the following morning before setting up the two fabricators to start making some of the smaller internal pieces. With everything working, I headed to bed, falling asleep almost instantly.

The next morning, I continued to work on my sword and knife, fully disassembling the two rifles and getting the recycled AA into the fabricators. One of the last steps was to use the circuit board printer to make a custom control system for both of the blades. No more activating every time I grabbed them. Instead, there was a toggle switch on the side of each blade. I also added an emergency shut-off that activated if the blade spun around the wrong axis too fast, which could only happen if it was knocked out of my hands. That could also be disabled, as could the shut-off attached to a water sensor.

When I finally assembled both my new weapon and my new piece of equipment, I tested them both, switching them on. They hummed with pale blue energy as a blade of concentrated plasma ignited all around the weapon's edges. I stepped out of the slightly cramped workspace so I could swing the sword a bit, each movement agitating the hum the weapon made, making it louder and somehow more aggressive.

I had to resist the urge to slash at something to test its abilities, like the couch, instead choosing to deactivate it and carry it back into the workshop. There, I set up a bit of a test, a polymer rod held in a clamp. Rather than try and swing the fusion sword around, I turned on the knife, slashing at the newly printed test rod. The smaller blade managed to cut through the thick rod with very little trouble, which honestly wasn't surprising. It was also able to deeply score and partially melt a similar dimensioned bar of steel. It did not cut through it completely, but the fact that it managed to slash into it at all was impressive.

I deactivated the tool and set it aside, taking a moment to debate making a sheath for them both. They were still sharp when the plasma was turned off, but the AA meant that the edge was not going too dull from normal wear and tear. Since the sword would most likely be going on my back, I decided I only needed to make one for my knife. I quickly whipped up a flexible polymer sheath that I riveted to the fake leather of my pistol holster. Now, I would be able to grab it with my right hand whenever I needed it.

With my latest project done, I left the workshop behind, grabbing my new sword on the way out. The ceiling of my apartment wasn't high enough to seriously swing my sword around, but I at least wanted to get a feel for it. I didn't turn it on because I didn't want to lose any fingers, so I would leave that for when I had my warden armor on. For now, I experimented with stabs, slashes, and a few simple cuts, constantly aware of the roof over my head. I managed to avoid hitting it for the most part, and the AA construction held strong the few times I did.

Eventually, I actually worked up a decent sweat, swinging around my new melee weapon. It was light, especially in comparison to what an iron or steel sword would be at that size, but I was still moving around the room a lot.

Unfortunately, while I felt a bit more confident swinging it around by the time I stashed it back in my workshop, it was obvious that I had very little actual skill with it. My strikes were clumsy, my thrusts were inconsistent, and the simple fact that I occasionally hit things I didn't mean to mean that if I ever met someone actually trained in sword fighting, I would be hilariously outclassed, at least in terms of fighting prowess.

Still, it would be useful in some circumstances, I'm sure.

When I was done messing around, I hopped into the shower and cleaned off. My mind drifted off as I went through a delayed morning routine. I could hear Spot flying around in the main room, picking up my mess and straightening up the place. I had updated him twice at this point, just some simple extra programs to help him clean and keep the place neat, and so far, they were working well. His control program was still just a simple response program with no learning methods, but it was still hard not to personify him. Especially when he was so helpful.

When I was done with my routine, I headed to my workshop, not to work but to clean up. While Spot kept the main room of the apartment clean, I didn't want him messing with the stuff I kept around the workshop. This meant I had to clean up after myself, which was another way of saying the room was a mess. I tried to clean up as I went along, but that was hard to do when time was so precious.

I was an hour in to cleaning the room when my door alarm rang out again, and this time I had a pretty good idea of who it was. I dusted off my hands before making my way to the door, opening it to let Jackie in.

"Hey man, I'll be ready in a minute," I said, stepping back to quickly get dressed.

"No rush choom," Jackie responded, surreptitiously looking around the apartment, and I couldn't help but smirk when I realized what he was doing.

"I'm not going to have something new every time you visit," I said with a smirk, tugging at my belt holster to make sure it was firmly strapped on, checking that the fusion knife and mag pistol were firmly in their holders.

"You haven't missed yet," Jackie retorted, looking over at me. When he spotted my smirk, he narrowed his eyes. "You got something genio, I can feel you wanted to show off."

"Go check out the workshop," I said, unable to deny his words.

Jackie nodded and stepped into the workshop, letting out a muffled "Dios Mio" before coming back out as I slid on my jacket. He was holding my sword in a two-handed grip, looking at it with wide eyes.

"You made a thermal sword?" He asked, holding the it parallel to the floor as he looked it over. "It looks cool, but you know you could just buy one at any weapons dealer in the city."

"One, only if I wanted a Katana," I pointed out, my choom accepting the point with a shrug. "And two, it's not a thermal blade. Flick the switch where the grip meets the cross guard. And be careful, it's sharp as fuck."

It took a second for him to figure it out how to turn it on, but when he did he nearly dropped it, the blade coming to life, casting a pale blue shadow along his hands and chest. His eyes went wide and he firmed up his grip.

"Why do I get the feeling that's not mood-lighting choom?" he asked, moving the blade slightly, immediately stopping as its hum got louder. "The hell is this?"

"It's a fusion sword," I explained. "A thin line of plasma is held around the edge of the blade, massively increasing the weapon's cutting power."

"Choom, why do you keep making stuff you can't use?" He asked with a frown.

"I'll admit, I was a bit naïve about the plasma guns," I said, now wearing my own frown "But I can use this. Even without the plasma it's an incredibly sharp blade, since my special alloy holds an incredibly dangerous edge. And you said it yourself, when you don't turn it on, it looks just like a thermal blade."

"Until you turn it on," He repeated, slowly like he thought I was dumb.

"Only in emergencies," I explained. "Until then, it's just a really sharp sword."

"Yeah... alright, that's fair enough," he admitted. "You never know when you might need a little extra. Just how good is it at cutting?"

"Much better than a thermal blade," I assured him, standing up straight and adjusting my underarmor before nodding. "Alright, I'm all set."

"Great. Oh, by the way, Misty, my input? She owns a... well it's like a mystic shop, Misty's Esoterica. It's right by Viks," He explained. "She is kind of like his secretary... Actually, don't tell her I called her that... You'll see."

Technically, I had already seen it, but I did my best to seem like this was new information. I had already assumed we would be stopping by to see Misty, as that was how she was introduced in the game. Thankfully, I hadn't said anything because I had no reason to already know any of that.

"Alright Jackie, lets get going," I said with a smile. "Can't wait to meet her."

We left my apartment after Jackie stored my new sword away in the workshop, heading down to the parking garage. The drive to Viks, or more specifically Misty's shop, was longer than I had anticipated since they were both in Little China, and Megabuilding H2 was down at the bottom of Wellsprings. It was nice driving through a part of the city that I had never seen before. Even if there were reminders of fucked this Earth was around every corner, it was hard not to be impressed by the sheer scale of the buildings.

Driving on plated roads, which most of the central city used, was also very strange. It was the smoothest ride I had ever had, without a single pothole or bump. It was so smooth that I kept looking down at the speedometer to find I was going significantly faster than I had thought.

When we finally arrived at the shop, after driving around for a minute to find a spot to park, Jackie led me in. It was hard not to laugh at the change in his posture, clearly adding a bit of swagger for his girlfriend.

The shop smelled pleasantly of burning incense, a spicy, woody scent that seemed at least similar to cinnamon. I could see lit candles all around the place, alongside several different religious or spiritual statues and effigies. I even spotted a bible tucked into a corner, almost hidden away. It seemed like by 2077, even Christianity, or one of its offshoots, was considered among the strange and spiritualistic.

Gentle chimes played as we stepped in further, getting the attention of the short-haired blonde girl standing behind the counter.

"Jackie! Good to see you," She said, coming around the counter to give the significantly taller man a hug. "Was wondering if you were running late."

"Nah, Jackson here just needed to get ready," He explained, returning the hug before turning slightly, his arm behind her back, while his other gestured to me. "Misty, meet my new choom, Jackson."

Misty stepped forward and gave me a quick, chaste hug, pulling back to lean against Jackie.

"So you're the techie who finally got Jackie some protection?" She asked with a smile. "Thank you for that. I tried to convince Jackie that I was only teasing when I told him I didn't like subdermals, but the gonk wouldn't listen."

"No problem. The next step is getting him into some armor," I said, shooting Jackie a smirk. "I gotta make him some since I agreed to come and look at some chrome."

"Is that right?" She asked, looking at Jackie in a way that made him wince. "Well, thank you. It's nice knowing he's got someone working the tech side, though I gotta admit, it's strange to hear a Techie not eager for more chrome."

"It's how I was raised," I said with a shrug. "Parents kept us real sheltered. For most of my life, I didn't even know cyberware was a thing."

"Jackie mentioned that," She admitted with an empathetic frown. "Jumping to Night City after living like that must have been one hell of a transition. If you ever need spiritual help, maybe a chakra realignment, I'm happy to help."

"Thank you, that means a lot," I said sincerely. I may not believe the same things as she did, but it was still clearly an offer to help, which was always appreciated. "I've always wanted to learn how to meditate, to center myself. If you've got anything on that...?"

"I can get some stuff together for you. Have it ready for when you're done with Vik," She said, eyes lighting up as she nodded with a smile. "Are you looking more or less of the spiritual side?"

"Less, for now," I admitted with a wince. "I'm not really looking for anything more at the moment."

"No problem!"

The three of us chatted for a while before we eventually excused ourselves, stepping out the back door of Misty's shop and heading down to Vik's. As the door shut behind us, Jackie thanked me for taking Misty seriously, as it was, apparently, an ongoing issue.

"Last friend I introduced assumed she was pushing drugs and that the spiritual stuff was all just a cover," He explained, shaking his head. "Kept stopping by, looking for cheap glitter. We don't talk anymore."

A glowing green light marked the stairs down into Vik's workspace, and after stepping over a cardboard box or three, we descended downward. The door opened automatically for Jackie, who walked through without hesitation. On the other side were a shelf, some boxes, and a metal gate system, which Jackie tapped and opened with practiced ease. The interior was lit red by several faux neon lights, as well as some more normal lights towards the center of the room. There, in the red corner, was Viktor, sitting on a low chair.

"Vik! How's it going?" Jackie called out, the familiar-looking man spinning to face us before standing out of his chair to greet Jackie with a bro hug. "I brought Jackson with me, just like you asked."

"Jackie, good to see you again," The pseudo-doctor said before looking over at me and extending a hand. "Jackson, it's good to meet you. Any friend of Jackie is a friend of mine."

"It's nice to meet you too, Vik."

I smiled and returned his handshake, looking around as Viktor dropped back into his seat. I turned around to see Jackie pushing a second chair out of a dark corner of the room, pushing it to me before he sat down on the edge of the surgery chair. Taking the offered seat, I turned to focus on Viktor, who had been watching me the whole time.

"I gotta say, it's been a long time since I've gotten a completely organic person your age in here," He admitted with a chuckle. "Usually, it's just kids coming in for their first neural link."

"Yeah, it's a whole thing," I responded. "Parents didn't believe in cyberware, so I didn't even know it existed. Real sheltered upbringing."

"You must be far out of town then," He said, sounding surprised.

"You got no idea, Doc," I said, my voice sounding heavier than I intended. Both Jackie and Vik clearly caught it, but neither mentioned it past a concerned look and a raised eyebrow.

"Well, I don't know what Jackie has been saying, but I'm not gonna tell you you need to get chipped," Vik said, leaning back on his seat. "What I can do is show you some cyberware that fits in around your worries. Whether you decide to get them is up to you."

"Jackie already convinced me that if I'm going to be working with him, I need an extra layer of protection," I admitted, running my fingers through my hair. "I'm not about to hack off a limb or put in anything that can be connected to, but I do need something to give me an edge."

"Well, the good news is we have some stuff like that," He said with a smile. "The bad news is the list is a lot smaller than normal cyber or bioware. It's also more expensive."

"I'm not hurting for cash too much, Doc, so let's see what you got."

Vik nodded and gestured me over to his desk, pulling up a catalog of sorts on his computer. I rolled closer to get a better view while Jackie stood up to look over our shoulders.

The catalog he showed us was broken up into three sections. The first was his own selection, stuff he had on hand or stored at a nearby safe location. After that was a chunk of options that other rippers had, a sort of ripper network. These were slightly more expensive, on average, since he would have to pay for the cyberware, plus a decent cut to the ripper he was buying it from. The network was set up with other rippers he considered to be trustworthy, which meant it was a pretty small list, all things considered. The third and final group was just stuff he could order from other sellers. Most of it was low-grade civilian stuff, but at least a few options on that list were solid chrome. It was also a lot more expensive because he would be buying it from a company, usually new.



We spent close to a half hour looking through the options. Out of everything, I was most interested in the skin weave, bone lace, and muscle lace. All three of them were nanite infusions that would weave fibers into their specific target, increasing resiliency and, in the case of muscle lace, their effectiveness. None of them were cheap, but not only would they greatly improve my survivability, but they were easily removed as well. Each would take a couple of weeks to complete, but all three were extremely tempting. Before I could select one or multiple of them, Vik made a different offer.

"I... also may have a lead on something special. Bioware advanced enough that I wouldn't usually get access to it," He explained. "But a corpo Doc I know from back in the day had a client skip out on him, a corpo who claimed he had the money."

Vik tapped on a few things before pulling up an email and showing off what looked like a pretty significant chunk of the organ. What organ it was, I had no idea.

"This is a bio-nanosurgeon hive," he explained. "All one hundred percent Bioware, meaning no batteries, no neural link, and no hacking. The only difference you will notice is a slightly increased appetite... and a supplement you must take once a week or after a major injury."

"I think I can guess, but what does it do?" I asked, leaning in to take a closer look.

"It uses the food you eat to make and maintain a decent-sized swarm of Nanosurgeons that percolate through your bloodstream," He explained. "They will heal minor injuries in seconds and major injuries in a few minutes, but that uses up the swarm real quick. Hence the supplement after any major injury."

"Damn, someone skipped over that?" Jackie asked from behind us. "That sounds preem."

"Well, it's not going to perform miracles, but it will help keep you from bleeding out, cut down your recovery time, and let you keep going from an injury that would normally knock you down," Vik continued. "It is *not* a replacement for actual medical care or a cure-all. You get stabbed or shot more than once, and you're gonna have a bad time. It also doesn't regrow limbs, obviously. It might fix a fingertip, but beyond that, it's not gonna work."

"That sounds expensive as hell, Doc," I pointed out, and he snorted.

"That's cause it is. Normally this would be near thirty to thirty-five thousand eddies," He answered. "But the problem is that these kinds of Bioware? They have a shelf life. Without someone to carry it soon, it will basically go bad. I put out some feelers for bioware you might like and my friend reached out. Basically, he is just trying to get it out before it's useless. It barely has enough time left to make it here."

I chewed my lip for a long moment before leaning back in my chair. After a moment, I looked at Vik.

"Tell it to me straight. What do you think?"

"I think you are incredibly lucky," He said with a smirk. "If I didn't already know Jackie wasn't interested, I would be offering it to him. This kind of bioware is made on demand, for people with connection I certainly don't have."

"How much?"

"Twenty grand, plus eight for installation and delivery."

"Jesus Christ..." I said, letting out a long breath. Eventually, I nodded. "Alright, you convinced me. Make the order."