

## Chapter 42: Elevate City Consortium

Status	
Level:	13
EXP:	800/1300
Musculoskeletal:	76
Neural Reflex:	15
Visuomotor Coordination:	27
Endurance:	24
Sensory Perception:	52
Upgrade Points:	0
Upgrades:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stealth +7</li> <li>● Hacking +3</li> <li>● Cybernetic Engineering +6</li> <li>● Stealth Technology +8</li> <li>● Software Engineering +6</li> </ul>
Enhancements:	SAID: Zenitech Hoth Mk.3 Optics: Nova Tech Stars Mk.4 Cyberarm (Left): Nova Tech Mudra Mk.6 Cyberarm (Right): Nova Tech Shiva Mk.5 Auditory: Amazing Corp FieldTac Gen 2 Cardiovascular: BioGen Labs Marathon 4 Miscellaneous: HSU Custom Shade

I stared blankly at my status while I organized my thoughts. I have been researching the topic of incorporation since one of my employees brought it up.

My goal was always to strike it rich so that I had full control of my life and could afford better security. I always knew the only viable way was to create my own corporation. There was no way for me to change how society worked here, so I could only join them. Maybe when I became one of the top dogs, I could implement some changes to make this place friendlier and more peaceful. After all, I couldn't enjoy my riches without a peaceful world.

Elevate City was an independent city-state that was controlled by the Elevate City Consortium, a group of corporations that came together to stand on their own feet, away from the influence of other governments. The various corporations here have immense influences throughout the planet and even the colonies in space. While the corporations shared an interest in the

consortium, they were in no way friendly to each other, as constant fighting in the background took place for their profits.

Still, they allowed new businesses to join their ranks to replenish the ones that dissolved from the cutthroat fighting. It also allowed for new ideas and inventions to sprout up.

Although they allowed it, it wasn't easy to join the exclusive club; they set a simple and effective barrier to entry. A large annual fee to be affiliated with the consortium in the name of contributing to the city's expenses. The fees paid were divided into ten different levels. The more you paid, the more privileges you got that ranged from lower tax rates to priority with infrastructure like the use of the ports.

The one we were looking into was the lowest G-tier and required an annual fee of a million credits. I've read many horror stories of businesses forcing their way to join the consortium to be recognized as legitimate corporations that they had no more cash flow to grow, causing them to stagnate and soon no longer able to afford the fees.

My accounting department had outlined a more detailed proposal on the feasibility of incorporating and expected to have higher profits even if our sales stayed the same as they are now if we took advantage of the lower taxes from becoming a corporation.

The only thing we were discussing was when to incorporate the business, whether it be now or a bit further down the line. We had to decide if we were to spend our money on expanding the company and purchasing better equipment now, against more income from a lower corporate tax rate.

*I am tired of seeing the security team wearing mismatched gear and definitely want to standardize it. Did I really want to put it off even longer? I also was considering expanding into NLA to better make use of our existing facilities there already.*

A sudden knock broke me out of my musing, "Hey Rollo, you busy?" The door opened and Claire's head peeked into my room.

"No, was just taking a break. Need me for something?"

"Nothing important, just that we were planning to buy a VR capsule to play together and wanted to see if you wanted to join us."

"Well, I did tell you guys to spend that money to reward yourselves, as there was no use letting it sit in our account. Why not? "

"Cool! I'll send you the one we were getting. Give me a second."

I watched as she quickly brought out her terminal and navigated through it.

*I've been deliberating by myself for too long. Maybe I need a fresh perspective.*

“Hey Claire...”

“Hmm? I’m almost done, just one more second...and done. What’s up?”

“I wanted to get your opinion on when we should incorporate.”

“So you really plan to go through and make this company an official corp, huh?”

“Yeah, or else we won’t be able to continue growing. Businesses we work with won’t take us seriously until then.”

“I see...I’m not sure how I feel about that, especially Thorne, considering what happened with his mom.”

*Right, I should talk with Thorne as well about this before we go through with it. He may reflexively have a bias against all corporations, a perfectly understandable one too, as they took his mom away from him.*

“Let’s call him here to talk it through,” I said as I sent a message to the person in question through my SAID.

He entered the room within a minute, as the clinic wasn’t that large to begin with, and Claire gave him a quick summary of our discussion.

“I don’t see a problem with incorporating. I know you and it’s not like you’re going to suddenly become like most of the corpos because of what some documents say.”

“That’s right,” I nodded at him and he then continued, “Though I do want to ask what your end goal is, how big did you want to grow the company?”

“To be honest...my main reason was to get rich and use the wealth to secure my safety and freedom but it seems like that isn’t going to happen until I become such a top player that we become immovable, so I recently plan to bring some change to the corporate world while on the way to the top, starting with better working conditions.”

“I see,” Thorne stated, while deep in thought, before Claire smugly added. “Well, that’s predictable, seeing how generous you already treat your employees.”

Thorne chuckled, “She’s right, but anyway, you’re not in any hurry to incorporate right?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t want to take it too slow either, with the Harvesters and Rust Scrappers threat always hanging nearby.”

“Then I still think we should take our time and hire more people first. A new corp, no matter how small, will draw some attention from the hyenas, so we should be prepared.”

He was right. I was rushing it a bit too fast in the face of profits. What was more important was the ability to defend my wealth being kept up at the same pace.

“Right, we’ll focus on expanding then. I’ll leave it up to you two on that end.”

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“I think you’ll love what we have next at 1345 SocialCorp Road. It may be an older building, but it’s at a prime stop within this district. The plot of land is half an acre in total, though the current building doesn’t make full use of the land, you can freely rebuild it after your purchase,” The young man proudly introduced as our ride pulled up to a slightly worn-looking office building.

I exited the car, looked up, and counted five floors. “How high are we allowed to build here?”

“It is currently set to the same height as the current building, so around five stories, six if you stretch it, though it is possible to negotiate with city hall.”

*Right, what zoning law could stand up to the might of a bribe in this city?*

Surveying the surrounding area, there were a few small businesses, mainly selling food and coffee shops, spread out between the various similar-sized office buildings that likely belonged to some corporation.

Apparently, it wasn’t popular to share an office building in this world as it posed a serious security risk with all the corporate espionage that happened daily. That meant each corp had its own building, which meant the smaller players had mini office buildings in individual plots of land.

The ones in the downtown area were sold to only established corporations, but there were still plenty throughout Elevate City. Fitting as a corporate-controlled city-state to have available offices while the average workers were stuffed into megabuildings. It was also no surprise that the rent for the office buildings actually seemed fair compared to the rent they charged for residential units.

Still, this old five-story office building and the surrounding land will cost one hundred thousand credits per month, more than the annual fee for becoming a corporation. The only reason they managed to convince me of the move was due to another attack on the clinic by some small-time gang looking for some quick money.

I needed a more secure place to live in and more room for the new employees we’ve been hiring. We also planned to turn the ground floor into another clinic as well.

“There are 36 underground parking spots spread across two basement levels. An independent power generator and water filter are included in the rent.” The man continued to babble on as I walked into the lobby.

So far, this seemed to be the best one as it fit the size we were looking for, with ample room to expand into.

“We’ll go with this one. Please start contacting the owner and start drafting up the documents. I also wanted to take a look at the floors above.”

“Of course, sir. I’ll be here getting it ready. Please feel free to head up at your leisure. There is no one else here today.”

The one elevator in the building brought me straight up to the top floor. It wasn’t really high up, being only five floors, but the view from all the full-sized glass pane windows was still a sight to behold. I stared downward where hundreds of ant-sized people went about their day.

Before I could take a seat and relax, my SAID alerted me to an incoming call request.

“Rollo, this is important, go watch the Elevate City news right now!” Leo’s voice immediately rang out.

Leo and Lana had started working for me recently. They had always wanted to return to being a corpos, so they took Claire’s offer without hesitation. The only catch was that they were the ones who created the software that monitored my employees, so at their insistence, I had to put my upgraded software engineering skills to the task.

With Leo being my new head of cyber security, there was no reason for me to doubt him. My optics booted up the news as a new screen took up half my peripheral vision.

“---are only forty-eight hours left until the time limit, then I believe most colonies will declare martial law and restrict all travel as the war begins.” Listening to the newscaster, my eyes immediately got drawn to the bolded headline toward the bottom that read ‘War Declared by Europa Station against Enceladus Station!’

I continued listening in on the details provided about which consortium was against which one, the notable corporations involved, and some expert commentary. Once it was finished, it looped back to the beginning that I hadn’t seen yet.

“For those of you just tuning in, the government of the space colony on Europa Station has just declared war on Enceladus Station for reasons unknown. There is a 48-hour grace period for all those who do not want to get involved to leave as soon as possible. Travel will then be restricted, I repeat, there are only forty-eight hours left until—”

I closed the window and brought the call with Leo back into focus, “That seems serious, stock up on as many materials and medical supplies as possible before the price rises.”

“I’ve already told Claire to get on that, but you need to be worried about other things. War in space means a lot of resources will be directed off-planet, logistics will be screwed up for a

while, and you won't be able to easily find someone to ship your products from your factory in NLA to Elevate City anymore!"

"Shit...it's too late to find someone to sign a deal, isn't it..."