

By the time we left Dakota Smith's garage, the sun was starting to set over the horizon, and I found myself nodding off in the passenger seat of Kaytlyn's Type-66. I had been working nearly nonstop for days now, and the break to check in with Dakota had let it all catch up to me. I was exhausted.

"Hey, Jay, you alright over there?" Kaytlyn asked, reaching over to nudge my shoulder.

"Yeah... just the last few days catching up to me," I said. "Been working hard to expand into the new space, and I'm capped."

"Gonk, you're gonna make yourself sick," She said, rolling her eyes. "Dummy."

"Yeah, I know. I just need a few more days. After that, I can finally slow down for a while," I said, ignoring the look Kaytlyn gave me. "Need to build a few more things and set up some more tech before I can switch over to production for a week."

"Damn, that's impressive for a garage setup, Jay."

I shrugged and leaned back, enjoying the comfortable seat. When we pulled back into Rocky Ridge, I said goodbye to Jackie, thanked Kaytlyn for the ride, and headed back to the garage. Samwise had long since completed the parts for the holo pilot gear and had also taken the initiative to print the parts for a water vapor electrocondenser.

Rather than starting on the holo pilot, since it would have taken me around maybe three hours to put together, I spent a single hour putting the condenser together, getting a decent-sized download of information, including a few upgrades, in the process. When I instructed Samwise to make as many of the condensers as he could while I was sleeping. With enough of them, we wouldn't have to worry about water for a long time. After that, I immediately walked back to my trailer and nearly collapsed into my bed.

The following morning started a little late, but I woke up feeling so much better. I didn't realize how hard the fatigue and work had been grinding down on me.

"Man... I cannot wait until I get some sort of super soldier serum," I said as I sat heavily down in my workshop chair. "I'm sick of being tired and fragile."

"Do you think it is likely you will find one soon?" Samwise asked from beside me, setting up what I would need to assemble the holo pilot system.

"I don't know, to be honest," I admitted with a frown. "Super soldiers are a semi-common trope, but... a lot of stories gloss over it. I don't want to jinx anything, so I'm not gonna say what I'm hoping for, but... well, I guess time will tell."

Samwise and I chatted a bit, but soon, I was too engrossed in my work to multitask. The holo pilot system was advanced or exotic enough that even as I was doing the initial design

process, how it worked eluded me. Thankfully, as I started to put it together, I started to comprehend what I was doing and how everything fit together.

The holo projection system was built around a backpack support kit, with an arm that came over the shoulder and acted as the projector, though that was not what it really was. Instead, it was armed with dozens of little, precisely controlled laser projectors. However, these projectors were special in that they altered the charge of the light as it left the arm. The projectors were calibrated to send their charged beams of light on a collision course for a separate beam, also sent out by the arm. These beams would collide at a precisely calculated point, and the photons in one stream would interact with the other. For the brief nanosecond that these normally invisible lasers interacted with each other, they released a controllable amount of light.

The invisible lasers also explained the trail of flickering lights behind the projected image. As dust passed through the beams, it would light up from the laser hitting it, causing a blinking trail behind the projection.

Importantly, though, the amount of light was not the only thing that could be controlled. By adjusting the several aspects of the laser, you can control the wavelength of visible light produced by the collision. This meant that making a recognizable image is as simple as mixing colors to produce the whole color wheel.

From there, the "projector" functions like a 3D CRT monitor. It drew out the projection line by line, way too fast for our eyes to see anything but the finished product, the projected image. This immediately told me a few things. For one, I could scale this up or down, but there was a limit. If I made the image too large, the arm wouldn't be fast enough to complete the image before the eye could see a blank spot. I was sure I could solve the problem with a little ingenuity, but I could figure that out later.

As I finished the projector arm and pack, I could see that this tech was definitely what the cloak ability used to function. I could also see that it would be very vulnerable to anyone using any tech that lets them perceive time more slowly, either with a Sandevistan or a Kerenzikov. It could also be beaten by any eyewear scanning over a certain frame per second or, perhaps most disappointingly, by taking a picture. The "FPS" of the holo system was extremely high; it had to beat Titans, after all, but that was no match for a still-frame image.

The bottom line was that the tech would be useful, but it wasn't going to fool everyone or everything. In fact, I would say that relying on it completely would be a mistake.

I finished putting the system together, and I immediately started working on the cloaking tech. As I predicted, the holoprojection technology played a large part with the cloaking tech. In fact, it was nearly identical, save for a few different parts meant to angle the projection down at the person wearing the device. I finished designing it within an hour, using the holo pilot system as a base, and let Samwise handle printing the parts. I was hoping that between the holo pilot

and the cloak ability, I would have as good a grip as I could get on the tech. With any luck, it would illuminate a significant "area" around the holo tech in the branch.

While Samwise worked on printing and preparing the cloak build, I moved on to my next project, the underlayer that pilots wore under their armor. The project was broken down into two major parts. The first was the artificial muscles, and the second was the nervous system reader that allowed the person to control the suit. Where the warden armor read your motion, interpreting shifts in your limbs before moving to copy it, the pilot underlayer read your nervous system directly. The former involved a noticeable delay, making the armor feel clunky and slow, whereas the latter allowed for nearly complete synchronization between the wearer and the underlayer.

Now, previously, I struggled with figuring out just how the underlayer worked without a rigid structure for the artificial muscles to work with, like how our muscles used our skeleton. As I started putting the design down, however, I began to understand how it functioned better.

Essentially, the strands of artificial muscle had three states. The first was its default state, in which the strand was flexible. If you put a current through the strand in one direction, it would twist around itself clockwise, which would cause the strand to shrink and pull at whatever it was attached to. With just a single strand, the effect was tiny, but combined with thousands of other strands, the effect was impressive.

But where the real genius was, was what happened when a current was applied in the other direction. By changing the flow of electrons through the artificial muscle, the strands become rigid, locking in place. With hundreds of thousands of strands all woven together, one "muscle group" would act as the "skeleton" for another, and vice versa. With some potent programming and the nervous system reader, it was an incredibly intuitive and powerful combination. The whole system would stiffen and release at precise points, enhancing and supporting the user's movement.

The ability to tense and release the artificial muscles was also what let pilots survive massive falls and not shatter their hands when punching metal robots. It wasn't bulletproof, and strands of the artificial muscle did get damaged, which meant some muscle groups had to be replaced frequently. That explained why only pilots got the underlayer since supplying replacement parts for a whole army would be insane.

Of course, the system was not perfect. While wearing the underlayer, I would be significantly stronger, but I wouldn't be bench-pressing cars anytime soon. The system was restricted to how squishy the person wearing it was, which was why pilots were so heavily encouraged to enhance themselves.

Of course, once I got Skinweave and some bone and muscle lace, I would be able to crank the suit up to eleven. I still wouldn't be bench-press cars, but I would definitely be stronger than Jackie.

Until I made him one, of course.

I quickly copied down the blueprints while the molly-makers were pumping out the final parts for the cloaking device. When I was done with the blueprints, I stepped away to work on the cloak, once again letting Samwise handle the printing.

Once I was done with the cloak, and had mentally sorted through the knowledge it had given me about the holo projection system. I started assembling the pilot underlayer. It was slow going since I had to weave and attach a frankly ridiculous amount of stretching filaments, artificial muscles, and other bits before finally attaching the central nervous system scanner and the battery pack. It was a long process, taking until three pm to complete.

When I was done, the temptation to try it on was too much to resist, so with Sam's help, I slid into the underlayer, which fit me snugly. I built it to my exact specifications, but there was an alternate suit, which I conveniently got the knowledge and design for when I finished my sized version, that was adjustable. It was far from one size fits all, but it would still come in handy.

When I was inside the suit, I was just about to step outside when a smile curled up on my lips. I walked over to where the clocked pack was hanging up on the wall. With Samwise's help, I managed to fit the system on, strapping it over the underlayer.

By then, he had also finished his adjustments to the system, replacing the power source with a series of Elerium nodes. Not only was the improved system lighter, but it also had infinite charge. One Elerium node would build up energy while the other ran the system, and they would switch off as necessary.

I activated the system and laughed when I disappeared. I looked down at my hands, spotting a slight shift in the image being projected around me. Certain no one would see me, I finally went outside the garage to test out the underlayer and the cloak tech. I started by running along the street, the suit supporting and assisting me the entire time. At a slow run, it was basically doing all the work, meaning I could sprint for a ridiculously long time. When I was pushing myself for speed, the artificial muscle weave surrounding my limbs worked with my own muscles, pushing me to a speed well beyond what I would normally be capable of.

Eventually, after twenty minutes of running and jumping around the town while nearly invisible, I got caught. I came around the corner of a trailer, heading back to the garage, when something slammed into, driving me to the ground. Murtaugh had tackled me, while Riggs and Kaytlyne rushed over to cover him, their weapons trained on me. Thankfully, the impact knocked the cloak out of alignment enough for the field to fail, revealing who was running around the town. Unfortunately, Murtaugh was quite a heavy robot, and the impact drove the air from my lungs.

"Jay?! What the fuck!" Kaytlyn said, pulling her pistol back and angrily shoving it back into its holster. "When the fuck did you get optical camo?"

As Murtaugh scrambled off of me, I sat up slowly, holding my hand up as I regained the ability to breathe again, struggling for a long moment before recovering.

"Didn't, I made it," I responded, letting Riggs help me to my feet. "Was just giving it a test run."

They escorted me back to the garage, both Murtaugh and Riggs apologizing, but I waved them off.

"It's my fault, guys. I should have said something. In fact... I need to make something for us to communicate with so that this doesn't happen again."

When I sat back down in the garage side room, nursing a drink and wincing at the bruises around my torso while Samwise carried the camo device to hang up in the garage. Kaytlyn sat down beside me, still clearly annoyed.

"So you made some camo, huh?" She asked, poking at my suit. "Doesn't look like any I've used before."

"That's because it probably works differently from anything that you've used or seen before," I explained. "And the suit isn't the camo, the pack was. This is an armor underlayer."

She waited for me to explain more, but when I didn't elaborate, she pouted, standing up from the couch.

"Fine, fine. I get it. Not sure you trust me yet," She said, raising her hands in surrender. "I'll go check the tower or something."

As she left, I couldn't help but feel that she genuinely disliked the fact that I didn't trust her. I didn't call her back, though, the door sliding shut behind her as she left.

"Sir, again, I am very sorry," Murtaugh apologized. "If you wish to decommission me-"

"Woah! No, absolutely not! First off, you were just doing your job, Murtaugh. You are *not* in trouble. I'm glad you guys were on the ball," I said, patting his shoulder. "Even if you had fucked up, decommissioning you is akin to killing you, and I would never do that, especially not as a punishment."

"What if we requested it?" Riggs asked out of nowhere, shocking the hell out of me. "You said you wanted us to be free. Would you decommission us if we asked you to?"

"I... Riggs, do you want to be decommissioned?"

"No, I am just curious," He admitted. "Which comes first, what we want or what you want?"

"That's the kind of question with no real answers until you're faced with it for real, Riggs," I responded with a shiver. "I would have to think about that a lot, and I kind of don't want to unless it's something I actually have to do. If you guys are suffering for some reason, you should tell me, and together, we might be able to find a fix."

"That doesn't answer the question."

"Welcome to being alive, Riggs. Not all questions have answers, and even if they do, sometimes you don't get them anyway."

When the two AI-driven robots were finally satisfied that I was okay, they left the garage to go back to work patrolling the town. I did a quick stretch, wincing at the bruises on my stomach and chest from Murtaugh's tackle. I spent some time inspecting the underlayer, making sure that it hadn't been damaged. It was pretty resilient, so I wasn't surprised to find that it was intact, if a little scuffed.

"Alright, Samwise. What's next?" I asked, stepping out of the side room and into the workshop.

"I believe the next item on your list was some of the cyberware and other enhancements," He stated.

"Right... what kind of options does Titanfall have..."

I closed my eyes and dove back into my mind, exploring the Titanfall tech tree. I could see the spots lit up by what I had managed to make, as well as what I had access to with all of the knowledge I had gained so far. There was a lot that I had unlocked, both from bonus information I received when I finished projects and from my increased total knowledge, allowing me to fully understand certain parts and concepts.

Unsurprisingly, considering the scale of the Titanfall universe, all of that was just a drop of water in the ocean. There was a whole branch of spaceship tech that I could barely see into, and several other fields that were even less revealed. I shook my hand, forcing myself to ignore most of it. The sad fact of it was that I needed to pick and choose. I had two full days left, as well as whatever time was left today. I needed to focus on what I could do with that time.

I mentally searched the cybernetics branch, following the start of the path and going up as far as I could. The work with the artificial muscle for the underlay gave me a good head start, but as I examined each piece of tech, I slowly began to frown.

The Titanfall universe had plenty of enhancements, replacements, and modifications, but as far as I could see, almost all of it was either around the same level of potency *or below* what was available in Cyberpunk. Sure, their artificial muscles were much more advanced than what this world had access to, but somehow, this universe had gotten so good at miniaturizing smaller mechanical parts that they didn't need artificial muscles in most cases.

I spent fifteen minutes examining everything before finally concluding that it just wasn't worth the time. This would be especially true when I started making enough money to buy whatever cyberware I wanted.

While I was shocked at my conclusion at first, the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. If I had been stranded somewhere else, then getting Cyberpunk as a tech tree would have been all about the Cyberware. Titanfall was all about AI and robots, and Cyberpunk was all about cybernetics. Sure, Titanfall included a lot of superior tech because of its more advanced setting, but it made a certain kind of sense that its cybernetics and body modding wouldn't be able to match a setting whose entire purpose was high-tech body enhancements.

"Alright, change of plans," I said, leaning back from my workshop desk. "I'm skipping enhancements and cybernetics. There's nothing they have that isn't already here."

"Very well, what is next on your list?" Sawmire asked, not skipping a beat.

I frowned and pulled up the list on my computer, crossing off what I had managed so far. Just like when I had looked at my list of projects from XCOM, it didn't look like much when crunched together on the list. Thankfully, I only had to look around to see just how much progress I had made.

"Alright. It looks like medical equipment is next," I said, nodding to myself as I double-checked the list before getting to work.

The rest of the day was spent designing and building various pieces of medical equipment. While the cybernetics portion of the medical industry was pretty advanced in this reality and was obviously leaps and bounds beyond what we had back home, it was nothing compared to what Titanfall had access to. This world tended to prescribe cyberware as the cure for a lot, whereas Titanfall actually attempted to cure or fix things before cutting them out and replacing them.

I focused primarily on the sort of steps you would see in colonies, advanced equipment in small, portable forms that were built to last and be easily replaceable. Most of these were specifically designed to be made by molly-makers, meaning the printing process was quick and easy. By the time I went to sleep, I had the bare bones for an entire infirmary printed out. The following morning, I continued the process as I padded out the rest.

The final, and perhaps largest piece of medical equipment, was something called an Auto-Pharma. It was a fridge-sized device capable of making several *thousand* medications on demand. Everything from allergy medication to anti-coagulants. Even better, it was all drugs from Titanfall, meaning it was way past anything I had seen or was available here. Even better, new information could be fed into the device to enable new production recipes. I would need to buy a lot of chemicals for all of the recipes to work, but having a working Auto-Pharma was the final piece of a medbay design that would make any colony doctor happy.

Now, I just needed a colony doctor.

Since I didn't trust anyone but Vik as a doctor around here, I would just have to make one. There were several medical bots I had access to since I had already dove so deep into that branch. I decided to build one of the more robust models, a basic frame with especially precise arms and very stable legs. It took me three hours to get the design out since it shared segments similar to those of the ALEO units.

While the design segment was unusually short, the programming took a long time since I was basically programming a doctor. It had to have an incredible capacity to learn and apply that learning to save lives and heal people. This was good because the standalone AI programming did not have any medical knowledge, meaning we would have to feed it medical textbooks by the dozen. I would be concerned about that, except that was the standard operating procedure for medical AI in the Titanfall universe.

When I finished programming everything, there were only a few more hours in the day, but despite being tired, I buckled down for a long night. Rather than take time off to prepare, I knew what was coming this time, which was why I made the decision to work through the final night. With the help of copious amounts of coffee and Samwise watching over my shoulder, there was very little danger in missing one night of sleep, especially if I kept busy. I spent an hour and a half assembling the [medical robot](#), activating it just enough to get the credit before putting it to the side.

At some point, Riggs came inside to charge while I was working on designing a more comprehensive set of tools, filling my garage with advanced building gadgets that would make my life easier in the future. It occurred to me as I was working on them that the more advanced tools probably should have gone up higher on the list, but I suppose hindsight is 20/20. By the time four AM rolled around, Riggs had left, and Murtough was the one charging.

When I was done upgrading my tools, I got to work on the next project, taking a crack at one of the cooler things from the game, the Mk.6 Smart Pistol. Well, I got to work on the part that actually mattered, the bullet. The pistol itself was barely noteworthy. After all, my home world was already developing target interpretation programs when I left, never mind what I had access to here.

Hell, the smart weapons available on the market here were already pretty impressive. But the bullet the MK.6 fired was particularly adept at following the information the weapon was sending it, and while they were expensive to make, giving everyone a backup pistol full of instant kill bullets? That was well worth the cost. Or it would be once I had built up enough to make that many.

The bullets did have a downside. They were a very sensitive gyrojet design, meaning they weren't actually bullets, they were rockets. This meant they were nearly useless at close range, since they needed time to build up speed. They also didn't actually have that much penetration power, even with plenty of time to build up. The only reason they were as hilariously lethal was the bullet and tracking software was good enough to land headshots every time. Otherwise, any decent amount of armor would stop them pretty dead.



Once I had finished a single bullet, I worked out the compound for electric smoke, putting together one of the grenades. It was an interesting bit of tech, especially since it wasn't smoke at all, but an incredibly fine powder.

The grenade functioned by releasing its powder payload, before activating it with a burst of harmless low-level infrared radiation. The powder breaks down aggressively, releasing bursts of electricity that jump between the cloud particles and to anyone stupid enough to try and charge through it. It was the ultimate in-location denial, as not only can you not see through it, but you couldn't run through it either. You could also use it to take down a whole building of people, though the more enclosed the powder is, the quicker the charge dissipated.

The sun was coming up when I finished the electric smoke grenade, the completed project revealing a whole branch of thrown weapons like grenades, satchel charges, and a little diamond in the rough I almost missed, the gravity star. I wrote down the formula for explosives they used in the satchel charge before I quickly focused on the crazy throwing star weapon.

The gravity star was a device you threw like a throwing star, containing a central chamber at the center. Once thrown, the device was activated and, on impact, would detonate into a small ball of energy. This ball of energy generated a field that pulled in everything around it, including projectiles, before eventually explosively tearing itself apart.

As I started to design the weapon, I couldn't help but feel nostalgic about working on the XCOM tech tree, because, just like XCOM, the IMC had absolutely no idea how what they discovered worked. It was just like how XCOM had no idea how Elerium worked, they just knew it did. The key to the baffling grenade was a small blue crystal harvested from asteroids and other space debris inside certain high-energy nebula. When exposed to certain types of radiation, the kind very much not good for people, while undergoing a high voltage charge, the crystal vaporizes, then condenses, before making gravity its bitch. The reaction then destabilized and violently detonated.

And IMC had no idea how it did that. So what did they do? They stuffed it into a grenade and threw it at people. It was like building Vahlens tech all over again.

On the one hand, I almost didn't want to make the grenade, since who knew what that process was doing to the space-time continuum or whatever. On the other hand, while I was too scared to start throwing gravity stars around here, I had no idea what sort of benefit I would be missing out on later. Who knows, maybe when I finally get to Mass Effect and start learning things about mass effect fields, I could learn that the crystal, creatively called gravity crystals, were actually a protoform of element zero and were somehow perfect for solving some sort of grand issue.

So, I designed and printed out a gravity crystal generator, just like an Elerium generator, since the crystal didn't exist in this universe. This process needed a dozen different chemicals and *sapphires* as a seed crystal. I ended up sending Kaytlyn back into the city to pick out whatever I needed, starting up the generator as soon as she returned.

I continued to work hard, developing and building half a dozen more gadgets and doodads, pumping out as many as I could to really advance what I was capable of making, and pulling more things into my general knowledge of building stuff. When time finally started to dwindle down, my final act with the Titanfall tech tree was to open up the gravity crystal generator, pull out a crystal the size of my thumb, and slot it into a throwing star before sealing it back up.

I then nearly collapsed back into my chair, feeling the information wash over me while also feeling my time running down quickly. I let out a sigh when the Titanfall tree finally fell away. It was almost a relief when it was gone, as I was finally able to rest my mind. Samwise helped me to my trailer, where I crashed into my bed and slept like the dead.